Recalibrated Expectations: A Qualitative Longitudinal Investigation into Precarious Work and Industry Closure.

Thesis Submitted by

Gemma Keziah Beale
Bachelor of Arts (Hons), The University of Adelaide

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Contents

Abstract

In October of 2017, General Motors Holden's Elizabeth plant produced its last red commodore and, in doing so, marked the end of 70 years of motor vehicle assembly operations in Australia. This closure was distinct from past closures in that although it happened during a period of relative economic stability, there had been a clear and well-documented deterioration in job stability and job quality in Australia over the three preceding decades. To date, there has been relatively little research into the impact of high rates of precarious employment on closures and other mass unemployment events. And, of that pool of research, even less has explored the intersection of these two issues in the Australian landscape. This thesis addressed that oversight.

Through the design and application of a unique longitudinal, qualitative framework, this thesis' original contribution to knowledge is the confirmation that precarious work poses a significant risk to workers' transition experiences following large scale job loss. By focusing explicitly and exclusively on the presence and impact of precarious work on worker's experiences of employment transition, it proves that job quality must become a central consideration for future worker transition support programs.

This thesis uses data collected throughout a longitudinal study consisting of three waves of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, conducted at 6-month intervals, with 28 former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers, totalling 79 interviews. It employs a constructivist grounded theory approach and a longitudinal design in order to link the pragmatist intention of democratic social reform with critical inquiry through self-conscious reflexivity.

The automotive industry was a central producer of secure full-time employment and an anchor for one of the most vertically integrated and complex value chains in Australia. Its closure marked a significant step in the deindustrialisation of the Australian economy, but it also stands out as a significant moment of change for individual workers and their families and communities.

The central finding of this thesis is that, in the almost three years (29 months) following the industry closure, the only participants not to experience at least one component of precarious work were the three participants who were unable to secure *any* work. The longitudinal design enabled the researcher to track exposure to precarious work overtime to show that participants' exposure to

each of the elements of precarious work fluctuated over the course of the study. This important finding shows that participants' employment outcomes were not static or linear.

The thesis adds to the literature on contemporary experiences of precarious employment and of industry closure. It provides a (South) Australian context to the experience of both large-scale closures and precarious work. In documenting the transition experiences of former automotive workers, it provides a valuable insight into the differing employment transition experiences of workers from a single large company, General Motors Holden, as compared to smaller supply-chain companies. In doing so, it provides an in-depth account of the human dimension of deindustrialisation and precarious employment, which is currently lacking.

It contributes to the methodological literature on precarious work through the construction of an operational, qualitative Framework for Employment In/Security for identifying the presence of precarious work based on four reoccurring components across the extant literature: employment in/security; working-time in/security; economic in/security and access to rights and entitlements.

Finally, this thesis uses the Framework for Employment In/Security as the basis for an experimental Conceptual Model for Employment In/security. The conceptual model is intended to be used as a way of interpreting and understanding the impact and value of secure and precarious work. It draws on the qualitative findings of this thesis, captured at an important moment of change in the Australian employment landscape, to advocate for a big picture understanding of employment security that is directly informed by workers' experiences.

Interviewing these workers during this moment of change provided an insightful contrast between the incredibly secure work they were leaving and the varyingly precarious work most of them found. In doing so, the thesis found the value of secure work is not necessarily in the specifics of the task at hand, though that is also desirable, but in the stability and security that allows individuals to build friendships, families, and communities, and it is that which fosters the environment of love and fraternity that the participants of this thesis described.

Historic changes to the employment landscape are on the horizon as Australia begins to transition to a low-carbon economy. This thesis contributes to the literature by showing that precarious work poses a substantial risk to a genuinely just transition for workers who will be affected by those changes. It speaks to the importance of a holistic conception of the value of secure employment and

establishes that precarious work must be directly and centrally addressed, as part of future transition programs, to ensure the successful and just transitions of affected workers.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed.....GKB.....

Date.....21 June 2022.....

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First and foremost, I would like to thank the workers who participated in this project. A longitudinal study is not an insignificant commitment. These workers spoke with open and honest insight during a time of great change and vulnerability, and I am grateful for that. I hope I have done their stories justice.

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Although it is trite to say, a PhD takes a village (or at least this one did), and I am in awe of mine. So, forgive the indulgence, as I list them all.

I think when I talk and so a significant portion of this thesis began in conversation through text messages across (often unfavourable) time zones with Sam Prendergast or over cups of tea and pints of beer with Paris Dean, both true comrades I'd be lost without. My housemates, who have graciously tolerated my second-hand stress and turned our big, weird house into a beautiful, weird home, we are very much family now: James Edmonds and George Stamatescu.

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During my candidature, the following impactful outputs were produced from my thesis

Peer-reviewed conference papers

2020, *Exploring the impact of precarious employment on workers' transition experiences following industry closure,* The Association of Industrial Relations Academics in Australia and New Zealand, Queenstown, New Zealand.

Presentations

Delivered the Keynote on precarious work in Australia at the Financial Institutions Remuneration Group's 2021 Conference, Hilton Hotel, Adelaide.

Panel member

2021, *The Protective Power of Job Security* with Senator Sarah Hanson Young and Tanya Hosch for the Working Women's Centre SA, Adelaide.

2021, *The Future of Local Journalism roundtable* with Royce Kurmelovs and Anisha Pillarisetty, Writers SA's Context Festival, Adelaide.

2020, *Working in the Arts,* with Letisha Ackland and Emma Webb for the Working Women's Centre SA, Adelaide.

2020, Launch of PerCapita's Jobs for Australia project in celebration of the 75th anniversary of Curtin's Full Employment White Paper, online.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this thesis. This chapter outlines the objectives and theoretical background of this thesis, the structure, research questions and methodologies, as well as the justification of the research, its key assumptions, limitations, and the thesis' original contribution to knowledge.

1.2 Introduction

The growth of precarious work as a result of the substantial expansion of casual and otherwise insecure work in Australia over the last three decades has been well documented. However, research addressing the impact of high rates of precarious work on industry closure is still in its infancy. There is currently no consensus regarding the definition of precarious work, which makes it difficult to identify and measure. This thesis builds on the existing literature to develop a qualitative framework for defining, measuring, and understanding precarious work and uses the framework as a means for exploring workers' transition experiences following the closure of the automotive manufacturing industry in South Australia.

This chapter summarises the thesis' background and research rationale, outlines the research questions and methodology, including its theoretical frameworks, and details the overall structure of this thesis.

1.3 Project Objectives

The objective of this thesis is to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between precarious employment and industry closure. The core objective is to gain a qualitative insight into the impact of precarious work on the experience of workers following large scale industry closure.

It was conducted in the context of precarious work literature, which is still lacking definitional consensus, and industry closure literature which has only very recently begun to seriously engage with the presence and impact of precarious work.

The objectives are pursued with the understanding that moments of significant change, like the closure of the Australian automotive manufacturing industry, provide opportunity for great insight. The researcher sought to document and understand the experiences of workers in the automotive industry, which boasted some of the most secure work in Australia, in order to contrast them with their experiences following its closure.

1.4 Background and Research Rationale

Holden's closure marked the end of 70 years of motor vehicle assembly operations in Australia. It followed closures in Victoria of Toyota's Altona plant in the same month and Ford's assembly plant in Broadmeadows and engine plant in Geelong a year earlier. At the time of the announcement, economic modelling estimated that anywhere between 8,390 jobs and 13,176 jobs would be lost in South Australia (Burgan & Spoehr, 2013, p. 15; Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 22). The larger figure included the 1,760 workers who were employed at Holden; 4,000 supply-chain workers and a further 7,500 across the South Australian economy (Burgan & Spoehr, 2013). Subsequent analysis conducted by Wallis and ACIL Allen for the Australian Government indicated that the true number of job losses was considerably lower, which was largely attributed to successful supply-chain diversification; in early 2019, less than one quarter of supply chain companies had closed (Australian Government, 2020).

Holden's plant was large, located 20km north of Adelaide's CBD, it provided a vital link between the Elizabeth and Salisbury city centres. Construction of Holden's facilities began at the Elizabeth site in 1958; the first vehicle parts were produced in 1959 and the first car bodies in 1962. In addition to its economic role, it played a historically, socially, and geographically significant role to both Elizabeth and South Australia.

The individual, family, and community impacts of mass unemployment events such as this should not be underestimated. Existing literature tells us that the loss of a major employer like Holden can have a detrimental impact at a local and national level (Barber & Hall, 2008; Beer & Evans, 2010; Beer & Thomas, 2007; Burgan & Spoehr, 2013; Ranasinghe, Hordacre, & Spoehr, 2014). And that job loss, especially in the case of industry closure, can have serious and often lasting inter-generational, psycho-social effects on workers and their families and communities (Beer et al., 2006; Chapain & Murie, 2008; Jolley, Newman, Ziersch, & Baum, 2011; Newman, MacDougall, & Baum, 2009).

Following the closure's announcement, a nationwide suite of federal, state, and company-funded programs were put in place to assist automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers' transition into new industries (Bowman & Callan, 2017, p. 38). Automotive manufacturing workers and affected supply-chain workers were eligible for the South Australian state government's automotive supply chain worker transition program (also known as 'Drive Your Future'), administered by Northern Futures Inc. and the Australian Government's Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Program (AISAP), administered through Job Network (Bowman & Callan, 2017, pp. 40-41; Department of Industry, 2018; Nous Group, 2013). The 1,500 Holden workers employed on site in 2014 were also automatically incorporated into Holden's Transition Program (Bowman & Callan, 2017, p.39). Each program offered varying levels of assistance in finding information about job opportunities, identifying transferable skills and skills gaps, funds for retraining, referrals to health services, and ongoing support and mentoring (Bowman and Callan, 2017, p. 38; Department of Industry and Skills, 2018, Drive your Future; Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, 2018, Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Program). These programs were demonstrably informed by existing literature on the importance of comprehensive support programs, as well as the closure of the Mitsubishi plant in Tonsley, South Australia in 2006.

The closure of Australia's automotive manufacturing industry is distinct from past closures in that although it happened during a period of relative economic stability, there had been a clear and well-documented deterioration in job stability and job quality, partly attributed to the growth in casual and non-standard employment contracts in Australia over the three preceding decades (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Carney & Stanford, 2018). The growth in precarious work has been driven by a confluence of factors, central to which is the concentration of employment growth in the services sector and job losses in manufacturing at the same time as we have seen efforts to subvert established industrial relations expectations through business model innovation (Carney & Stanford, 2018). In effect, the growth of precarious employment in Australia is a result of some of the same shifts in macroeconomic policy and practice as the closure of the automotive industry; namely, a trend towards globalised market deregulation and deindustrialisation.

Precarious employment, much like industry closure, has been clearly linked to an increase in rates of poor individual and community physical, psychosocial, and mental health outcomes (Bardasi & Francesconi, 2004; Marlea Clarke, Lewchuk, de Wolff, & King, 2007; Keuskamp, Ziersch, Baum, &

LaMontagne, 2014; McNamara, Bohle, & Quinlan, 2011; Pocock, Prosser, & Bridge, 2004; Zeytinoglu, Lillevik, Seaton, & Moruz, 2004).

To date, there has been relatively little research into the relationship between high rates of precarious employment and industry closure. This thesis uses former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers as a case study to better understand the intersection of these two variables.

1.5 Research questions

The literature review identified gaps regarding the relationship between high rates of precarious employment and workers' transition experiences following industry closure and large-scale job loss.

The aim of this thesis is to document the transition experiences of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia and to answer the following three research questions and sub-questions.

Research Question 1: How did workers feel about leaving the automotive industry?

Research Question 2: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?

> **RQ 2.a**: To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious, and unemployed workers?

Research Question 3: Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply chain?

1.6 Research Methodology

This thesis uses a qualitative longitudinal design and constructivist grounded theory analysis. It employed a fixed-panel longitudinal framework, wherein a single sample is followed in order to gather detailed information on changes in their characteristics (Smith, Lynn, & Elliot, 2009, p. 22). Longitudinal studies have considerable advantages over one-time surveys and are well suited to investigating measures of stability and instability, including time-related components of events and causality rather than 'mere association' (Derrington, 2019; Lynn, 2009), all of which are central to this thesis. Short-running longitudinal studies, such as this, have also been a common methodological choice for studying worker outcomes in redundancy studies (Beer et al., 2019).

Grounded theory was selected to ensure that the findings formed through the case study of the Australian automotive manufacturing closure may be of use for future instances of large-scale job loss during periods of high rates of precarious employment. It uses a traditionalist method of constructivist grounded theory to link the pragmatist intention of democratic social reform with critical inquiry through self-conscious reflexivity (Charmaz, 2017).

Taken together, these frameworks complement one another. The longitudinal design allows the exploration of the nature and degree of changes over time and constructivist grounded theory sees people as experts in their own experience and allows the generation of new perspectives from familiar phenomena, thereby allowing the data, produced by participants and gathered over time, to develop into theory.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the core theoretical and methodological components of this thesis.

Chapter Two places this thesis in the overarching context of the closure of Australia's and, more specifically, South Australia's automotive manufacturing industry including Holden's Elizabeth Plant. It provides a brief history of automotive manufacturing in Australia, looking at the economic and social role of the industry and some of the policy decisions that saw it grow and then collapse. It ends with an overview of the local and national economic context at the time of the closure.

Chapter Three reviews and synthesises the literature on both precarious work and on industry closure, two fields of study that have, to date, remained largely independent of one another. It draws these two largely separate areas of research together to demonstrate the need for greater qualitative, longitudinal research in this area and establishes the core research questions and the conceptual framework adopted for application in this thesis.

Chapter Four, the methodology, outlines the research steps and justification for a qualitative, longitudinal study using constructivist grounded theory. It explains the rationale for the research method used in responding to the overarching research focus of this thesis: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply chain workers in South Australia?

Chapter Five presents the analysis and findings of the longitudinal qualitative data collected over the course of 79 one-on-one interviews, conducted in three waves at 6-month intervals, with 28 former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers. It details the way the interview data was analysed using constructivist grounded theory methodology and presents the thesis' core findings.

Chapter Six presents a discussion of the findings and analysis detailed in Chapter Five in the context of the literature reviewed in Chapters Three and Four. It examines how the findings relate to the existing research. Chapters Five and Six are organised into sections that correspond with the thesis' research questions. Within each section, the relevant findings and literature is discussed in the context of their significant contributions to precarious work and industry closure literature. In line with constructivist grounded theory, this chapter draws the discussion together in order to expand upon the Framework of Employment In/Security developed for this thesis into an overarching conceptual model.

Finally, Chapter Seven provides an overview of the findings, establishes the thesis' original contributions to existing knowledge and acknowledges its limitations and makes recommendations for future research.

1.8 Delimitation of Scope

This thesis has limitations, as the research was conducted without engaging non-worker stakeholders. It is a worker-focused thesis that is primarily concerned with worker experiences of both precarious employment and industry closure. It is outside the scope of this thesis to interview other key stakeholders, including government and industry representatives and workers' families.

1.9 Participant anonymity

A key component to ensuring participant safety is maintaining anonymity. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained over the course of this research and will be into the future. Participants have been assigned pseudonyms throughout this thesis, and any identifying information has been excluded.

In order to further ensure anonymity, no one participant's account has been relied upon in such a way that their identity could be uncovered through their 'resume'. Where positions are discussed,

it is in the broadest terms possible so as not to allow participants, known to a reader, to be identified.

Although supply chain workers came from fourteen different companies—some of them of considerable size—specific companies have not been named as workplaces for the same reason. Holden was deemed large enough, and the comparative distinction between the experiences of Holden and supply chain company workers significant enough, to identify those participants who worked at Holden.

1.10 Original Contribution to Knowledge

Through the design and application of a unique longitudinal, qualitative framework, this thesis' original contribution to existing knowledge is the demonstration that precarious work now poses such a significant risk to workers' transition experiences, following industry closure, that its reduction needs to become a central consideration for future transition support programs.

The central finding of this thesis is that, in the almost three years (29 months) following the industry closure, the only participants not to experience at least one component of precarious work were the three participants who were unable to secure *any* work during this period. The longitudinal design enabled the researcher to track exposure to precarious work overtime to show that participants' exposure to each of the elements of precarious work fluctuated over the course of the study. This is important because it shows that participants' employment outcomes were not static or linear.

This thesis adds to the literature on contemporary experiences of precarious employment and of industry closure. It provides a (South) Australian context to the experience of both large-scale closures and precarious work, which is important given the significant impact local socio-economic and welfare policies have on workers' transition journeys.

It documents the transition experiences of former automotive workers and provides a valuable insight into the differing employment transition experiences of workers from a single large company, General Motors Holden, as compared to smaller supply-chain companies. And in doing so provides an in-depth account, which is currently lacking, of the human dimension of deindustrialisation and precarious employment.

It contributes to the methodological literature on precarious work through the construction of an operational, qualitative methodology for identifying the presence of precarious work. The findings of this thesis are a valuable contribution to the literature and industry closure policy and demonstrate that precarious work must be directly and centrally addressed to ensure the successful and just transitions of workers following large scale job loss.

1.11 Summary

This chapter provided an outline of this thesis. It detailed the project objectives, research questions, methodology, and the justification and contribution of this thesis.

The next chapter outlines the history of automotive manufacturing policy in Australia and the policy decisions that led to the industry's closure.

2 CONTEXTUALISING AUSTRALIA'S AUTOMOTIVE CLOSURE

2.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the closure of Australia's automotive manufacturing industry and, more specifically, South Australia's automotive industry including Holden's Elizabeth Plant.

2.2 Introduction

This chapter is divided in two. The first half provides a brief historical and economic overview of automotive manufacturing in Elizabeth, South Australia the home of the General Motors Holden Plant—and Australia more broadly. It contextualises this thesis by looking at the economic role of automotive manufacturing in Australia and providing a brief overview of some of the policy decisions that saw it grow and then collapse.

The second half of this chapter examines the literature on industry closures. Large scale job losses, as a result of company or industry closure, are affected by a complex assortment of intersecting macro and micro variables. These include but are not limited to business model innovation, the changing size and demand of markets, automation, climate change, the relative strength of the national economy, employment rates and welfare systems, and community resilience and government preparedness (Beer, 2010; Cook et al., 2013; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Spoehr, 2014). Such layoffs sit within a spectrum, from smaller business adjustments to more far-reaching economic restructuring culminating in complete industry closure. For this reason, this chapter will be drawing on research surrounding the impact of, and recovery from, closures and large-scale job losses, also known as 'mass unemployment events', as well as research surrounding economic shocks. It ends with an overview of the local and national economic context at the time of the closure.

2.3 A General Motors Town

The City of Elizabeth sits 31 kilometres north of Adelaide, South Australia and was designed in the 1950s as Australia's first British-style New Town (Conlon & Perkins, 2001; Marsden, 2000). Built with considerable state government intervention and overseen by the South Australian Housing Trust,

Elizabeth was borne of ambitious post-war reconstructive optimism, designed to lift the working class out of the 'slums' by building a worker's city (Marsden, 2000; Peel, 1995a). Holden's decision in the late 1950s to build their second factory in Elizabeth (their first was in Woodville in Adelaide's inner north-west) was a core component in the town's evolution (Browne-Yung, Ziersch, Baum, Friel, & Spoehr, 2020; Marsden, 2000). It followed the construction of nineteen smaller factories built by the SA Housing Trust and anchored Elizabeth's development as an 'Industry Town' (Marsden, 2000). Premier at the time, Sir Thomas Playford, said Holden had been attracted to the local *'assured supply of labour'* that there *'were not people living in hardship in sub-standard housing'* (Marsden, 2000). In effect, Holden's presence had proved the New Town hypothesis.

Construction of Holden's facilities at the Elizabeth site began in 1958; the first vehicle parts were produced in 1959 and the first car bodies in 1962. And the plant was large, spanning nearly 300,000 square metres. It provided a vital link between the Elizabeth and Salisbury city centres (Schlesinger, 2017). As such, in addition to its economic role, it has also played a historically, socially, and geographically significant role to both Elizabeth and South Australia for more than three generations.

2.4 Economic role of the automotive industry

In Australia, the automotive manufacturing industry played a pivotal role in the development of Australia's broader manufacturing industry, generated secure full-time employment, and played a key role in the development of skills-based career paths for workers (Stephen Clibborn, Lansbury, & Wright, 2016). Broadly understood, manufacturing is the transformation of 'some tangible material product' into 'something more complex and useful' (Stanford, 2020, p. 8). It is also the 'intense application of knowledge to making things' (Spoehr, 2015, p. 2); it drives economic complexity and is central to a nation's participation in the knowledge economy (CSIRO, 2016; Spoehr, 2015). Advanced economies rely on manufacturing as a driver of productivity and innovation and it is, according to (Spoehr, 2015), different from other industries because it provides higher potential returns to society. An advanced manufacturing sector produces higher incomes and greater employment than would otherwise be possible and, in doing so, contributes toward greater social health outcomes (Spoehr, 2015, p. 3). Historically, automotive manufacturing specifically was also considered a 'jewel' of industrial policymakers because it anchors complex supply chains that have considerable reach throughout the economy and acts as a trendsetter for advanced technology and

innovation as well as wages and employment conditions (Barnes, 2021; Beer, 2018; Beer et al., 2019; Stanford, 2017a).

In fact, automotive manufacturing was one of, if not the, most vertically developed, integrated, and complex value chains in Australia (Spoehr, 2015, p. 44; Stanford, 2017a; Worrall, Gamble, Spoehr, & Hordacre, 2021). It was an incredibly complex multi-layered industry that included the original equipment manufacturers (OEM), the three tiers of supply chain companies that they purchased and subcontracted from, and the global value chains it sat within (Barnes, 2016). The demise of the automotive industry means that the manufacturing sector in Australia is now largely dependent on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Worrall et al., 2021). This is problematic because it means Australia is now wholly dependent on the defence sector, as the only remaining large manufacturing industry, for smaller SMEs to integrate with. According to Worrall et al. (2021), this leads to weak value chain linkages and an industry that is likely to lack key capabilities and be overly dependent on imports. This is supported by analysis conducted by Stanford (2020, p. 62) that shows Australia now has the highest dependency on manufacturing imports and the lowest level of manufacturing self-sufficiency in the OECD. Stanford's analysis of the most recent OECD data also finds Australia's total manufacturing output was smaller than most OECD economies, a drop he partly attributes to the loss of the automotive manufacturing industry (2020, pp. 60-61). A lack of a sufficient economic complexity has serious consequences, not only for the nation's self-sufficiency, but also for Australia's ability to innovate and manage unexpected crises; as we saw when demand saw international shortages in medical and personal protective equipment (PPE) in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Stanford, 2020). Such deficits also raise considerable concern around Australia's capacity to face expected crises, including the looming threat of climate change.

In addition to its substantive role in ensuring Australia's economic complexity, the automotive manufacturing industry also provided well-paid, secure work. At the time of closure, there were a variety of predictions about what aggregate impact the closure would have nationally. Predictions ranged from 40,000 jobs (Productivity Commission, 2014) to just under 200,000 jobs (including 24,000 losses in South Australia) (Spoehr, 2015), as well as a national loss of $29 billion to the national GDP.

The automotive industry was one of the core pillars of Australia's advanced manufacturing capabilities and provided good, ongoing work. The loss of the industry has not only led to the loss

of secure and ongoing work, but it also has serious consequence for the future of Australia's advanced manufacturing capabilities and sovereign self-sufficiency.

2.5 Policy decisions that contributed to the closure of the Australian Automotive Manufacturing Industry

By the time Holden announced its closure in late 2013 (following announcements from Ford and Toyota earlier that year), the Australian manufacturing industry had been in decline for some time (Browne-Yung et al., 2020; Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of the automotive manufacturing industry was one of the largest scale industrial shocks in contemporary Australian history (Spoehr, 2017). The end of an industry of this scale and complexity is never attributable to a single cause.

This section seeks to provide a brief outline of the factors at play and the policy decisions made in response. Over the course of its lifetime, the industry confronted a core group of variables that would contribute to its ultimate demise. They are: production scale, domestic consumer demand, export capabilities, the fluctuating value of the Australian dollar, and the number of producers and models (Beer, 2018). The death of this industry was not, however, inevitable. It was the result of active policy decisions made by successive Australian governments, away from the protectionist policies of the early 20th century toward free-market neoliberalism (Beer, 2018). These decisions began in the 1970s, when the Whitlam government began reducing tariffs across the board, and ended with the Abbott government's refusal to provide the industry with any further budgetary support in 2013 (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016).

2.5.1 Beginnings to Button

The Australian automotive industry began in the early 1920s with the assembly of imported parts, but it was not until post-World War Two that it grew into a strong manufacturing, rather than assembly, industry. This advancement was borne of deliberate post-war industrial policies that converged around a dream of manufacturing an 'Australian car' to be designed *and* manufactured onshore (Conlon & Perkins, 2001), a dream that would be realised first by Holden in 1948, before the rest of the global original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) followed suit shortly after. Supported by a series of active policy levers, the industry would grow to be a central pillar of the Australian economy over the next two decades as Australia grew to manufacture close to half a million vehicles annually, almost as many cars as local consumers purchased by the early 1970s

(Stanford, 2017a). Jobs grew in tandem, and the industry became a cornerstone of full-time secure work in Australia. It set the pace for skills-based career paths, safety standards and decent wages (Spoehr, 2015).

Those supportive protectionist policies established in the early 20th century sheltered the industry from international competition through a combination of company subsidies and high tariffs on imported vehicles (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016). Automotive import tariffs were, and continue to be, a common tool used by most countries as a source of revenue and a means of supporting domestic production (Bracks, 2008, p. 35). However, that began to change in the 1970s when the Whitlam government started implementing a series of trade liberalisation policies including a 25 per cent reduction on all Australian import tariffs (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016). The Hawke government followed suit with the establishment of the Passenger Motor Vehicle Plan, better known as the Button Plan in 1984—named after then Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, Senator John Button (Conlon & Perkins, 2001, p. 136).

The Button Plan was a response to an industry on the edge of collapse. Its goals were to remove import quotas which had allowed the industry to become inefficient, further reduce import tariffs, reduce the number of vehicle producers from five companies with short production runs on 15 different models, and increase the efficiency of the remaining three companies to produce only six vehicle models with reduced government assistance to an internationally competitive standard (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 136136; Conlon & Perkins, 2001; Sohal, Pratt, & Schroder, 2001). It was accompanied by the establishment of the Automotive Industry Authority to oversee the activities of industry stakeholders (Sohal et al., 2001).

The Button Plan was indicative of the growing influence of neoliberal economic ideology that valued international competition and reduced government intervention above all else (Sohal et al., 2001, p. 481). The move toward neoliberalism would expand under the Keating government and his government made it clear in the Industry Commission's Automotive Industry Report that the primary objective was: '*only that production which can survive without special treatment from the Government can be regarded as truly viable and internationally competitive* (1990)'.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that as tariff assistance was reduced, a series of industry-specific budgetary measures were activated intended to support the industry through the its transition. Each support package included a fixed end date, implying that industry support would

(and should) be finite (Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 109). Support included the Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme (ACIS); the Automotive Transformation Scheme (ATS); and additional budgetary assistance including various capital subsidiaries in the form of co-investment grants from State and Federal Governments (Productivity Commission, 2014).

Thus, although Australia had reduced its motor vehicle tariff to 5 percent by 2010, one of the lowest tariffs of any vehicle-producing major economy, the automotive industry was one of the most heavily assisted industries in Australia, with the value of assistance as a proportion of the industry's (unassisted) value added reaching 9.4 percent in 2011 (Bracks, 2008, p. 11; Productivity Commission, 2014).

Table 1: Applied Tariff Rate in Selected Countries, 2013

Country/Region	Tariff Rate on Passenger Vehicles %	Tariff Rate on Commercial Vehicles %	Tariff Rate on Automotive Components %
Australia	5	5	5
Brazil	35	35	0-18
China	25	6-25	3-25
European Union	10	22	3-4.5
India	60-100	10	10
Japan	0	0	0
Mexico	20	20	0-5
Korea	8	10	8
Thailand	80	40	10-30
United States	2.5	0-25	0-2.5

Source: (Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 288)

An unintended consequence of the tariffs was that they enabled local manufacturers to operate relatively autonomously from overseas headquarters. This autonomy, and a strong local market, had allowed them to produce vehicles not made elsewhere in the world, with comparatively little oversight (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 10). That changed in the 2000s when global headquarters instigated much greater oversight as a component of production rationalisation (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016).

2.5.2 Global competition

One of the core challenges faced by the industry was Australian manufacturers' small production scale, and this would prove to be its Achilles' heel. A persistent problem for the duration of the

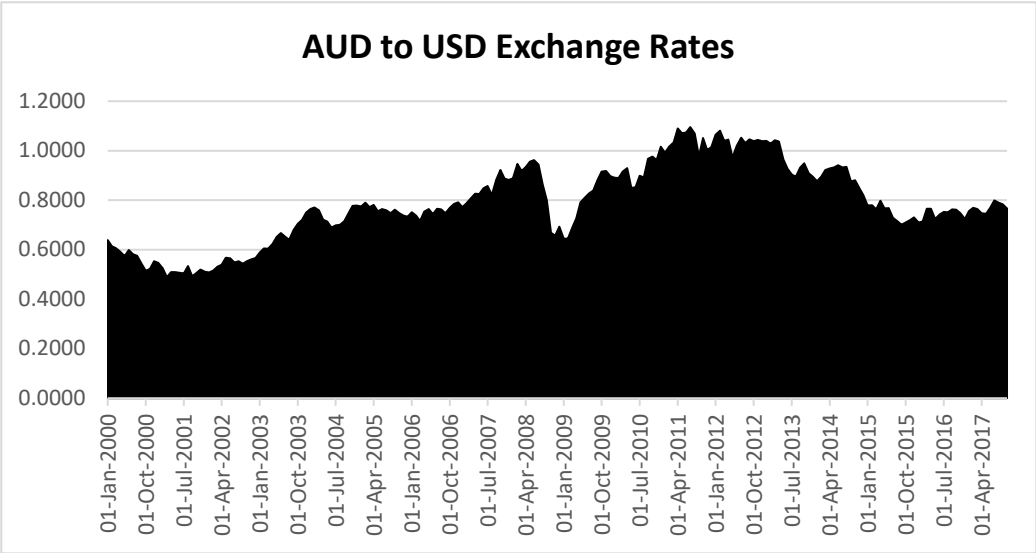
industry's lifetime, it became increasingly problematic following the implementation of the Button Plan and the consequent reduction in protective tariffs (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 307).

Automotive manufacturing is highly reliant on economies of scale whereby profits are driven by a manufacturer's ability produce a significant number of products, thereby driving unit costs down. In this way Australia—a comparatively small economy—has consistently been disadvantaged. By the early 1990s Australia was struggling to compete with international competition in America and Japan's new lean production methods (Industry Commission, 1997, p. 55).

This was exacerbated by a trend toward globalisation as international companies increasingly began moving production facilities to lower-cost economies (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016). The competitiveness of already expensive Australian vehicles was further undermined by the fluctuating (and largely growing) nature of the Australian dollar. The mining boom of the mid-2000s led to the rapid growth, almost doubling, of the Australian dollar against the US dollar, from A$0.51 to A$0.91 (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 99). Excluding a brief fall around the Global Financial Crisis, the Australian dollar would continue to climb reaching A$1.09—its highest rate since the 1980s—in 2011 (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 99). This was a significant problem for an industry that

needed an exchange rate of A$0.80 to remain competitive (Spoehr, 2015). Figure 1 details the Australian to US dollar exchange rates from January 2000 until the industry closed in 2017.

Figure 1: RBA Exchange Rates – Monthly – July 1969 to December 2009 and RBA Exchange Rates – Monthly – January 2010 to latest complete month of current year



*Source: (*Reserve Bank of Australia, 2022a*,* 2022b*)*

Although the exchange rate would drop in 2013, it was too late, and Australian producers were unable to bounce back (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 99; Spoehr, 2015, p. 11).

The problem of scale also impacts the resources available for research and development. Although substantial money was spent on research and development, relative to the size of the Australian industry and compared to other Australian sectors, comparatively small scale production restricted the funds available for reinvestment (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 316). This is not to say that the industry was not improving but, rather, that it was only improving at the pace required of all competitive businesses—not enough for an industry that required a significant overhaul (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 316). Similar problems were apparent in the United Kingdom, where Rover was unable to keep up with the investment standards of the global industry (Chapain & Murie, 2008).

2.5.3 Consumer demand for smaller cars

In their 2020 book analysing the rise and fall of automotive manufacturing in Australia, *National Policy, Global Giants: How Australia Built and Lost its Automotive Industry,* Wormald and Rennick argue that by the 1980s, the industry was in desperate need of a major change of course. They conclude that successive Australian governments' consistent failure to ask the 'hard questions' of

industry and, consequently, to intervene appropriately, in favour of 'minor tweaks', is one of the central reasons the industry died (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 309).

Part of this is attributed to what they call an 'optimistic bias', which resulted in the dismissal of, or under-valuing of, key pieces of information (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, pp. 310 - 311). One example of this optimistic bias is evident in the Government's failure to pay adequate attention to the growth in the market share of small cars starting as early as the 1980s. In the 20 years to 1997, small cars captured 70 percent of the market's growth in units sold, in conjunction with significant growth in their overall market share, making for a change that should have been considered a 'seismic shift' in the Australian new car market—but was not (2020, pp. 312-313).

The Keating government did not foresee, or pay close enough attention to—depending how you look at it—changing domestic consumer preference from the 'Australian Car' (large sedans) to more compact, cheaper, economical imports (Wormald & Rennick, 2020). Wormald and Rennick point to the 1997 Industry Commission report, which did not investigate what characteristics of imported cars were attractive to Australian consumers, implying instead that imported cars were popular simply because they were imported, as an example of this (Industry Commission, 1997; Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 311). This trend continued and in the decade to 2002 imported vehicles overtook the domestic consumer market, increasing from 31 percent in 1992 to 81 percent (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016).

Substantial increases in the price of oil in the 2000s exacerbated this problem, the price of petrol increased by 33 per cent in the years 2004 to 2008, driving up operating costs of passenger vehicles and providing another reason for Australians to avoid locally made cars that consumed more petrol than their competition (Bracks, 2008, p. 10).

Consumer demand was, in part, driven by mandatory buy-Australian policies for public and private fleet vehicles (Wormald & Rennick, 2020). The national preference for locally produced fleet vehicles unintentionally skewed consumer demand for large sedans and meant that as tariffs were reduced, and the domestic market moved toward imported vehicles, local manufacturers became increasingly reliant on fleet sales, a reliance that was undermined when the Australian government switched fleet vehicle contracts from GM Holden to BMW in 2013 (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 2016; Wormald & Rennick, 2020). The early cuts to import tariffs on small cars to make it easier for younger and first-time car buyers had the unintended consequence of 'giving away the industry's

future' by familiarising younger people with foreign cars (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 313). It also meant Australian manufacturers of 'Australian Cars' were largely competing for the same segment of the market share.

It is easier to identify problems such as this in hindsight, but it is Wormald and Rennick's proposition that many of these issues were sufficiently visible at the time. They make a sensible case that this should have become apparent as early as 1997, but by the 2000s the folly of the Australian government's failure to demand more information and commitment from an industry it had been supporting generously for decades should have been apparent (Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 320).

2.5.4 Wages and Industrial Relations

The automotive industry was an incredibly unionised workforce and remained that way until its demise. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) had near full coverage for non-managerial workers in large companies and significant coverage throughout the supply chain (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 11). As a result, the AMWU had considerable bargaining power right up to closure, especially in contrast to declining union membership throughout the rest of the Australian workforce (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 11). As a result, industrial relations were repeatedly blamed for the closure. Despite anti-union speculation surrounding the closure, it is broadly agreed that this inability to significantly increase scale caused the collapse of the industry rather than too-high labour rates (Stephen Clibborn et al., 2016, p. 33; Wormald & Rennick, 2020, p. 307).

2.6 Australia's labour market at the time of automotive closure

The closure of Australia's automotive manufacturing industry is distinct from past closures in that although it happened during a period of relative economic stability, there were several concerning indicators of labour market vulnerability, including persistent stagnant wages, high rates of precarious work, and a falling male full-time employment rate.

Stagnant wage growth had been a concern for the Australian economy for some time (Stephen Clibborn, 2021; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a). In 2018, Phillip Lowe, the Reserve Bank Governor, delivered a keynote at the annual Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) dinner where he noted that in the 6 years prior (2012-2018), there had been little change in real hourly earnings and that wage increases had been largely matched by inflation (Lowe, 2018). In fact, annual

wage increases had decelerated to their slowest pace in decades, and depending which method of measurement is chosen they had been growing at 0.5 – 2.0 per cent per year (Carney & Stanford, 2018; Stanford, 2018).

Stagnant wage growth has been attributed to the interconnected influence of: the separation of wages from productivity, low inflation, the decline in union membership, the growing share of the Australian workforce now covered by enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs), and growing rates of precarious employment (Carney & Stanford, 2018; McCrystal, 2019; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a; Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2020; Stanford, 2018).

Regarding the separation of wages from productivity, the combined labour share of income (the ratio of total wages and salaries to total income in the economy) in Australia has been on a gradual decline since the early 1970s, over which time there has been a simultaneous increase in the capital share of GDP (La Cava, 2019). Excluding the financial sector, the aggregate labour share has remained unchanged since 1990 (La Cava, 2019).

One explanation for this is Australian workers' loss of bargaining power; there has been a consistent decline in union membership in Australia over the last three decades (La Cava, 2019). A growing body of research suggests this process of 'deunionisation', between labour and capital—which has restricted industrial action, limited collective bargaining, and led to an increasingly large portion of the workforce's wages be determined by the minimum awards rather than enterprise bargaining agreements—is contributing to low wage growth (Carney & Stanford, 2018; Stephen Clibborn, 2021; McCrystal, 2019; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a; Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2020).

In this way, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between stagnant wages and high rates of precarious work in that many of the factors that have caused wages to stagnate, specifically a limited regulatory system and reduced collective bargaining, have also enabled precarious work to flourish—and, likewise—high rates of precarious work slows wage growth.

In October of 2017, the seasonally adjusted underutilisation rate was 13.9 percent nationally and 15.1 percent in South Australia. The male unemployment rate was sitting around 7 percent, and male full-time employment was on a downward trend (Spoehr, 2017). This is of particular concern given the automotive industry was overwhelmingly male-dominated and so, the bulk of the people losing work would be older men. There had also been a clear and well-documented deterioration in

job stability and job quality, partly attributed to the growth in casual and non-standard employment contracts, in Australia over the three preceding decades (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Carney & Stanford, 2018).

Looking more specifically to the City of Playford, formed by the amalgamation of the City of Elizabeth and the City of Munno Para in 1997 and the home of the Elizabeth plant in South Australia, it is the second-largest council area in South Australia and the most disadvantaged local government authority (LGA) in the greater Adelaide region (Browne-Yung et al., 2020). As of the most recent Australian Census, it has a population of almost 90,000 people. The median weekly income for a family in Playford is $1, 212, which is more than $500 lower than the national average and almost $300 lower than the state average (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The City of Playford's unemployment rate is consistently higher than the state and national average.

2.7 Industry Closures and Large Scale Job Loss Literature Review

The next sections examine the impact of, and responses to, industry closure and large-scale job loss. The individual, family, and community impacts of events such as these should not be underestimated. Existing research shows us that job loss, especially in the case of industry closure, has serious and often lasting inter-generational impacts (Beer et al., 2006; Cook et al., 2013; Davies, Homolova, Grey, & Bellis, 2017; Jolley, Newman, Ziersch, & Baum, 2011; Spoehr, 2014).

Historically, mass unemployment, through company or industry closure, was a relatively infrequent event affected by a complex assortment of intersecting macro and micro and causative and responsive variables. These include, but are not limited to, the changing size and demand of markets; the relative strength of the national economy; employment rates and welfare systems; and community resilience and government preparedness (Beer, 2010; Cook et al., 2013; Spoehr, 2014). However, that assumed employment stability is now under threat from significant shifts in the environmental, technological, and health landscapes. Arguably the most significant threat to the future of large-scale job losses and industry closures, in Australia and globally, is climate change - and the economic and social changes that are necessary as part of the transition to low-carbon or carbon-neutral economies (Newell, 2013). In addition, the rapid rate of technological change through automation, digitilisation and business model innovation has led experts to predict a broad spectrum of likely employment impacts ranging from single-digit figures (Borland & Coelli, 2017; Chester, 2018) to one third (Deloitte, 2014) or, infamously, up to one half (Frey & Osborne, 2017)

of all jobs might be lost due to automation. And, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequent forced shut down of the economy, had a dramatic and ongoing impact on employment in Australia, at its peak the pandemic saw the national unemployment rate increase by more than 3 points from 5.1% in January 2020 to 7.4% in July 2020 and, in January 2022, two years into the crisis, almost one quarter of employing business' reported employees were unavailable due to factors relating to COVID-19 and almost half were experiencing supply chain disruptions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The economic crisis brought on by COVID-19 has led some prominent scholars, and the peak Australian union body, to call for a complete economic reconstruction plan (Australian Unions, 2020; Pennington & Stanford, 2020b). Each of these factors independently warrants a greater understanding of the contemporary experience of mass job loss in Australia but, taken together, this research area becomes both pertinent and imperative.

Industry closure poses two central and interrelated problems: what happens to the workers and what happens to the region, in the immediate aftermath and over the long-term. This chapter will first explore the impacts of these mass unemployment events and then outline the differing local and regional responses; and the circumstances and ideology that underpin them.

Large scale layoffs sit within a spectrum, from smaller business adjustments to more far-reaching economic restructuring culminating in complete industry closure. For this reason, this chapter will be drawing on research surrounding the impact of, and recovery from, closures and large-scale job losses, sometimes referred to as 'mass unemployment events' as well as research surrounding economic shocks—not all of which are prompted by economic events—but many of which experience them as consequence.

This thesis follows a significant wave of 'retrenchment studies' research, conducted during the last significant wave of deindustrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s, that explored the socio-political impacts of job loss – in Australia and beyond (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Rubery & Wilkinson, 1994; M. J. Webber & Weller, 2001; Weller & Webber, 2004). Although that research precedes the emergence of 'precarious studies' it is important to acknowledge these studies lay the groundwork for studying the relationship between the loss of secure work and economic insecurity, poor health outcomes and community and familial break down.

2.8 What factors shape an industry closure?

Industry and company closures and the consequent displacement of workers have been, and will continue to be, a significant feature of established and emerging economies whether that is as a result of decarbonisation, automation, structural adjustments or business model innovation, individually or in combination (Armstrong, Bailey, de Ruyter, Mahdon, & Thomas, 2008; Bailey, Chapain, Mahdon, & Fauth, 2008; Barber & Hall, 2008; Barnes, 2021; Beer et al., 2019; Goods, 2021). Existing literature tells us that the loss of a major employer can have individual, regional and national repercussions (Barber & Hall, 2008; Beer & Evans, 2010; Beer & Thomas, 2007; Burgan & Spoehr, 2013; Productivity Commission, 2014; Ranasinghe, Hordacre, & Spoehr, 2014). And that it can have a devastating and lasting psycho-social effect on workers, their families and their communities (Beer et al., 2006; Chapain & Murie, 2008; Jolley et al., 2011; Newman, MacDougall, & Baum, 2009).

The impact of any given closure both shapes, and is shaped by, the economic and regional setting in which it occurs (Bailey, Chapain, & de Ruyter, 2012; Productivity Commission, 2014; Spoehr, 2014, p. 90). Although there is a range of outcomes that can be expected from mass layoffs, the complex interplay between causative and contextual factors means that each closure must be taken on its own terms. The depth and breadth of a closure will be shaped by both its socio-economic context and the policy interventions that follow. This section reviews the literature on industry closures, as well as company closures and other large-scale job losses, to understand the factors that shape a closure and their ongoing ramifications.

2.8.1 Gauging the strength of the Australian economy

It has been well established in the literature that the economic shock of closures and mass unemployment events is substantially different if they occur during economic downturns, as compared to periods of economic growth (Cook et al., 2013; Davies et al., 2017; Spoehr, 2014, p. 75). Cook et al. (2013) conducted extensive research into economic shocks for the federal Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills to produce a framework about when and how it is appropriate for government to intervene following economic shocks. Their analysis supports the extensive research on Australian industry adjustments conducted by Spoehr et al. (Barbaro, 2014; Burgan & Spoehr, 2013; Ranasinghe et al., 2014; Spoehr, 2014, 2015, 2016; Spoehr, Barnett, & Parnis, 2009; Spoehr, Morrison, & Wilson, 2003) that shows that closures during periods of strong economic growth tend to have fewer negative ramifications as long as there is enough available

work of an *'appropriate quality'* [researcher's emphasis] (Spoehr, 2014, p. 91). Cook et al. (2013) concluded that although large scale job loss tends to be precipitated by business decisions (influenced by sectoral, market and technological changes) any ongoing impacts are shaped by the macroeconomic environment in which they occur. Put simply, in ordinary cases, the detrimental impact of mass job loss is reduced when there is enough pre-existing, secure, and suitable work available for the affected workers.

Whereas the likelihood of long-term unemployment is much higher when closures happen during periods of low growth and high unemployment (Davies et al., 2017; Spoehr, 2014). As such, it is imperative that policymakers have as accurate a picture of the health of the economy as possible in the lead-up to a closure (Spoehr, 2014, p. 91). At the time of the automotive industry closure, Australia had been impacted by but managed to avoid the most severe impacts of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (Spoehr, 2014). And until the economic crisis, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, had been experiencing steady economic growth for a quarter-century (Cebulla, 2020, p. 191). However, slowing economic and employment growth at national and local levels signalled to some researchers, at the time of closure, that the closure of Australia's automotive manufacturing industry might be different (Barbaro, 2014; Burgan & Spoehr, 2013; Ranasinghe et al., 2014; Spoehr, 2014, 2015, 2016).

To date, however, there has been relatively little research into the impact of high rates of precarious employment on closures and other mass unemployment events (Bailey and de Ruyter, 2015; Barnes, 2016a; Barnes 2016b; Barnes, 2018; Barnes 2020; Barnes, 2021). And, of that small pool of research, even less has explored the intersection of these two issues in the Australian landscape (Barnes, 2021; Barnes & Weller, 2020). This is an oversight in the literature.

The closure of the Australian automotive manufacturing industry was distinct from other large scale closures in that, although it happened during a period of relative economic stability, there were several concerning indicators of labour market vulnerability including persistent stagnant wages, high rates of precarious work, and a falling male full-time employment rate (Carney & Stanford, 2018; McCrystal, 2019; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a; Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2020; Stanford, 2018).

By the time of closure in 2017, stagnant wage growth had been a concern for the Australian economy for some time (Stephen Clibborn, 2021; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a). Stagnant wage

growth has been attributed to the confluence of the gradual separation of wages from productivity, low inflation, the decline in union membership or 'deunionisation', and growing rates of precarious employment (Carney & Stanford, 2018; McCrystal, 2019; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a; Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2020; Stanford, 2018).

A growing body of research emphasises the role of 'deunionisation' in low wage growth because it has restricted industrial action, limited collective bargaining, and meant a large and growing portion of Australian workers' wages are now determined by the minimum awards rather than enterprise bargaining agreements (Carney & Stanford, 2018; Stephen Clibborn, 2021; McCrystal, 2019; Pennington & Stanford, 2020a; Sheldon & Thornthwaite, 2020). There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between stagnant wages and high rates of precarious work because many of the factors that have caused wages to stagnate (including a limited regulatory system and reduced collective bargaining) have, as established earlier in this chapter, also enabled precarious work to flourish—and likewise—high rates of precarious work slows wage growth (Stanford, 2018; Stewart, Stanford, & Hardy, 2018).

As discussed earlier in this chapter at the time of closure, the seasonally adjusted underutilisation rate was nationally and in South Australia was high, as was the male unemployment rate (Spoehr, 2017). And there had also been a clear and well-documented deterioration in job stability and job quality in Australia over three preceding decades (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Carney & Stanford, 2018). And the City of Playford was the most disadvantaged (LGA) in the greater Adelaide region and it has a consistently higher unemployment rate than the state and national average (Browne-Yung et al., 2020).

Although the impact of the growth in precarious employment on industry closure is under-researched, it is likely to have significant, complex, and unpredictable impacts on workers' transition experiences, even during periods of economic growth. As such, focusing on the unemployment rate alone might provide a false sense of confidence in a swift recovery. The literature surrounding closures has failed to adequately account for the impact of consistently high rates of precarious work in Australia.

2.8.2 Regional Resilience

In addition to the overarching economic environment, transition pathways are also shaped by their local regional context. The regional context consists of the other businesses and industries in the region and the community and support networks that sustain the people who live and work there. Regions that are highly dependent on a single industry or employer are at greater risk of extended, even generational, periods of unemployment because it is less likely that the available work will require the same skillsets as the industries shedding labour (Beer & Evans, 2010; Chapain & Murie, 2008, p. 314; Spoehr, 2014, p. 91). No two shocks are the same, and so we must be cautious about any attempts to identically replicate success stories (Koutský, Slach, & Tomáš, 2011). What worked in one city will not necessarily do so in another. As such, it is important to account for and build upon existing strengths and skill sets.

A region is more than an economy alone, and one measure of a regions' strength is community resilience. A comparatively new public health concept, community resilience emerged out of the psychological and behavioural health sciences' exploration of individual resilience (Plough et al., 2013, p. 1190). It emerged as an explanation as to why, in otherwise comparable circumstances, some populations fair better during crisis than others (Nuwayhid, Zurayk, Yamout, & Cortas, 2011, p. 506). Although there is no single definition of community resilience it is accepted that it is more than the simple accumulation of individual resilience; a collection of resilient people will not guarantee a resilient group (Galea, Ahern, & Karpati, 2005, p. 134; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008, p. 129; Nuwayhid et al., 2011; Plough et al., 2013, p. 506). Instead it is best understood as a process (rather than an outcome) in which political, social and cultural factors interact in the face of adverse conditions to form community strength (Nuwayhid et al., 2011; Plough et al., 2013, pp. 506-507).

In their book exploring community resilience and health security in the United States, Chandra et al. define it as the ongoing and developing capacity to account for vulnerabilities *and* to develop new capabilities (2011, p. 31). They propose that community resilience mitigates the stress of crisis, assists with the restoration of a community to a pre-crisis base level, and empowers them to better withstand future incidents (Chandra et al., 2011, p. 31). At its core it is about identifying and building upon a community's existing strengths and resources and using them to plan for the future including, vitally, 'planning for the unplannable' (Norris et al., 2008, p. 127; Nuwayhid et al., 2011, p. 516). As such it plays a central role in regional recovery following large scale job loss and should be understood, incorporated into, and fostered, by transition programs. The difficulty is that if we

understand it as a process—something that is cultivated over time—it also needs to be a consistent part of industry policy, even during times of economic stability. Given the unpredictability of some economic shocks, embedding community resilience into industry policy is not only good practice during periods of growth, but an essential component of crisis preparedness (Davies et al., 2017, p. 64).

Resilience is measured by the speed at which homeostasis is achieved, but it needs to account for the variability in community outcomes beyond the 'averaged rate' of individual wellness in a given area (Norris et al., 2008, p. 127). A community cannot be considered well if most of the affected population has returned to a pre-crisis level, while some have been pushed into acute stress. This is an important consideration for transition programs that tend to measure their success in population averages.

Considering many of the factors that undermine individual and community resilience are common elements of precarious employment it is possible that high rates of precarious employment would undermine overall community resilience beyond just the impact of an underutilised workforce. Given both concepts require a nuanced understanding of complex variables it is unsurprising that, to date, there has been little research into the relationship between high rates of precarity and community resilience—this project seeks to explore the relationship between these concepts.

2.8.3 Closures over time; the importance of early intervention

Economic shocks present both short and long term problems: the initial wave of unemployment and then the ongoing regional socio-economic impacts (Cook et al., 2013, p. 11). These elements are interrelated; in general, the greater forewarning workers, business, and government have of a closure, the better. Greater warning allows interested parties time to plan and, assuming the time provided by the forewarning is well utilised, the processes put in place moderate some of the more severe and lasting negative ramifications of closure, often referred to as 'aftershocks'. The literature from past closures warn that many of the most negative social problems do not *emerge* for 18 to 24 months, when retrenched workers' payouts diminish and holidays end (Henderson & Shutt, 2004, p. 34). Holden employees were entitled to four weeks' severance pay and four weeks of pay for every year of continuous service with the company, in addition to unused sick, long-service (Fair Work Commission, 2014). Given the average length of service at holden was 17 years that equates to 71 weeks payout, slightly under 1.5 years. This payout for Holden, and other OEM workers was

considerably more generous than many supply chain arrangements (Australian Government, 2020; Barnes, 2021).

These long-term effects can be severe for individuals, regions, and nations alike (Cook et al., 2013; Davies et al., 2017). As such, it is widely accepted that early 'intelligent intervention' that begins with the forewarning of the closure (be it a formal announcement or otherwise) and carries on long after the last day on the job is key to handling closures well (Spoehr, 2014, p. 75).

2.9 Human impacts of industry closure

Existing literature tells us that the loss of a major employer can be felt at an individual, regional, and national level (Barber & Hall, 2008; Beer & Evans, 2010; Beer & Thomas, 2007; Burgan & Spoehr, 2013; Productivity Commission, 2014; Ranasinghe et al., 2014). Including devastating and lasting psycho-social effect on workers and their families and communities (Beer et al., 2006; Chapain & Murie, 2008; Jolley et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2009). Without adequate intervention retrenched workers and their communities are left to bear the brunt of business decisions in more ways than the simple loss of work (M. Webber & Campbell, 1997, p. 187).

2.9.1 Impacts on the Individual

Past closures have shown that the impacts of industry closure are not distributed evenly, what Chapain and Murie call 'unequal impacts on an uneven surface' (2008, p. 311). Older workers, lower-paid workers and those from diverse cultural backgrounds or who do not speak English fluently are more vulnerable to periods of long-term or cyclical unemployment (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018; Chapain & Murie, 2008, p. 315; Davies et al., 2017; Mavromaras, Sloaneab, & Zhang, 2015; Spoehr et al., 2009; Watson, 2013).

Beyond the loss of income, large scale job loss also poses a real risk to workers physical and mental health through periods of extended unemployment and the loss of social support networks (Davies et al., 2017; Marmot, Wilkinson, & Bartley, 2006; Ziersch, Baum, J Woodman, Newman, & Jolley, 2014). In addition to feelings of grief and loss, risks to individuals include, but are not limited to, increased rates of: unhealthy behaviour (smoking, drinking, and drug misuse), anxiety and

depression, attempted suicide, morbidity and mortality (Beer et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2017; Marmot et al., 2006). This includes the exacerbation of the well-established ill-health impacts of unemployment as mass redundancy can lead to an increased competition for work, extending individual periods of unemployment.

Unemployment, and specifically non-voluntary retrenchment, can also significantly impact the mental and physical health of workers' spouses, children, and extended families (Davies et al., 2017; Jolley et al., 2011; H. Park & Kang, 2016; Ziersch et al., 2014). Some reports indicate that the effect on spouses' health can be 'almost as high' as redundant workers (Davies et al., 2017, p.4). Similarly, it is important to consider the flood of recently retrenched workers can displace existing job seekers who are less recently employed extending and compounding their period of unemployment (Chapain & Murie, 2008, p. 315315).

Given these risks, it is important then to take a holistic viewpoint that considers the qualitative transition experiences of workers' and their communities. The concern is that narrow or purely quantitative data, such as employment statistics, can obscure some of the more complex outcomes. And, to date, there has been very little research into the qualitative experience of the intersection of high levels of precarious employment and industry closures (Bailey et al., 2008, p.53).

2.9.1.1 ***Employment Outcomes***

Regarding employment outcomes, the accepted wisdom entering this closure, informed by the Mitsubishi closure in South Australia, was that three years after closure, one third of workers found full-time work, one third were unemployed or under-employed, and one third had left the workforce (Australian Government, 2020; Beer et al., 2006; Browne-Yung et al., 2020).

In his Library Fellowship Paper exploring the transitional politics for Victoria's automotive industry ahead of this closure, Barnes (2016) highlights the dangers of relying too heavily on the employment outcomes of past closures, including Mitsubishi's, that happened when there were other suitable manufacturing jobs available. Drawing attention to a noteworthy difference between total industry closures and single company closures or instances of large-scale job loss. The most obvious difference being that industry closure forces the bulk of a workforce to retrain into new work in a way that not all single plant closures do. This thesis responds to the danger of assuming past closures will be replicates and responds to Barnes' (2016) call for longitudinal research into the *quality* of work employment outcomes for retrenched automotive workers.

The literature also shows that, in the case of industry closure, there are likely different employment outcomes for workers leaving original equipment manufacturers (OEMs)—in this case, Holden—and those from supply chain companies (Barbaro, 2014; Barnes, 2016; Cook et al., 2013; Nous Group, 2013). First, because supply chain companies are differently reliant on the automotive industry, not every company will close and, therefore, not everyone employed in the supply chain will lose their job (Barbaro, 2014; Barnes, 2016; Ranasinghe et al., 2014). The State and Federal governments invested significant resources, as part of structural readjustment programs, to support supply chain companies to diversify and mitigate these job losses (Australian Government, 2020; Browne-Yung et al., 2020). Second, because supply chain workers have differentiated access to support programs (Browne-Yung et al., 2020, p. 85). And third, because workers from OEMs tend to have better employment outcomes than those from smaller supply chain companies (Beer et al., 2019). This is especially significant given most workers in the Australian automotive manufacturing industry were employed in the supply chain (Barnes, 2016). For these reasons, Research Question 3 of this thesis examines the differing experiences of participants from Holden and the supply chain.

2.9.1.2 ***Is any job a good job?***

To date, there has been comparatively little research into the impact of quality of work following industry closures. Important recent scholarship from academics who are also investigating the automotive industry's closure in Australia has begun to point to the significance of job quality, especially for older retrenched workers.

Barnes and Weller's (Barnes, 2021; Barnes & Weller, 2020) analysis of automotive worker's trajectories after industry closure establishes the important mitigating role individual's pre-existing financial security has against the more severe impacts of precarious work. Their work challenges the causative link between precarious work and precarious lives, arguing that precarious work becomes one determinant of a precarious experience (Barnes & Weller, 2020, p. 528). Their findings are supported by research conducted into Detroit's welfare-to-work program from 2010 and 2017 that found statistically significant differences in outcomes between workers who were hired by a company directly compared to those that were hired by a temporary employment agency (D. Autor, H., & Houseman, 2010; D. H. Autor, Houseman, & Kerr, 2017). The Detroit study found workers who were employed temporarily had reduced job stability 'by all measures [they] were able to examine' (D. Autor, H., & Houseman, 2010, p. 9999). And that temporary employment was often a pathway

into lower earnings and ongoing insecurity, rather than security and stability (D. Autor, H., & Houseman, 2010).

The second study by the same group of researchers in 2017 found that compared to workers who were hired directly by a company, temporary contract workers had 'uniformly zero or negative effects' on their earnings. Autor et al. use this finding to cast doubt on the prudence of the extensive reliance on temporary-help agencies in employment programs in Detroit. Questioning the logic behind the assumption that workers should be placed in the first position available, especially for those on the lower end of the earnings spectrum (D. H. Autor et al., 2017, p. 185185).

2.9.1.1 ***Health impacts of Job Loss***

Individuals impacted by large-scale job loss include both the retrenched workers and their families and communities. Work is central to the construction of individual identity, health, and well-being. This is especially true of industries, like automotive manufacturing, where workers tend to stay at one company for all or most of their working lives (Barnes, 2016, 2021; Beer et al., 2006; Verity & Jolley, 2008). As such, there are two key issues following a factory or large business closure; first, the employment landscape, including the way you find a job, has likely changed significantly since one last sought new employment. Second, with the loss of employment, workers also lose a significant portion of their social lives (Beer et al., 2006, p. 31; Ziersch et al., 2014). A stable 'job for life', such as those offered by General Motors Holden, enables families to establish roots, plan for the future, and encourages and incentivises an interest and investment in local community (Carney & Stanford, 2018, p. 44). Such an investment is entrenched by shared values shaped over generations at the same worksite; through friendship formation as well as the formalised acts of community building that are facilitated by, or within, large companies and their associated unions (Verity & Jolley, 2008, pp. 334-336).

For example, research from Mitsubishi's 2008 plant closure in South Australia showed that many of the retrenched workers had got their job by asking at the 'front gate' many years earlier in their teens and early twenties (Beer et al., 2006, p. 11) and that one-third of them were involved in social groups that were directly related to, or facilitated through, their workplace (Beer et al., 2006, p. 31; Verity & Jolley, 2008, p. 334). Likewise, an exploratory report of international closures conducted by Public Health Wales found that it was common for workers and their communities to experience feelings of intergenerational 'grief and social isolation' following 'mass unemployment events'

(Davies et al., 2017, p. 10). Naturally then, it should come as no surprise that the literature clearly demonstrates the importance of transition programs that assist workers to navigate the contemporary employment landscape *and* in finding and nurturing social networks. For this reason participants were asked about changes to their friendship networks over the course of this thesis.

Former automotive workers retrenched from Mitsubishi's South Australian plant in 2006 also reported experiencing depression, grief and a crisis of self following the factory closure; symptoms that are largely attributed to the loss of comradery, trust and a sense of 'family' established in such a large and consistent worksite (Beer et al., 2006; Verity & Jolley, 2008). This is further supported by a separate study that found colleagues can have a significant impact on an individual's health and well-being (Godin & Kittel, 2004, p. 1548). A further qualitative and longitudinal study conducted into the same closure found job loss caused former auto workers considerable psychological distress as a result of stress, changes to perceived control, loss of self-esteem and status, financial strain and grief (Anaf, Baum, Newman, Ziersch, & Jolley, 2013). This is consistent with earlier Australian research into retrenchment (M. Webber & Campbell, 1997). The same Mitsubishi study called for greater investment in the social, emotional and financial investment of retrenched workers in future and highlights the importance of holistic research that considers human agency and whole of life circumstances (Anaf et al., 2013). This has informed this thesis' longitudinal and qualitative structure, as well as the choice to use open-ended interviewing techniques.

2.9.2 Community and regional impacts

The literature also warns that the loss of a major employer can have a detrimental economic impact on local business activity through the loss of income to the supply-chain as well as local stores and cafes frequented by the workforce (Davies et al., 2017, p. 29), in addition to the loss of cash and in-kind donations to local schools, not-for-profits and other community organisations that are common practice for large scale businesses (Spoehr, 2014). This might seem a flippant consideration, but these donations can make up a significant portion of a community club's income. In the six years before its closure, Exxon Mobil's Oil Refinery in South Australia had donated $600,000 to local schools and community organisations (Spoehr et al., 2003). This is especially important given the role such organisations play in combatting social isolation and building resilience.

Likewise, it is important to distinguish between large-scale job loss and complete plant or industry closure. The latter is more likely to devastate local supply chains, especially in regions that were

highly dependent on a single employer or industry. This is true when unemployment is low but is, of course, exacerbated when there are fewer available jobs and competition for work is heightened (Beer et al., 2006).

Historically, the towns in which closures occur have felt the impacts most acutely. Chapain and Murrie's study of MG Rover's Longbridge closure warns against romanticising hyper localised neighbourhood impacts, demonstrating that due to the normalisation of longer-distance commuting for work, the spatial impact of contemporary closures is much broader than it has been in the past (Chapain & Murie, 2008, p. 315). They are careful to reiterate that this does not eliminate the centrality of regional context but instead disperses it over a wider zone than closures of the past (Chapain & Murie, 2008, p. 315), an acknowledgement that the communities that shape, and are shaped by, a closure are likely to extend beyond the clearly defined borders of local government.

The impact of complete industry closures especially can also ripple far beyond any given closure. Because of the core role automotive manufacturing has played in developing and incorporating advanced technologies in Australia, there is serious concern that its loss could undermine the growth of complex manufacturing in Australia (Barbaro, 2014, p. 14; Worrall et al., 2021). Historically, automotive manufacturing provided key training opportunities to ensure the Australian labour market was equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to best utilise emerging technology (Barbaro, 2014). The literature shows that complex manufacturing is, and will become, an increasingly important way of ensuring a nation's economic complexity; an area in which Australia is sorely lagging, as the economy is increasingly dependent on raw mineral exports (Dean & Spoehr, 2018, p. 11). Given that low-level economic complexity is associated with a high risk of job loss there is also concern that a failure to sure up the future of complex manufacturing may lead to a mutually reinforcing cycle of job loss (Roos & Shroff, 2017). That is: Australia lost automotive manufacturing jobs *and* the capabilities that support the growth of complex manufacturing jobs.

2.10 The closure of the South Australian Automotive Manufacturing Industry

To assist in contextualising the thesis' findings, this section provides a brief overview of the timeline of the closure of the Australian automotive manufacturing industry and a summary of the transition support packages offered to automotive workers.

In October of 2017, Holden produced its last red commodore and, in doing so, marked the end of 70 years of motor vehicle assembly operations in Australia (Barbaro, 2014). It followed closures in Victoria of Toyota's Altona plant in the same month and Ford's assembly plant in Broadmeadows, and engine plant in Geelong, a year earlier. Table 2 details the timeline of each of the manufacturer's plant closures.

Table 2: Timeline of Australian manufacturing facility closures

Date of Closure	Facility
7 October, 2016	Ford Production Plant, Broadmeadows
7 October, 2016	Ford Engine, Stamping and Casting Plant, Geelong
7 October, 2016	GM Holden Cruze Production, Elizabeth
29 November, 2016	GM Holden Engine Plant, Port Melbourne
July 2017	Ford Broadmeadows and Geelong Plants
3 October, 2017	Toyota Production Plant, Altona
December 2014 – October 2017	GM Port Melbourne and Elizabeth engineering and manufacturing (phased)
20 October, 2017	GM Holden Production Plant, Elizabeth

Source: (Australian Government, 2020, p. 8)

One uncommon aspect of this closure was the comparatively long time between the announcement of the closure/s and the actual closure/s; the OEMs had begun announcing their closures in 2013. In May of 2013, Ford announced that it would be closing its Australian manufacturing facilities in 2016. In December that year, Holden had followed suit, announcing it would close in 2017. And, finally, in February of the following year, Toyota confirmed it too would also cease manufacturing in 2017 (Barbaro, 2014).

Following the announcement of the closures, a nationwide suite of federal, state, and company-funded programs were put in place to assist automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers' transition into new industries, in addition to a number of structural adjustment programs aimed at transitioning supply chain companies into other manufacturing industries.

2.10.1 What were automotive workers eligible for?

Automotive manufacturing workers and affected supply-chain workers were eligible for the South Australian state government's Automotive Workers in Transition Program (AWITP)—also known as

'Drive Your Future'—administered by Northern Futures, *and* the Australian Government's Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Program (AISAP), administered through Job Network (Bowman & Callan, 2017, pp. 40-41; Department of Industry, 2018; Nous Group, 2013). The 1,760 Holden workers employed on site in 2014 were also automatically incorporated into Holden's Transition Program (Australian Government, 2020; Barnes, 2016). Each program offered varying levels of assistance in finding information about job opportunities; identifying transferable skills and skills gaps; funds for retraining; referrals to health services; and ongoing support and mentoring (Australian Government, 2020; Bowman & Callan, 2017; Department of Industry and Skills, 2018; Department of Industry, 2018). These programs were demonstrably informed by existing literature on the importance of comprehensive support programs, most specifically the closure of the Mitsubishi plant in Tonsley, South Australia in 2006 (Australian Government, 2020, p. 10).

In addition, three pools of transition funding were made available to South Australian automotive manufacturing workers. Holden employees could access funding from the Holden Skills and Training Initiative and AISAP for a total of up to $4,300 in transition funding. Supply chain workers could access funding from AISAP and the AWITP for a total of up to $3,800 in transition funding.

2.11 Precarious work is a consistent problem, globally and in Australia

The growth of precarious work as a result of the substantial expansion of precarious jobs in Australia and across the industrialised world over the last three decades has been well documented (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Howell & Kalleberg, 2019; Kalleberg, 2011, 2018; Lewchuk, 2017; Watson, 2013; Wayne & Michelynn, 2014). Research from the OECD (2015, p. 135) looking at the distribution of work, wages and skills shows that, in the majority of OECD countries, standard work has 'disappeared' in the middle of the distribution while non-standard jobs have increased. Non-standard employment has risen in 19 out of 21 countries surveyed by the European Labour Force Survey (Laß & Wooden, 2020). In Japan in 2010, it was estimated that at least one third of the labour force was in temporary work and in South Korea half of all workers are in 'non-regular' jobs (Standing, 2011, p. 15).

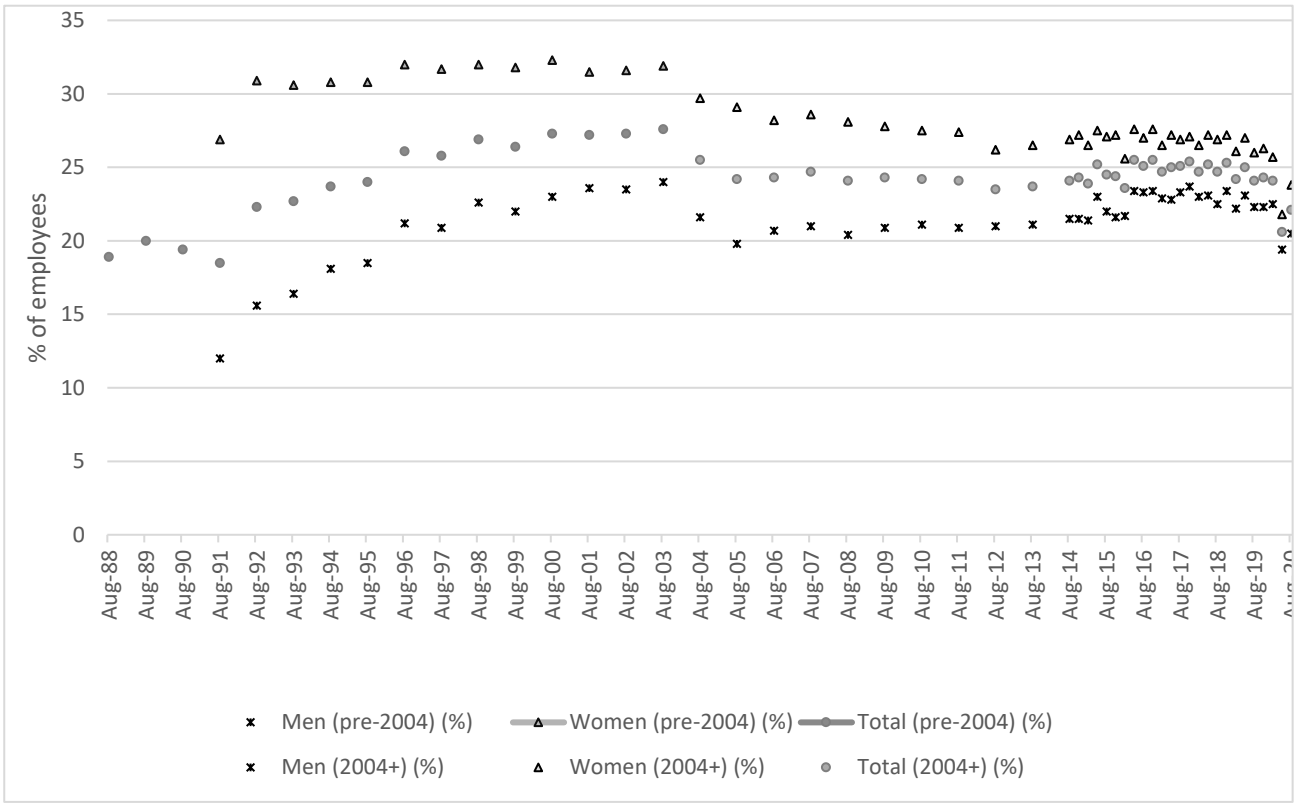
Although it is agreed that high rates of precarious work are a problem, it is difficult to accurately quantify for a range of reasons more fully discussed in Section 3.4 including difficulties measuring and comparing work types within and across nations. As such quantitative measures tend to rely on the imperfect concept of 'non-standard employment'. The widespread use of casual contracts in

Australia has also meant that the bulk of Australian literature on precarious work has focused on the impact of casual contracts replacing standard employment contracts (Buchler, Haynes, & Baxter, 2009; Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Campbell, Whitehouse, & Baxter, 2009; Laß & Wooden, 2020; Markey & McIvor, 2018; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017; Pocock, Prosser, & Bridge, 2004; Watson, 2013).

The main indicator the ABS uses to track casual employment in Australia is workers' access to paid sick and annual leave as this includes casual and self-employed workers. As of August 2021, 2.4 million Australian employees, or 23% of all employees, did not have access to paid leave (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021d, 2021f). Annual data released the year prior (August 2020—when the number of casuals dropped from 2.6 million to 2.3 million in the wake of COVID-19) shows that when the self-employed are eliminated, the share of casual workers increases to 22% of all employees, or over one in five employed workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021f).

Figure 5 draws on six data sets from the ABS to track the share of casual employment over time. Importantly, the pre-2004 series includes sole contractors or 'Owner Managers of Incorporated Enterprises', and the post-2004 series excludes them; this explains the apparent decline of casual employment in 2004 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021f).

Figure 2: Share of Casual Employment 1988 – 2020[1]



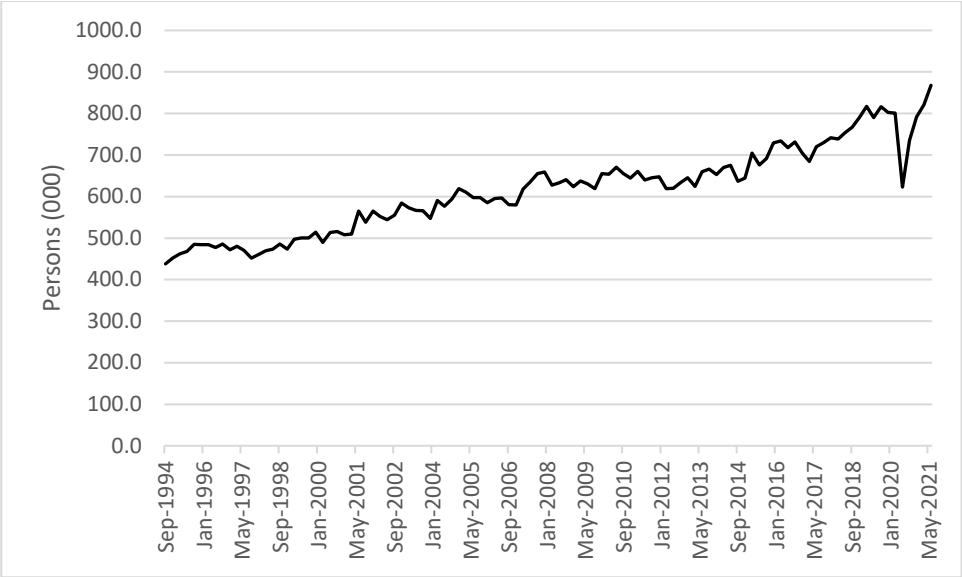
*Source: (*Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021f*)*

Figure 2 shows that the share of casual employment has remained high since the early 1990s, and that women have consistently accounted for a greater proportion of casual workers in Australia. This clear and well documented growth of casual contracts spans industries and occupations (Burgess, Campbell, & May, 2008; Campbell & Burgess, 2018).

It is expected that the true rate of casual employment is higher because there is a trend towards holding multiple jobs, as depicted in Figure 3, and in Australia second (and any subsequent jobs) are not calculated in the jobs count, but are likely to be casual or otherwise precarious (Burgess et al., 2008, p. 164).

Figure 3: Total multiple job holders in Australia, all industries

[1] The table looks unruly because the ABS began collecting casual employment data at quarterly intervals in August 2014, and so the data points are more frequent from then onwards (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021f).

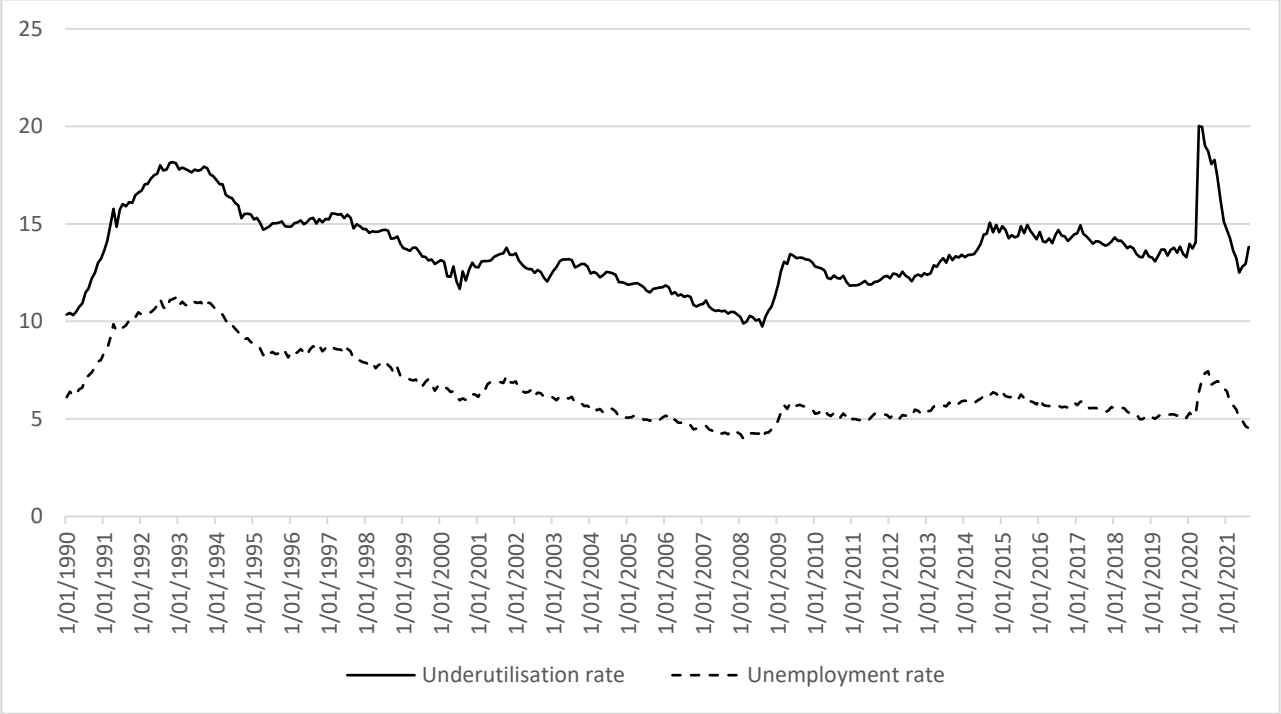


*Source: (*Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a*)*

As of June 2021, the three industries with the highest number of secondary jobs were administrative and support services, health care and social assistance, and education and training—all industries with consistently high rates of casual work and with higher rates of casual than standard work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021b).

As discussed more fully in the next chapter, casual contracts are not the only type of precarious work types in Australia. High rates of part-time and casual work can conceal the extent of un- and under- employment. In Australia, the underutilisation rate, which includes unemployed people and people who want to work more hours (regardless of contract), is a more accurate indicator of the health of the economy than the unemployment rate because it takes account of this problem. Figure 4 shows the underutilisation rate is consistently much higher than the unemployment rate, indicating a significant portion of the workforce are *involuntarily* working less hours than they want or need; the significant spike in early 2020 depicts the loss of work as a result of COVID-19.

Figure 4 Australian Underutilisation Rate and Unemployment Rate 1990 - 2021



Source: (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021e)

Finally, the growth of what Williams (2019) calls dependent self-employment is widely perceived as a rapidly growing form of precarious work (Abraham, Haltiwanger, Hou, Sandusky, & Spletzer, 2021). In Australia, this form of self-employment is, arguably, the most precarious work type. Although it makes up a smaller share of the labour force than casual work, the proportion of sole contractors without employees is growing rapidly, increasing by 25% from June 2005 to June 2020, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Counts of Australian Businesses operating at end of financial year June 2005 – June 2020

Company Type	Jun-05	Jun-20	Change
Non–employing	1,155,278	1,441,105	+25%
Employing			
Employing 1–4	471,481	599,516	+27%
Employing 5–19	225,447	213,218	-5%
Employing 20–199	81,390	56,252	-31%
Employing 200+	5,675	4,357	-23%
Total employing	785,607	873,343	+11%
Total	**1,939,088**	**2,314,448**	**+19%**

Source: ABS 8165.0 Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, June 2005 to June 2021

2.12 Summary

The automotive manufacturing industry played a pivotal sociocultural and economic role in Australia. It was the pillar of Australia's broader manufacturing industry, a generator of secure full-time employment, and central to the development of skills-based career paths for workers.

The growth of precarious work has made the availability and quality of jobs more risky and uncertain (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). As discussed more fully in the next chapter, Australia has very high rates of casual and otherwise precarious work, and it is likely to be an enduring feature of the Australian labour market. This poses a serious but under examined threat to the successful transition of workers following large-scale job loss and industry closure.

The following chapter closely examines the extant literature on precarious work to establish the research questions and the unique qualitative framework adopted for application in this thesis.

3 PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyse the literature on precarious work in the context of the industry closure literature discussed in the previous chapter.. It establishes the core research questions and the conceptual framework adopted for the application of this thesis.

3.2 Introduction

This chapter examines the literature regarding the nature and impacts of precarious employment in the context of the literature about responses to large-scale job loss and industry closure presented in the preceding chapter. While a significant amount of literature exists exploring both the shape and nature of precarious work and industry closure, little attention has been paid to the impacts of high rates of precarious employment on workers' transitions into new employment following industry closure. This thesis reviews these two literatures independently in order to understand an under-researched but important problem.

This chapter will first examine the interdisciplinary literature from sociology, industrial relations, and public health regarding the presence, growth, and experience of precarious employment in advanced economies generally, and in Australia specifically. It establishes precarious work as a growing problem in Australia, and globally, and then draws on the literature to define a framework of precarious employment in Australia. It also summarises the research on the economic and socio-cultural impacts of precarious work on an individual, community, and regional scale. Finally, the chapter demonstrates the need for greater qualitative, longitudinal research in this area.

3.3 Precarious work as a historical and temporal phenomenon

Work is one of the core building blocks of society; it is central to the construction of individual identity and the formation of social relationships (Kalleberg, 2021). As such, significant shifts in the structure of work have garnered considerable attention from researchers concerned that it is likely to have pervasive social, economic, and health ramifications for individuals and communities alike (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Kalleberg, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020; OECD, 2015).

To examine precarious employment, it is prudent to first outline what is meant by *secure* employment. Secure work is most often understood as full-time, ongoing work, with paid leave entitlements (Campbell & Burgess, 2018). Sometimes called the standard employment relationship (SER), it is borne of, and shaped by, the unionised Fordist workforces of the industrial revolution and the dominant social and gender norms of that time (Kalleberg, 2009; Munck, 2013). Although the SER would be familiar to most, it is worth being explicit. In addition to being full-time and ongoing work, standard work has been characterised by an employee working under the direct supervision of a single employer who provides the workplace and tools required, as well as the social benefits and entitlements that make up the 'social wage' (Leah F. Vosko, 2007). Reaching its height in advanced economies in the post-war period, it is also grounded in a heteronormative reproductive relationship that assumes a male breadwinner who is paid a family wage sufficient enough to support his family and allow his wife to perform unpaid domestic labour (Leah F. Vosko, 2007).

Although standard employment is a familiar and dominant concept, it has not been distributed evenly across time or space. It has always been more accessible to some; mainly white men in advanced economies (Kalleberg, 2021; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018, p. 6; Leah F. Vosko, 2007; L. F. Vosko, MacDonald, & Campbell, 2009). Precarious work is a growing problem in Australia and other advanced economies (Japan, Korea, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, to name a few), but it is not an ahistorical phenomenon (Allison, 2013; Kalleberg, 2018, 2021; Procyk, Lewchuk, & Shields, 2017; Standing, 2011).

Different manifestations of precarious work can be identified temporally and geographically, and some form of what we now call precarious work has existed for as long as paid work has (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is credited with identifying the concept of '*the Précarité*' in 1963, before declaring it was 'everywhere' in the late 1990s (Alberti, Bessa, Hardy, Trappmann, & Umney, 2018; Bourdieu, 1998, p. 82). However, considerable scholarship from, and about, the 'global south' emphasises that precarious work, or 'informal work', has remained the norm in many parts of the world and, as such, informal workers make up the bulk of the global workforce (Mosoetsa, Stillerman, & Tilly, 2016; Munck, 2013). The latest data from the International Labour Organisation shows that more than 60 percent of the global workforce, more than 2 billion workers, are employed informally (International Labour Organisation, 2018). Informal employment accounts for 85.8 percent of all employment in Africa; 40 percent in the Americas; 59.2 percent in

the Asia and Pacific region (87.8 percent in Southern Asia and 75.2 percent in South-Eastern Asia) and, 25.1 percent of workers in Europe and Central Asia (International Labour Organisation, 2018).

As such, from the outset, this researcher is wary of global and historic generalisations. Although there is significant scholarship discussing the rise of precarious work and, especially recently, the changing shape of work as a result of the emergence of 'gig work' across the world, this thesis is concerned with the distinct shape and impact of precarious work in Australia, specifically as it relates to employment shocks and closures. It draws on the relevant literature with the specific intent of first describing the nature of precarious work in Australia and then, its impact on workers' transitions following industry closure.

3.4 Defining precarious work

Despite substantial and interdisciplinary growth in precarious employment research and literature, a commonly accepted definition is yet to be found (Alberti et al., 2018; J. Benach et al., 2014, p. 230; Kreshpaj et al., 2020, p. 236; Paraskevopoulou, 2020). The lack of consensus is partly attributed to discrepancies in employment regulation and legislation that make it difficult to identify and compare precariousness across regulatory borders (OECD, 2015, p. 130). Complications that are exacerbated by attempts to link precarious work with income data, because very few countries maintain data on both wages and employment types over time, and because 'no single statistical indicator completely captures the full extent of changes in job security' (Carney & Stanford, 2018, p. 1; OECD, 2015, p. 130). These challenges have led to what some have called a conceptual slippage in meaning (Alberti et al., 2018; B. Anderson, 2010; Campbell & Price, 2016; della Porta, Silvasti, Hänninen, & Siisiäinen, 2015).

To further complicate matters, a range of terms including, but not limited to, precarious work; precarious employment; precariousness; precarity; temporary; insecure; non-standard; contingent; casual; flexible; atypical; and gig work or employment, are used near-interchangeably across the literature depending on country and discipline (Kreshpaj et al., 2020, p. 236; Paraskevopoulou, 2020). In response to these complications, precarious work is most often defined in contrast to 'atypical' or 'standard' work, which is full-time, ongoing work, with paid leave entitlements (Alberti et al., 2018; Burgess & Campbell, 1998, p. 66; Kreshpaj et al., 2020; C. Lee, Huang, & Ashford, 2018; Paraskevopoulou, 2020; Tweedie, 2013; Wu, Wang, Parker, & Griffin, 2020).

Although a consensus is yet to be reached on a singular definition of precarious work, it has been widely accepted that a unidimensional definition of precarious work as exclusively employment insecurity fails to capture the depth and breadth of precarity, nor acknowledge that elements of 'standard' employment is also being eroded by the same competitive market principles that forged the non-standard workforce (Burrows, 2013, p. 381; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Tweedie, 2013, p. 298). As such, there has been a trend toward a multi-dimensional definition for precarious employment that includes: job insecurity; irregular hours; poor or highly variable wages; reduced rights and entitlements; and limited control over working conditions (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Fournier, 2009; Kalleberg, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020). However, a recent systematic literature review of sixty three studies, conducted by Kreshpaj et al. (2020), concluded that even though there is consensus that it is a multidimensional concept, in practice research tends to avoid defining or operationalising precarious work and instead relies on unidimensional definitions that focus on income and employment status (Kreshpaj et al., 2020, p. 241).

This thesis addresses this gap in the research by constructing and applying a multidimensional framework grounded in core indicators of precarious work including employment security, economic security, working-time security and access to rights and entitlements. The following sections provide an explanation for, and a definition of, these core indicators. It draws on the significant work of Standing (Standing, 1997, 2011, 2014) and Burgess and Campbell (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018) to create a qualitative framework for precarious work that can be operationalised.

3.4.1 Precarious work and ontological precariousness

Before delving into the dimensions of precarious work, it is worth first addressing one more element of the literature on this topic. Precarious work sits within a broader framework of precariousness. It has been well established that the relationship between precarious work and 'precarious lives' or 'ontological precarity' is complex (Lain, Airey, Loretto, & Vickerstaff, 2019). Scholars exploring the intersection of precarity and marginalised identities (including gender, race, age and migrant status) have highlighted the comorbidity between precarious work and ontological precarity in that precarious work both influences, and is influenced by, more generalised precariousness (D. Anderson & Naidu, 2010; K. D. Bone, 2019; Feldman, 2020; Kalleberg, 2020; Paraskevopoulou, 2020). It has been shown that precarious work *can* lead to precarious lives and, likewise, people

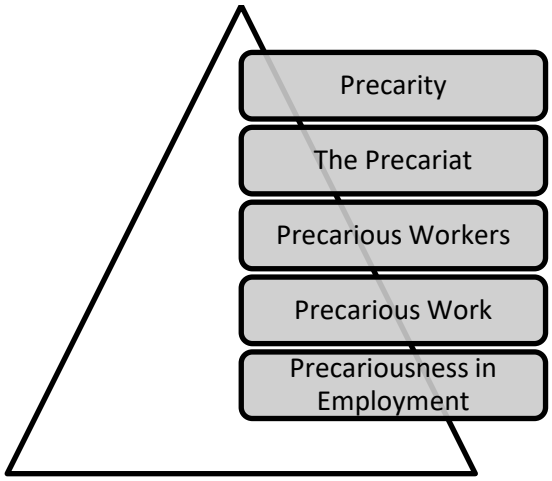
who are living precarious lives as a result of migration status, for example, are more likely to find themselves employed precariously (Feldman, 2020; Moriana, 2021).

The literature shows that migrant workers across the developed world are concentrated in some of the most precarious jobs, in the most precarious industries, as a result of discrimination, illiteracy or poor language skills, illegality, and a failure to recognise international qualifications (B. Anderson, 2010; Campbell, 2018; Feldman, 2020; Hande, Mian Akram, & Condratto, 2020). For example, Moriana's (2021) recent case study exploring the relationship between domestic violence, migration status, and precarious work in Spain found that people who experience gendered violence can find themselves reliant on precarious work because their circumstances (experiencing crisis, changing needs and responsibilities, work-status) can make it difficult to secure full time work *and* that income security as a result of precarious work can simultaneously exacerbate precariousness. Although precarious work and ontological precarity are often coincident it is not a necessarily causative relationship; and research has established that precarious work does not always lead to a precarious life (Antonucci, 2018; Clement & Vosko, 2009). This complexity, and the blurring of lines between precarious work and precarious lives is one of the reasons precarious work can be such a difficult concept to isolate, and then study.

To minimise the slippage between ontological precarity and precarious work, Australian industrial relations scholars Campbell and Price (2016) developed five analytical levels of precariousness based on the extant precarious work literature. *'Precariousness in employment'* is the first level and the central concern of this thesis. Precariousness in employment is a multi-dimensional concept made up of the objective and quantifiable indicators of precarity (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016; Kreshpaj et al., 2020). It recognises that some 'standard work' has elements of precariousness whereas '*precarious work'*, the next analytical level, is 'non-standard' waged work that consists of *several* dimensions of precarity (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Campbell & Price, 2016; L. F. Vosko et al., 2009, p. 76). '*Precarious workers'* are engaged in precarious work *and* are experiencing negative ramifications of precariousness outside the workplace (Campbell and Price, 2016: 315). Their fourth level, '*the precariat'*, applies Standing's (2011) concept of a 'class-in-the-making' as defined by shared political and social attributes. And finally, '*precarity'* encapsulates all four elements, and describes the spread of insecurity from the workplace into all spheres of life including housing, welfare, and personal relationships (Campbell and Price, 2016: 316). The five

analytical levels, depicted in Figure 5, illustrate the hierarchical relationship described by Campbell and Price (Campbell & Price, 2016).

Figure 5: Campbell and Price's Five Analytical Levels of Precarity as depicted by the Researcher



Source: (Campbell & Price, 2016), interpreted by the researcher

Figure 5 demonstrates that although not everyone who has 'precariousness in employment' is necessarily in 'precarious work', everyone in 'precarious work' *is* experiencing 'precariousness in employment'—and so on, up the pyramid until the impact of precarious work has bled into a an all-encompassing ontological precarity. The differing extents to which precarious work is transmitted into a precarious life, highlighted by the distinction between precarious work and precarious worker, is central to a holistic understanding of precarity in the workplace and beyond. This thesis draws on Campbell and Price's five analytical levels to address their call for further in-depth qualitative research that analyses the particulars of precarious work and the differing experiences among individual workers (2016, p. 326).

3.5 The objective components of precariousness in employment

Throughout the literature, there are reoccurring components of precarious work. This thesis draws together the objective components from the extant literature into an overarching operational, qualitative framework of employment in/security.

The emergent framework was informed by the extensive work of four leading precarious work scholars: Guy Standing, Arne L Kalleberg, and Ian Campbell and John Burgess. It is impossible to discuss precarious work without acknowledging Guy Standing's now renown theory that precarious

work is leading to the formation of a new 'class in the making', *the precariat* – it has irrevocably shaped global discourse around precarious work over the last three decades (Standing, 1993, 2011, 2014). Arne L. Kalleberg's extensive research on the topic is internationally renowned and consistently cited (Kalleberg, 2009, 2012, 2018, 2021; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). And Ian Campbell and John Burgess have, together, authored two of the most commonly cited journal articles about precarious work in Australia (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Burgess, 2018).

Kalleberg (2009, 2011, 2018) has the broadest conceptualisation of precarious work; he defines it by three core components: work that is insecure, unstable and uncertain; work that is associated with limited paid entitlements (wages, benefits) and work in which there is little opportunity for promotion; and work that is not accompanied by legal and social protections and rights.

In 1998, Campbell and Burgess produced an 'Operational Framework for Analysing Precarious Employment' (Burgess & Campbell, 1998, p. 11). It drew heavily on an early iteration (1993) of Standings' dimensions of precarious work that would be formalised in his book *The Precariat* (Standing, 2011) some years later. Standing outlined seven forms of labour-related insecurity: employment security; job security; work security; skill reproduction security; income security; representation security; and labour market security, defined in Table 3 (Standing, 2011, p. 10). In 1998, Campbell and Burgess added to Standing's list with what they called 'functional insecurity' (Burgess & Campbell, 1998, p. 11). Table 3 is a simple depiction of the components each of the scholars incorporate in their work.

Table 4: Forms of labour security

Type of labour market security	Standing	Campbell & Burgess	Kalleberg
Employment security - legislative protection against arbitrary dismissal.	x	x	x
Job security - the ability to pursue a career with opportunities for promotion and upward social mobility.	x	x	x
Work security - which is the protection against hazardous working conditions (including protection from excessive or unsociable working hours) via health and safety regulations and access to compensation for legal refractions.	x	x	x
Skill reproduction security – includes both opportunities for workers to apply existing skills as well as to gain new skills.	x	x	x
Income security - access to a stable and liveable income.	x	x	x
Representation security - which refers to collective voice in the workplace, including trade union membership.	x	x	
Labour market security - the strength of the labour market and if there is enough work available.	x	x	
Functional insecurity - when employers can shift workers from one job to another at will or where the content of the job can be altered or redefined.		x	

*Source: (*Burgess & Campbell, 1998*;* Kalleberg, 2018*;* Standing, 2011*)*

In 2018, Campbell and Burgess returned to the topic in order to provide an updated version (Campbell & Burgess, 2018). In it they reorient their definition around three of the eight forms of labour insecurity presented in their earlier work, namely: employment insecurity; earnings insecurity and working-time insecurity (in addition to a broader discussion of casual work). In order to develop an operationalisable framework suitable for case study research the researcher has drawn on these three components, in addition to 'access to rights and entitlements' as the skeleton for this thesis' qualitative framework. The following Sections develop a definition of each of these four components of precarious work based on the existing literature.

The researcher has excluded what Standing refers to as labour market security as a contextual feature of the employment landscape rather than a defining feature of one's work.

3.5.1 Employment in/security

At the heart of precarious work is employment insecurity, which includes the risk of job loss as well as the loss of paid hours (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020). The risk of job loss is mediated or exacerbated by labour market insecurity, which refers to the ease with which one might find new comparable employment and is represented in Australia by

the participation rate (Kalleberg, 2018, p. 91). Job insecurity is an objective as well as a subjective phenomenon, in that it can be measured empirically through employer tenure but it can also be measured by an individual's *perceived* job security (Kalleberg, 2018, pp. 91-105). According to Kalleberg (2018) perceived job insecurity is the self-reported probability of job loss and of then finding comparable work. Perceived job insecurity affects feelings and behaviours and the psychological literature has linked it to poor mental and physical health outcomes as well as job dissatisfaction (Kalleberg, 2018, p. 91; Wu et al., 2020). Perceived job insecurity is also related to what Millar (2017)—drawing on Butler (2004)—and followed by Lain et al. (2019) and Barnes et al. (2020) call 'ontological precarity', or the extent to which workers view their reality as being precarious. Perception of insecurity is important given the causative role stress plays in many of the poor mental and physical health outcomes (Allan, Autin, & Wilkins-Yel, 2021; Bhattacharya, Ray, Bhattacharya, & Ray, 2021; Marlea Clarke, Lewchuk, de Wolff, & King, 2007; De Cuyper, Schreurs, De Witte, & Selenko, 2020; Wu et al., 2020). Job insecurity has been shown to be the main obstacle to economic self-sufficiency among 'lower-skilled' workers (D. Autor, H., & Houseman, 2010, p. 97).

The literature shows that job insecurity has become a key concern for the future of work generally and for efforts to rebound from the economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically (C. Lee et al., 2018; Pennington & Stanford, 2020b; Wu et al., 2020). In addition to the risk of job loss or the loss of hours of work, Kreshpaj et al. (2020) call for greater attention to be paid to what they call 'contract renewal predictability' as a more accurate determinant of precarity than tenure, especially in the case of recurrent fixed-term contracts. This call has been incorporated into this framework and contract renewal predictability sits within employment in/security in the framework.

In contrast to employment insecurity, secure work is safe, ongoing employment with opportunities for skill development and promotion pathways that tends to be full-time (Standing, 2011, p. 10; Leah F. Vosko, 2007). It requires regulation that guides hiring and firing practices, protects against arbitrary dismissal, and penalises employers who break the rules (Standing, 2011, p. 10). This is, in part, to counteract the threat of the loss of work—be it the job, or (desirable) shifts—being used as a disciplinary or punitive tool (Campbell, Boese, & Tham, 2016; Campbell & Burgess, 2018, p. 52; Pocock et al., 2004, pp. 56 - 57).

3.5.2 Economic in/security

For the purpose of this thesis, economic security refers to the assurance of both adequate and stable income (Chapman, Skinner, & Pocock, 2014; Kalleberg, 2018; Pocock et al., 2004; Standing, 2011). In other contexts, economic insecurity can also be used to refer to the exposure of communities and countries to adverse events, but this thesis is only concerned with economic insecurity as a component of precarious work (Osberg, 2018). Economic insecurity is also referred to as earnings and income insecurity and is defined by low weekly earnings or significant fluctuation in income, also known as income volatility (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020; Osberg, 2018; Western, Bloome, Sosnaud, & Tach, 2012). It is inherently linked to employment and working-time insecurity for hourly workers and becomes problematic when it impacts workers ability to meet and maintain a minimum (and consistent) standard of living (Kalleberg, 2018, p. 2014).

For the purpose of this thesis, the researcher has also included what Standing (2011) refers to as job security, which is the 'ability to pursue a career with opportunities for promotion and upward social mobility' as a feature of economic in/security. According to analysis conducted by Cebulla (2020, p. 207), 'a large section', or one in eight Australian workers, has very limited, if any, opportunities for wage growth or promotion.

Economic insecurity can lead to difficulties accessing loans and credit (including mortgages) and financial hardship (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Carney & Stanford, 2018; Pocock et al., 2004). It can cause significant financial stress and make it difficult for workers to plan, borrow, and save in the short-term and long-term (Pocock et al., 2004). A significant qualitative study conducted by Pocock et al. (2004) details the way casual work negatively impacted workers' ability to plan and budget, ranging from social events to holidays, bills to mortgages, and holidays to retirement. And a longitudinal study conducted by Mavromaras et al. (2015) found scarring effects of low-paid workers meant that they were significantly more likely than high-paid workers to become unemployed.

Economic insecurity is exacerbated by what has over the last decade begun to be known as 'wage theft' (J. J. Lee & Smith, 2019; Levin, 2021). Wage theft is most often defined as an employer's deliberate failure to meet minimum wage requirements, either through underpayment or non-payment (Campbell, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2018). In his recent work on the topic, Campbell (2018) also advocates for the addition of other employer practices, including unauthorised deductions,

protracted unpaid trials, unpaid 'learning periods', unpaid setting-up or closing-down time, and the non-payment of penalty rates. It is most common in poorly regulated industries and those dominated by young and migrant workers (Campbell, 2018; Campbell et al., 2016; Cavanough & Blain, 2019; S. Clibborn, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2018).

In addition to the growing incidence of academic wage theft literature, there is also a wealth of grey literature on the topic produced by unions, governments, and research institutes (Cavanough & Blain, 2019; Levin, 2021). The South Australian parliament recently established a Select Committee into Wage Theft in the State that revealed wage theft to be pervasive across South Australia, especially among workers in non-union, casualised, and insecure work (Parliament of South Australia, 2021).

There is a well-established link between economic insecurity and negative physical and mental health outcomes that ranges from obesity and changes to individual personality traits to poor living conditions (J. Benach et al., 2014; J Benach, Vives, Tarafa, Delclos, & Muntaner, 2016; Benavides, Benach, Diez-Roux, & Roman, 2000; OECD, 2015; Rohde, Tang, & Osberg, 2017). There is also evidence that low pay and economic insecurity can have scarring effects on future earnings and opportunities (H. Cuervo & Chesters, 2019; Hernan Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Mavromaras et al., 2015; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). There is comparatively limited research that explores the consequences of fluctuating income, especially over extended periods of time (Kreshpaj et al., 2020, p. 88). The qualitative and longitudinal design ensures this thesis adds to the literature on the experience of economic insecurity and fluctuating income.

3.5.3 Working-time in/security

Working-time in/security is related to, but distinct from, employment in/security. It refers to access to adequate hours of work; control over hours worked; and predictability and consistency of working hours over time; the greater the fluctuation in working-time the more precarious the work is likely to be (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Pocock et al., 2004; Schneider & Harknett, 2019; Skinner, Cathcart, & Pocock, 2016). It also includes short notice of rostered work hours, irregular schedules and hours, cancelled shifts and on-call shifts (P. Bohle, 2016; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Schneider & Harknett, 2019). In Australia, working-time insecurity is a central feature of casual work, and data from the ABS shows casual workers are much less likely than permanent workers to work the same hours and days week to week (Campbell & Burgess, 2018, p. 53). Working-time can shape health

and well-being through the impact has on health-related behaviours including diet, exercise, and sleep *and* the impact it can have on one's sense of control and ability to plan, socialise, and perform caring roles (Schneider & Harknett, 2019).

Working-time insecurity is distinct from working-time flexibility largely through the determination of whether it is employee-orientated or employer-orientated flexibility, essentially, who has control over changing hours (Campbell, 2017). Employee-orientated working-time flexibility is often considered an attractive component of work and actively pursued by workers for whom rigid and traditional working hours are undesirable (Campbell, 2017). While employer-orientated flexibility can manifest as extreme working-time insecurity. Campbell (2017, p. 113) outlines an analytical framework for understanding working-time arrangements that takes account of what he calls duration (usual number of hours) and position (distribution of hours over the week) of working time, acknowledging that the impact varies based on degree of worker control. Both of these components have been incorporated into this thesis' framework for precarious work.

Working-time in/security is shaped by regulations for minimum and maximum hours of work. In Australia, working-time insecurity is ingrained in casual employment arrangements because there is no regulatory obligation for employers to provide regular, consistent or ongoing hours of work, and shifts can be as short as 3 hours in length (Markey & McIvor, 2018; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). Although part-time workers are protected by a minimum number of working hours they can still experience working-time insecurity in the form of on-call work where employees' hours and shifts may increase with demand, at the discretion of the employer (Campbell & Burgess, 2018, p. 57).

Analysis of the impact of precarious employment on young people who have grown up with precarious work found that difficulties balancing commitments led to a fragmentation of social time with significant others; that fluctuating rosters inhibit the maintenance of healthy and committed social relationships; and that working irregular and changeable hours makes it difficult to synchronise leisure time (Cai, 2014; Hernan Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Woodman, 2012). It has also been shown to delay major life events for workers including buying a home, relationship formation, marriage, and parenthood (Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005; H. Cuervo & Chesters, 2019; McVicar, Wooden, Lass, & Fok, 2019).

Although working-time is intrinsically linked to income for many precarious workers who are paid by the hour, the Shift Project surveyed 27,792 retail and hospitality workers in the United States about their work schedules and found that unstable and unpredictable work schedules have '*substantively larger negative associations with psychological distress, sleep quality and happiness*' than wages do (Schneider & Harknett, 2019, p. 25). Little advanced notice of shifts, changes to shifts, and on-call shifts were shown to cause workers considerable work-life conflict between personal responsibilities and work demands which, in turn, decreases well-being (Schneider & Harknett, 2019). This important finding supports the need for a multi-dimensional understanding of precarious work because it shows the temporal dimension of precarious work is a core part of the *experience* of it and that economic insecurity is not the only cause of workers' ill-health and stress (Schneider & Harknett, 2019).

3.5.4 Access to rights and entitlements

As discussed earlier in this thesis, workers' rights and entitlements, specifically social benefits and employment conditions, are difficult to compare between countries because of the differing ways social security is, or is not, tied to employment (Kreshpaj et al., 2020; OECD, 2015). For these reasons, given this thesis is concerned with the Australian employment landscape, this section will focus primarily on Australian employment arrangements.

The National Employment Standards (NES) set out in the Fair Work Act 2009 guarantee eleven minimum entitlements, out of a possible fourteen, for standard employees in Australia (Australian Government, 2021). The entitlements are: maximum weekly hours, requests for flexible working arrangements, offers and requests to convert from casual to permanent employment, parental leave and related entitlements, annual leave, personal/carer's leave, compassionate leave and unpaid family and domestic violence leave, community service leave, long service leave, public holidays, notice of termination and redundancy pay, and the provision of the Fair Work and Casual Information Sheets (Australian Government, 2021). Eligibility for each entitlement is governed by a wide variety of variables including: a combination of State and Federal law, contract type, age and ability, and time spent working with a single employer. A summary of Australian employment entitlements and eligibility criteria is available in Appendix A.

Although the NES is said to apply to all employees covered by the national workplace relations system 'regardless of any award, agreement or contract' casual, seasonal, and temporary workers

have a considerably reduced set of entitlements. Seasonal and temporary employees are only entitled to a fraction of the entitlements of standard employees. Specifically, Australian casual employees are entitled to: offers and requests to convert from casual to permanent employment; *unpaid* carer's leave; *unpaid* compassionate leave; *unpaid* family and domestic violence leave; and *unpaid* community service leave (Australian Government, 2021). As such, not only do casual employees have considerably reduced entitlements, many of the entitlements they do have are unpaid. The normalisation of casual work has also been linked to an erosion of the entitlements designed to compensate individuals required to work unsociable hours (Burgess et al., 2008, p. 162).

According to Hahn et al (2021), the core rights and entitlements of concern in Australia are: minimum periods of notice of termination, severance pay, and access to paid annual and sick leave and public holidays. In general, access to rights and entitlements are regulated through contract type with some contracts being more secure than others (Campbell & Burgess, 2018). As such the next sections provides a brief overview of the key contract types in Australia.

3.5.4.1 ***Casual contracts***

In Australia, the majority (but not all) of non-standard, precarious workers are employed on casual contracts (Barnes, 2021; Hahn et al., 2021; Wooden, 2001). This idiosyncratic use of casual contracts in Australia has led to a situation where although internationally 'casualisation' tends to refer to the spread of poor working conditions (including employment insecurity, low wages, and irregular hours), Australian casuals are a definitionally distinct group and so, in the Australian literature, 'casualisation' tends to refer to the growth of casual contracts (Burgess et al., 2008, p. 163).

The literature shows that casual work in Australia is decidedly precarious. The OECD (2015) and the Australian Productivity Commission (2006) have both categorised it as non-standard work, and until very recently (March 2021), it was literally defined by the absence of paid leave entitlements in Australian law (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021d; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Hahn et al., 2021; Markey & McIvor, 2018; Tweedie, 2013). In March of 2021, the Australian Parliament passed the *Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2021* which, for the first time, added a formal definition of casual work to the Fair Work Act. The newly legislated definition says that a worker is a casual employee if: the offer of employment is made and accepted on the basis of 'no firm advance commitment to continuing and indefinite work'; that the

employment is described as casual work; and that the worker is entitled to casual loading (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021).

And, in contrast to other advanced economies, Australian casual contracts are not limited by duration or industry, compared to much of Europe, for example, where similar arrangements are restricted to short-term and classically seasonal work (Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017; Tweedie, 2013; Wooden, 2001). This has led to a situation where the rate of casual employment in Australia now outstrips most Western economies (Burgess et al., 2008; Campbell, 2021; Laß & Wooden, 2020).

For casual workers, all four elements of precarious employment are always present. In addition to the absence of paid entitlements, employment insecurity is ingrained in the casual employment relationship because there are no minimum hourly requirements and the employment agreement can be terminated at any time; consequently, casuals are always at risk of losing both their job and hours of work (Barnes, 2021; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). Working-time insecurity is similarly ingrained, as outlined in section 3.4.2 (Markey & McIvor, 2018; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). As such, work can fluctuate considerably over time. This unpredictability, not knowing if working hours will remain consistent, or if contracts will be renewed, is a defining stressor of casual work (Kreshpaj et al., 2020). And because casual workers are hourly workers (rather than wage workers), the presence of working-time insecurity feeds economic insecurity both through fluctuating and unpredictable income and because Australian casuals are some of the lowest-paid workers in the country (Carney & Stanford, 2018; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017; OECD, 2015; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021).

In compensation for relinquishing 'standard' rights and entitlements, Australian casuals are paid a wage loading, the rate of which is regulated by the Australian award system—typically 25% in 2021 (Burgess et al., 2008; Hahn et al., 2021; Markey & McIvor, 2018; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). The awards system, intended as a means for enforcing minimum employment standards, now covers 22.5% of non-managerial employees (24.6% of the private sector and 14.0% of the public sector) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Carney & Stanford, 2018). Employees paid by award wages, not all of whom are casual, have the lowest hourly and weekly cash earnings and worked the lowest average hours per week (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). And analysis from the Centre for Future Work shows that, even with casual loading, casual employees are some of the lowest-paid workers in the country, followed closely by part-time self-employed workers without employees

(Carney & Stanford, 2018, p. 14). This is compounded by the prevalence of wage theft through the under- or non- payment of casual loading (Cavanough & Blain, 2019; Pocock et al., 2004). In addition, Mooi-Reci and Wooden (2017) analysed 11 years of the annual wage observations of 8,187 Australian workers and found that, even when workers do receive their full wage, periods of casual work have scarring effects on their overall income, over time, a phenomenon they call a 'wage penalty'. They found it varied by age and gender, in that the wage penalty for women was less than half that of men and that men who entered casual employment during their prime working years (over 35) and beyond were likely to experience a wider and more persistent wage gap (2017, p. 1086). This supports international research from the UK (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2002) and Canada (Fuller & Stecy-Hildebrandt, 2014) that shows, over time, men with a history of permanent employment have a higher wage than their casual counterparts (Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017, p. 1087). The differences in gender and age outcomes are attributed to the normalisation of casual work among younger and women workers, which means they are not as likely to be socially penalised as prime-age men who are perceived as 'deficient'(Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). This is important for two reasons first, it shows periods of casual employment can negatively impact workers long into the future and second, it undermines the idea that casual work can act as a stepping-stone to more secure work. Both of which are central to this thesis given former automotive workers are more likely to be older and male.

Although casual contracts are undoubtedly precarious due to the lack of access to paid leave entitlements and their ingrained employment, income and working-time insecurity the relationship between employer- and employee- choice and flexibility is complicated. The growth of casual contracts has been attributed to: shifts in the structure of labour demand to industries that rely on short-term, on-call and seasonal workers; worker preferences for greater employment flexibility and a greater share of workers who desire that (put simply: more women in the workforce); changes to the regulatory regime that incentivise casual employment growth; and changes in employer's labour use practices (Burgess et al., 2008, p. 167; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). So while employers have sought out casual contracts as a means of coping with fluctuating business demand fuelled by economic uncertainty, research shows that casual work—like other forms of precarious work—provide workers with a desirable flexibility not provided by the standard employment relationship (Hahn et al., 2021; Laß & Wooden, 2020; Standing, 2011).

Analysis of HILDA survey data disputes the portrayal of casual work as particularly egregious, arguing that casual workers in Australia are no more likely than other types of workers to report feeling insecure in their jobs (Wooden, 2001). Others point to employee satisfaction to argue that casual work is acceptable because casual workers are comparatively satisfied with their contract type (Wooden, 2001; Wooden & Warren, 2004). Similarly, at the outset of *The Precariat,* Standing argues that although there is significant vulnerability in precarity there is also liberation (Standing, 2011: vii), that non-standard employment forms emerged, in part, from workers' desire to do something different from what was offered by twentieth-century industrial society (Standing, 2011: vii). Standing refers to this as the tension between precarious workers as 'victims' of economic deregulation and precarious workers as 'heroes' rejecting the status quo in favour of 'greater intellectual and spiritual satisfaction' (Standing, 2011, p. 2). Similarly, the rise of non-standard forms of work (including but not limited to casual contracts) is an inherently gendered issue and is closely linked to women entering the workforce in the 1950s and the resultant de-standardisation of working hours (Leah F. Vosko, 2007). Casual and other forms of non-standard work are often preferable for those workers who also have significant reproductive responsibilities.

However, as discussed earlier, casual workers in Australia are objectively more insecure because they can be dismissed without notice and without legal recourse (Watson, 2013). To some extent, the subjective feelings of precarious workers about their insecurity is, while interesting, irrelevant, especially so in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, where casual workers accounted for two thirds of people who lost a job early in the pandemic (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). It is an objectively precarious job type, even if during 'ordinary times' workers self-report feeling secure in their work. This is doubly so for the 'permanent casual', workers who are employed on a casual basis over long periods of time, often years (Pocock et al., 2004). And is supported by Kreshpaj et al., who argue that, to date, there has been a lopsided focus on the literature on precarious employment, on contract type at the expense of the other dimensions of precarity (2020, p. 88). They call for more attention be paid to the duration of the contract into the future, from the point of inquiry, rather than looking at tenure—they call this contract renewal unpredictability (2020, p. 88). This concept is particularly pertinent in Australia because casual workers' tenure with a company is not accompanied by any obligation to ongoing employment.

3.5.4.2 ***Part-time contracts***

The two main sources of longitudinal labour market data in Australia, the Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), both define part-time work by time—specifically by less than 35 hours of work—rather than contract type. This means that in both cases data accumulated about part-time workers in Australia includes a range of employment types ranging from casual to permanent part-time workers. In order to avoid repetition, this section will look specifically at the literature regarding part-time work with leave entitlements.

In contrast to casual work, permanent part-time work is decidedly more secure. In Australia, permanent-part time workers have more rights and entitlements than their casual counterparts including pro-rata entitlements, similar to that of full-time employees (Campbell & Burgess, 2018). Although they can still experience working-time insecurity and economic insecurity. Working-time insecurity in the form of on-call work where employees hours and shifts may increase with demand, at the discretion of the employer (Campbell & Burgess, 2018, p. 57). Part-time workers who would prefer to be working more or full-time hours may also experience economic insecurity as a result of insufficient or changeable income (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Leah F. Vosko, 2007).

Part-time work can be secure and desirable work. It becomes precarious when it is involuntary because workers would prefer to be working full-time hours. Consequently high rates of part-time and casual work can conceal the extent of un- and under- employment (Standing, 2011, p. 15). I

3.5.4.3 ***Fixed-term contracts and labour-hire***

Fixed-term contract and labour-hire contracts account for about 37% of the Australian workforce and are considerably precarious work-types (Markey & McIvor, 2018). Fixed-term contracts are, somewhat tautologically, employment contracts that have a fixed end date; they can be casual or full-time contracts (Wilkins, Botha, Vera-Toscano, & Wooden, 2020). The Australian union movement argue that the overuse of recurrent short-term contracts is deployed as a way to avoid the accumulation of entitlements associated with standard work, including severance pay (Australian Unions, 2020).

Labour-hire or temporary agency work are sometimes referred to as 'triangular relationships' because of the addition of a labour-hire agency (employer) as an intermediary between the

workplace or 'lead employer' and the worker (Campbell, 2021; Stanford, Hardy, & Stewart, 2018). Labour hire arrangements have attracted some concern in the precarious work literature for a number of reasons (Campbell, 2021; A. Knox, 2018; Stanford et al., 2018). The most recent data shows that 3% of Australian workers are registered with a labour-hire firm and most labour-hire contracts (80%) are casual contracts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021f; Campbell, 2021). As such, many of the concerns over casual work outlined in section 3.4.4.1 apply.

Others have raised concerns that labour-hire agreements (in addition to subcontracting, franchising and outsourcing) have contributed to a fracturing of Australian workplaces (Bornstein, 2018; Hardy & Stewart, 2018). This is not to imply that labour-hire contracts are necessarily exploitative; these business structures are and can be used for legitimate reasons (Hardy & Stewart, 2018). But that they contribute to a splintering of the relationship between the 'lead employer' and the worker and enable companies to distance themselves from the reality of the work (Hardy & Stewart, 2018). This splintering enables the 'lead employer' to relinquish legal responsibilities associated with direct employment; the dispersion of workers across organisations also impedes collective organising and bargaining efforts and limits the scope of agreements (Hardy & Stewart, 2018). Bornstein (2018) draws on evidence from recent legal cases to argue that labour-hire contracts can lead to fractured workplaces when a worksite has both labour-hire and 'lead company' employees working alongside each other for extended periods of time, where one group (the labour-hire workers) are not 'treated as employees' and receive fewer wages and entitlements than their permanent counterparts.

Over time, the competition between labour-hire companies for contracts from large employers has also put downward pressure on the overall remuneration offered to workers, sometimes by breaching the Fair Work Act and underpaying workers (Bornstein, 2018, p. 163; Hardy & Stewart, 2018; Stanford et al., 2018). In the worst-case scenarios, labour-hire workers are being deliberately used by unscrupulous employers as a way of limiting the opportunity for workplace bargaining and bypassing wages and conditions mandated by union-led collective agreements and award rates (Hall, 2006; F. Macdonald & Pegg, 2018; Stanford et al., 2018).

In addition to the employment insecurity and work-time insecurity inherent in fixed-term and labour-hire contracts, research suggests that temporary and labour-hire workers receive less safety supervision and safety training than their permanent counterparts (Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001, p. 831). And a lack of oversight or communication between the labour-hire agency and the workplace can inhibit the safety management of labour-hire workers and contribute to the higher rates of work

health and safety injuries (Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001, p. 831). However, comparative analysis conducted by Campbell (2021, p. 11) shows that labour-hire workers tend to be full-time workers who are placed in contracts for more than three months at a time, and proposes these workers are most likely back-filling permanent full-time employees. This suggests that in the short-term labour-hire work may be more consistent and therefore secure than other forms of precarious work but that it is unlikely to lead to full-time employment with the main company in the long term.

3.5.4.4 ***Sole contractors and gig workers***

Self-employment is not inherently precarious, and not all sole contractors are precarious workers. The perceived freedom and control associated with self-employment and the opportunity to 'be your own boss' has been established as an justifiably attractive alternative to the standard employment relationship for some workers (Alberti et al., 2018; Choi, 2018). However, the growth of what Williams (2019) calls dependent self-employment (also known as marginalised self-employment or gig work) is widely perceived as a rapidly growing form of precarious work internationally and in Australia (Abraham et al., 2021; Hafeez, Gupta, & Sprajcer, 2022). In Australia, this form of self-employment is arguably the most precarious work type. Although it makes up a smaller share of the labour force than casual work, the proportion of sole-contractors without employees is growing rapidly. Non-employing sole-contractors lack access to minimum wage provisions and are required to take on the administrative work and costs of their own employment, including their own workers' compensation insurance and superannuation (Hafeez et al., 2022; Markey & McIvor, 2018). It is often conducted by marginalised lower-skilled workers subcontracted by large corporations and used as a last-resort for workers who are unable to find work elsewhere (Williams, 2019).

There is a growing body of grey literature that is concerned about an especially precarious situation called 'bogus' or 'sham' contracting, whereby positions are deliberately mischaracterised as self-employment by employers in order to avoid the administrative and financial responsibilities of the standard employment relationship (Carney & Stanford, 2018). This type of 'sham' contracting is of interest to the Australian Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) as they argue, this type of work is prevalent in the construction industry (Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, 2011, 2018).

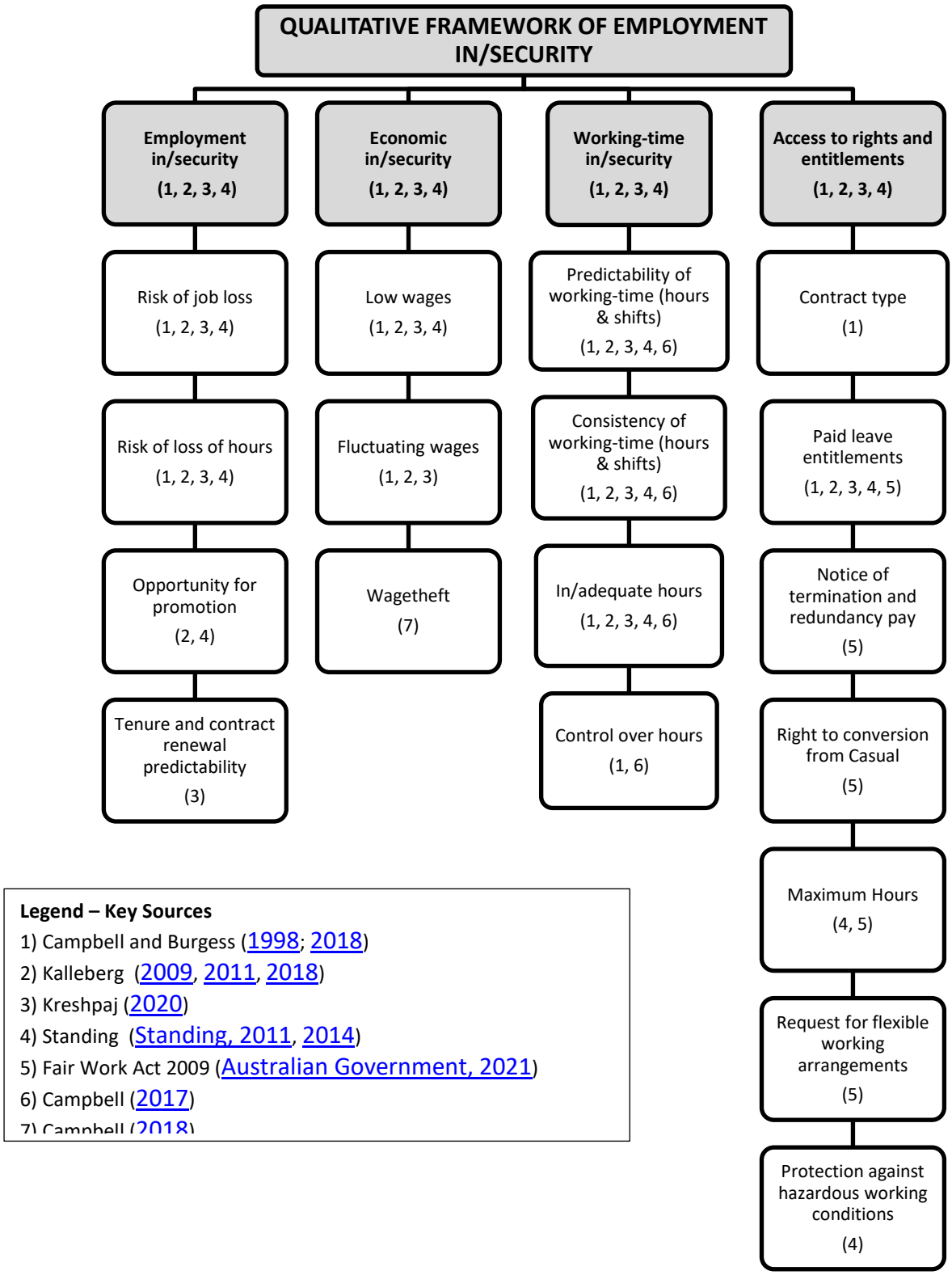
Further, precarious employment literature is increasingly concerned with the expansion of the 'gig economy' (Hafeez et al., 2022; McDonald, Williams, Stewart, Mayes, & Oliver, 2019; Stanford, 2017b). Currently the 'gig economy' is most closely associated with technology-facilitated digital transport and delivery platforms like Uber and Deliveroo; however, critics of the gig economy are concerned that, without government intervention, this framework might leak into traditionally standardised sectors including manufacturing (Dean & Spoehr, 2018; Stanford, 2017b; Vallas, Schor, Vallas, & Schor, 2020). It is highly precarious; often incredibly uncertain, unpredictable and atomised work that reduces jobs to tasks (Hafeez et al., 2022). However, the 'triadic nature' of gig work has made it difficult to classify and regulate because of the relationship between the worker, the platform and the 'client' (McDonald, Williams, Stewart, Oliver, & Mayes, 2019). In this way, it erodes the standard employment relationship by making workers 'sole-contractors' instead of 'employees' (Stanford, 2017b). In doing so, it is simultaneously shifting the risk, administrative work, and training costs and responsibilities of employment from the 'employer' to the 'employee'—roles many workers are unlikely to have much, if any, experience with (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018; Gandini, 2019; Hafeez et al., 2022; Morgan, Wood, & Nelligan, 2013). This leaves workers in legally precarious positions where they fall between gaps in employment legislation; further exacerbated by geographic diffusion making it difficult for them to organise collectively (Stanford, 2017b; Valenduc & Vendramin, 2016).

3.5.5 Qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security

Because precarious work is defined in relation to standard employment, it is defined by absence—by the absence of stability, of rights, and of income. This absence fuels both temporal and income insecurity (Banks & Bowman, 2020). The four objective components of precarious work outlined above provide a useful framework for gauging employment security. This framework enables a more nuanced understanding of precarious work beyond the traditional comparison to standard employment alone.

Figure 6 draws on the extant literature discussed to devise an operationalizable Qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security based on the four reoccurring components across the literature: employment in/security; working-time in/security; economic in/security and access to rights and entitlements.

Figure 6: Qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security [2]



[2] The literature tends to discuss workers' access to rights and entitlements without being specific about the rights and entitlements, likely in an attempt to maintain international relevance given the access to rights and entitlements can vary significantly across regulatory borders. As such, this thesis draws specifically on the Australian entitlements as determined by the Fair Work Act 2009.

They are not, however, the only components of precarious work. The following section will review the literature concerning the role of some of the more subjective elements of precarious work.

3.6 Subjective components of precarious work

In addition to the objective components outlined earlier in this chapter, job quality, status discord, and skill utilisation are reoccurring subjective elements of precarious work. The literature on job quality seeks to expand the discussion from the objective components to include job satisfaction, job control, and relationships with co-workers (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Marilyn Clarke, 2015). Job quality research seeks to determine what makes a 'good' and a 'bad' job in the sense that work can either contribute to, or detract from, workers' holistic wellbeing (Marilyn Clarke, 2015; Green, 2006).

There is a complicated, almost tautological relationship between the concepts of job quality and precarious work, in that many of the elements of precarious work are also negative indicators of job quality (Holman & McClelland, 2011). Low job quality is both seen as a feature and consequence of precarious work; however, the concept is complicated by the fact that not all low-quality jobs are precarious (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020). It is possible, though increasingly rare, to be securely employed in what could be considered a low-quality job.

Status discord, defined by Standing (2011) as the experience of workers with relatively high standards or formal education being forced to accept jobs they consider beneath them, is similarly subjective and, likewise, difficult to incorporate into a framework of precarity. It is related to skill utilisation (what Standing calls skill reproduction security) in that low-quality work has limited opportunities to gain skills through employment training opportunities and then, in turn, make use of those skills (Standing, 2011, p. 10). Analysis using the Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) data found scarring effects for workers doing work they were over-qualified for (Mavromaras et al., 2015). It showed overqualified workers were more likely to experience unemployment than well-matched employees, regardless of gender and education status (Mavromaras et al., 2015). Skill underutilisation is also linked to lower job satisfaction which, in turn, is linked to higher rates of absenteeism and higher rates of workplace accidents and injuries (Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001, p. 831).

Another subjective element of precarious work and job quality is related to agency and autonomy. Precarious employment arrangements and low-quality work can also be identified through the restriction of worker agency, often taking the form of reduced control over many of the indicators discussed in the earlier sections of this thesis including job type, task variation and shift length and frequency (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Standing, 2011, p. 16).

These elements are shown to be important to workers' experiences of precarious work however these subjective elements *alone* cannot be used to define work as precarious. For the simple reason that it is possible to be in full-time standard employment that is, for whatever reason, considered by the worker to be low-quality work either as a result of status discord or limited autonomy (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Angela Knox, Warhurst, & Pocock, 2011).

3.7 Isn't workplace flexibility a good thing?

The growth of precarious work in Australia has been, in part, attributed to shifts in the structure of labour demand to service industries that have become reliant on a flexible workforce through short-term, on-call and seasonal workers *and* to workers' preferences for greater employment flexibility (Burgess et al., 2008, p. 167; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). As such, there are elements of precarious work that are attractive to both employers and employees, chief among them is a preference for greater flexibility. Workplace flexibility is desirable for employers as a means of coping with fluctuating business demand and for workers seeking an increased work-life balance (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Kreshpaj et al., 2020; Sullivan, Goods, & Smith, 2021). However, there is a fundamental conflict between the reality of how workplace flexibility has manifested for employers and employees, and this has led to what Sullivan et al. (2020) call a 'nebulous understanding' of the relationship between flexibility and security.

Research shows that precarious work provides workers with desirable flexibility not provided by the standard employment relationship (Hahn et al., 2021; Laß & Wooden, 2020; Standing, 2011). Campbell (2017) found that employee-orientated working-time flexibility is often considered an attractive component of work and actively pursued by workers for whom rigid and traditional working hours are undesirable. Essentially, the complex allure of precarious work for some workers is that it is often the only work available that caters to workers who cannot (or do not want to) work standard hours. This has led to a conflation of the concepts of flexibility and insecurity.

In the European Union, this gave rise to the term 'flexisecurity' as a way of resolving this tension, to some extent (Antonio Ojeda & Miguel Gutierrez, 2014). In response, Australian scholars have been calling for a preference for flexible work arrangements to be separated from precarious employment (Philip Bohle et al., 2017; Burgess et al., 2008; Campbell, 2017). Campbell (2017) argues that (as with working-time flexibility) it is important to identify the balance and direction between employer- and employee-orientated flexibility because employer-orientated flexibility can manifest as extreme working-time insecurity for employees. He (2017, p. 113) outlines an analytical framework for understanding working-time arrangements that takes account of what he calls duration (usual number of hours) and position (distribution of hours over the week) of working time, acknowledging that the impact varies based on the degree of worker control. Both components have been incorporated into this thesis' qualitative framework of precarious work, with the intention that this longitudinal study will provide insight into workers' choice-making regarding precarious work.

There is also a growing body of research that challenges the accepted wisdom of the business case for precarious work (Blom, Richter, Hallsten, & Svedberg, 2018; Fisher & Connelly, 2017; Wiengarten, Pagell, Durach, Humphreys, & Durach, 2021). Wiengarten et al. (2021) analysed survey data from the United Kingdom and found that although low levels of precarious work improve flexibility and financial performance high levels of precarious work were detrimental to both. Research from the Dutch workforce conducted by van Vuuren (2020) found a small but meaningful relationship between job insecurity and job performance for most precarious workers. Fisher and Connelly (2017) conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the use of precarious work types in American organisations and found that lower performance and higher turnover meant the use of temporary agency workers tended to be more costly than permanent employees. A psychological study conducted by Blom et al. (2018) investigating the relationship between insecure work, burnout and performance found that job insecurity is positively related to burnout which is, in turn, related to poor performance due to poor mental health and sickness absence, and used it to argue that organisations should work to actively prevent job insecurity as a means of reducing mental ill-health in the workplace. This is supported by earlier research that argues precarity brought on by workplace flexibility necessarily harms organisational performance as a result of inhibiting individual job performance (Benavides et al., 2000; Quinlan, Mayhew, & Bohle, 2001).

3.8 Critiquing the concept

The concept of precarious work has garnered criticism. These criticisms have been largely directed at Standing's (2011, 2014) now familiar theory that that the growth of precarious work is leading to the creation of a new 'emergent' class he labelled 'the precariat' (Breman, 2013; della Porta et al., 2015; Jørgensen, 2016; Manolchev, Saundry, & Lewis, 2021; Munck, 2013; Wright, 2016). Standing posited that the growth of precarious work was leading to the emergence of a distinctive socio-economic group, a position that has since been adopted by a range of researchers (Campbell & Price, 2016; Jakonen, 2015; Melin & Blom, 2015; Savage et al., 2013).

Critiques of Standing's 'class in the making' theory largely fall into two broad categories; that precarious workers are not a homogenous enough group to constitute a class (Breman, 2013) and that depicting 'the precariat' as a global phenomenon fails to account for the fact that for most people, globally and historically, precarious work has been the norm (Breman, 2013; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). Researchers have critiqued global generalisations about the overarching shape and trajectory of labour force changes that fail to acknowledge non-standard or informal work has always made up the majority of the global labour force (Breman, 2013; International Labour Organisation, 2018; Munck, 2013).

Generalisations also fail to recognise the relationship between imperialism and precarity in that the advanced economies that have experienced a period of relatively widespread employment security are also major imperialist powers; and that there is a direct relationship between employment security experienced in advanced economies and the exploitation and oppression in the 'peripheral zones' of the global workforce (Breman, 2013). Alberti et al. (2018) have furthered the criticism by arguing that trying to incorporate the wide variety of work types and social strata into a single class (or class in the making) over-stretches and diminishes its explanatory power. They also argue that reliance on the explanatory powers of Standing's 'precariat' corrodes the complex relationship between work, capital, and class and fails to account for the fact that 'the precariat'—if they exist at all—are not the only victims of increasing precariousness in work and, in doing so, risks removing the potential agency of workers from class struggle by rendering them victims (Alberti et al., 2018, p. 450).

These criticisms of a singular global narrative of precarity are compelling and necessary. This thesis has responded to these criticisms by first ensuring it is focused on precarious work and the conceptualisation of precarity as 'present in all forms of work' as distinct from the theory of 'the precariat' as a more useful and persuasive way to understand the varying shape and impact of precariousness across regulatory borders (Alberti et al., 2018; Campbell & Burgess, 2018). Second, by avoiding global generalisations by studying the experience of precarious work in Australia. This thesis is concerned with the growth of precarious employment in Australia and the impact it has on workers following large scale job loss and industry closure, while many of the outcomes of this research will be broadly applicable this is not a one size fits all thesis.

3.9 Health impacts of precarious work

Precarious employment, much like factory and industry closure, has been clearly linked with an increase in rates of poor individual and community physical, psychosocial, and mental health outcomes (Bardasi & Francesconi, 2004; Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Marlea Clarke et al., 2007; Grzywacz & Dooley, 2003; Keuskamp, Ziersch, Baum, & LaMontagne, 2014; Kim, Kim, Park, & Kawachi, 2008; McNamara, Bohle, & Quinlan, 2011; Schneider & Harknett, 2019). Precarious work poses such a risk to individual, familial, and community health outcomes that it is now considered a social determinant of health (J. Benach & Muntaner, 2007; J. Benach et al., 2014).

It has been well established that employment insecurity, and specifically the fear of the loss of work, including the loss of financial and psychosocial resources (income and the work itself) can elicit strong negative emotional and physical responses including anxiety; depression; burnout; emotional exhaustion; elevated heart rate; and increased catecholamine secretion (produced by adrenal glands as a reaction to stress) (C. Lee et al., 2018; Olding, Barker, McNeil, & Boyd, 2021, p. 33; Wu et al., 2020). In fact, a study of middle-aged Australians found that, in some cases, poor quality work has more negative health effects than unemployment (Broom et al., 2006).

The next two sections review and analyse the public health, psychological and sociological literature on the physical and mental health impacts of precarious employment. They draw on research that uses a multidimensional definition of precarious work (Chandola & Zhang, 2018), as well as research that examines the impacts of components of precarious work including contract type (Keuskamp et al., 2014), work-time instability (Schneider & Harknett, 2019) and low pay.

3.9.1 Physical health impacts of precarious employment

Research has consistently demonstrated that precarious work has detrimental physical health outcomes (Chandola & Zhang, 2018; Keuskamp et al., 2014; C. Lee et al., 2018; McNamara et al., 2011; Schneider & Harknett, 2019). The research examining the physical health impacts of precarious work can be broadly divided into two categories: a disparity in work, health, and safety injuries, between standard and non-standard workers, and illness caused by stress.

Keuskamp et al. (2014) conducted a study of Australian workers and found a strong association between what they call full-time casual employment (workers on casual contracts working full-time hours) and poor physical health outcomes. They attributed this to the documented higher rates of workplace health and safety injuries among precarious employees (LaMontagne et al., 2014; Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001; Quinlan et al., 2001; Marianna Virtanen et al., 2005). This research is supported by data from Safe Work Australia, the government statutory body established tasked with developing national policy relating to work health and safety matters, that showed higher rates of workplace injuries among precarious workers compared to permanent workers (Safe Work Australia, 2012, p. 3) and Victorian research that found casual full-time workers had the worst manual hazard exposure profile of any work-type (LaMontagne et al., 2012).

Similar findings were evident in an American study that found that 'leased' contingent workers (similar to labour-hire workers in Australia) were associated with more negative work health and safety outcomes than secure work in a similar field with a similar demographic profile (Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001). Park and Butler ascribed this finding to two issues related to precarity: that precarious workers may work in more hazardous environments with increased rates of manual labour and that temporary or labour-hire workers receive less safety supervision and safety training than their permanent counterparts (Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001, p. 831). And that for sub-contracted or temporary agency workers a lack of oversight or communication between the direct employer and the work site can inhibit their safety management (Y.-S. Park & Butler, 2001, p. 831).

Regarding stress, extended periods of precarious work have also been shown to create a chronically stressful situation, one of the leading causes of ill health and poor well-being for workers and their families (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; C. Lee et al., 2018). A meta-analysis conducted by Virtanen (2013) of more than 170,000 participants found a modest association between job insecurity and

coronary heart disease. Reynolds et al. (2018) also found an association between working long hours (more than 38 hours a week) and increased cardiometabolic risk in young people, highlighting the importance of working-time as a component of job security.

3.9.2 Mental health impacts of precarious employment

The literature also shows that precarious work has a negative impact on mental health outcomes, so much so that its growth is recognised as a key psychological risk in the future of work literature (De Cuyper, De Witte, & Hetty Van, 2011; Hünefeld & Köper, 2016; C. Lee et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2020).

Job insecurity has been consistently causatively linked with poor mental health and psychological well-being, and recent research from Sweden (Blom et al., 2018) has also found a significant link with both burnout and depressive symptoms (De witte, Pienaar, & De cuyper, 2016; Ronnblad et al., 2019). Chronic job insecurity has been shown to have more severe health outcomes than an individual instance of insecure work. Wu et al. (2020) analysed HILDA data over a 9-year time frame and found that chronic job insecurity can change individuals' personalities making people less agreeable and conscientious to the point of neuroticism (Wu et al., 2020). Their study reveals chronic employment insecurity disrupts the development of social maturity, with substantial impacts on success, health and maturity (Wu et al., 2020). They found that both objective and subjective perceptions of employment insecurity are detrimental to mental health outcomes (Wu et al., 2020). They use this significant finding to argue that the macroeconomic change in the structure of the labour force can, and has, impacted individual lifespan development (Wu et al., 2020, p. 22). The impact of psychological stress caused by precarious work has also been linked to an increased risk of postpartum depression (Karl et al., 2020).

This recent research provides contemporary psychological support for earlier sociological work on the topic, including Bourdieu's assertion that high rates of un- and under-employment leave workers 'permanently haunted by the spectre of joblessness' (Beck, 1992; Bourdieu, 1998, p. 83). They demonstrate that when the stress of precarious work becomes consuming it makes people less likely to engage in 'pro-social' behaviours which, in turn, is likely to increase workplace isolation and, potentially, further employment insecurity as they lose support within an organisation (Wu et al., 2020). This mirrors what Bourdieu (1998, p. pp 84) called the 'struggle of all against all' and

Standing (2011) the 'erosion of fraternity'. Precarious employment can create a negatively reinforcing cycle as workers become less willing to think about, or work with, others (Wu et al., 2020). The complicated impact of this erosion of fraternity, or workplace solidarity, leads workers to see themselves as always in competition with their peers which, in turn, undermines workplace voice, and collective organising and further tips the balance of power in favour of the employer and fosters an environment susceptible to increased precarious work (Bourdieu, 1998; Standing, 2011; Wu et al., 2020).

Recent research from Schneider (2019) has drawn attention to the temporal impact of precarious work, finding that work-time insecurity is more strongly associated with psychological distress, poor sleep quality, and unhappiness than low wages. Longitudinal analysis of young Australian workers over a 20 year period found a consistent pattern of decline in mental health, especially among low and middle income groups related to the struggles of juggling paid work and study and financial difficulties (Hernan Cuervo & Wyn, 2016).

The spread of precarious work in Australia means that it encapsulates a broad (and growing) spectrum of workers and work types; as such, there is a need for a greater understanding of the way workers' physical and mental health is differently impacted (Campbell & Burgess, 2018). For example, research conducted by Bhattacharya et al. (2021, p. 317) found job satisfaction to be a mediating factor against some of the negative impacts of precariousness and stress. Similarly, a recent study from Hahn et al. (2021) that used longitudinal HILDA data found 'no evidence that casual work is detrimental to self-assessed worker health', a finding they attributed to the difference between involuntary and voluntary precarious employment. Similarly, in their systematic literature review, Ronnblad et al. (2019) note that much of the research into the mental health impacts of precarious work relies on single variable definitions of precarious work (most often job insecurity and temporary employment). Given the complexity of factors at play, greater qualitative research deploying a multi-dimensional definition of precarious work is needed to understand the impact precarious work has on workers.

3.10 Vulnerability, intersectionality and precarious work

Precarious employment is not distributed evenly across the workforce, and some people are more likely to be employed precariously and be more vulnerable to its negative impacts than others (Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Kalleberg, 2009, p. 10; 2021). Vulnerable workers tend to be people who are otherwise pushed to the social margins and include migrant and minority workers; young workers and much older workers; people from low socio-economic backgrounds; people with limited formal education; and women (Albelda, Bell-Pasht, & Konstantinidis, 2020; Kate Daisy Bone, 2019; Hernan Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Fiorito, Gallagher, Russell, & Thompson, 2021; Kalleberg, 2009, 2020; Landsbergis, Grzywacz, & LaMontagne, 2014). Precarious work frames, and is framed by, a range of social problems, including gender and race disparities, economic injustice, family insecurity, migration, identity politics and political polarisation (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 18). The literature also shows that precarious contracts are more common among workers in lower occupations than higher occupations (Landsbergis et al., 2014).

This next section looks at the differing ways precarious work intersects with worker identity and social location.

3.10.1 Precarious work and gender

The rise of non-standard and precarious work is an inherently gendered issue and is directly related to the de-standardisation of working hours as a result of women entering the workforce in the 1950s (Leah F. Vosko, 2007). As of August 2021, Australian women were more than twice as likely to be working part-time hours than men, with 2.77 million women part-time workers compared to just 1.31 million men (Agarwala & Chun, 2018; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021c). The growth of single-parent and dual-income families also sees many workers who have caring responsibilities, most often women, struggling to juggle paid and unpaid work (Campbell & Burgess, 2018).

That said, at the time of closure, male labour force participation rates had fallen by 10 percent in the three decades preceding, non-voluntary part-time work for men had increased dramatically, and full-employment for men in South Australia was in recession (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018). Low- and medium-skilled male workers are particularly vulnerable as they dominate the bottom ten growth occupations (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018; Moskos, 2012). A

vulnerability to precarious work that is likely to be exacerbated by male workers documented hourly wage stagnation (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018; Carney & Stanford, 2018).

3.10.2 Precarious work and age

Although young people consistently make up the largest share of precarious workers in Australia, there has been a recent increase in precarious work among older workers. Research suggests that precarious work sends different 'social messages' at different life periods; that for younger workers it may signal entrance into the workforce and career opportunities, while at older ages it could be perceived as a 'career failure' (Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017).

In Australia, young people without at least a high school and post-secondary qualification are the most likely to be unemployed or underemployed (Woodman & Wyn, 2013). Young people in Australia have been caught in a 'dramatic contraction of employment opportunities' that makes them more likely to experience 'churning', that is, the moving back and forth between unemployment and short-term employment (Cebulla & Whetton, 2018; R. MacDonald, 2011). Analysis of the impact of precarious employment on young people who have grown up with precarious work has been shown to delay major life events for workers, including buying a home, relationship formation, marriage and parenthood (Blossfeld et al., 2005; H. Cuervo & Chesters, 2019; McVicar et al., 2019). Precarious work impacts young people at a critical time in their lives during their transition to adulthood, and it has been shown that it, in conjunction with changes to education systems, has fundamentally changed the nature of adulthood. (Cai, 2014; H. Cuervo & Chesters, 2019).

Older workers generally, and older male workers specifically, are vulnerable to long-term and cyclical precarious employment (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018; Davies et al., 2017; Mavromaras & Zhu, 2015; Watson, 2013). And research following mass unemployment events indicates that older workers often find themselves working lower-quality jobs (Beer, 2018; Spoehr, 2014) or forced into early retirement (Spoehr et al., 2009). And that they tend to engage in increased consumption of alcohol and hazardous drinking; have greater risk of cardiovascular disease; increased rates of hospitalisation and are more likely to be depressed (Davies et al., 2017), all of which are factors that may be exacerbated by the increased competition caused by industry closure.

3.10.3 Migrant workers

Migrant workers are concentrated in some of the most precarious jobs, in the most precarious industries, as a result of discrimination, illiteracy or poor language skills, illegality and a failure to recognise international qualifications (B. Anderson, 2010; Campbell et al., 2016; Campbell & Burgess, 2018; Mares, 2016).

Migrant workers in Australia account for eight to nine percent of the workforce, or over one million workers, and most temporary migrant workers are concentrated in precarious work (Campbell et al., 2016; Howe, Reilly, Clibborn, van den Broek, & Wright, 2020; Mares, 2016; van den Broek, Wright, Howe, & Reilly, 2019). The Australian automotive manufacturing industry employed a high proportion of first and second-generation immigrants and people from non-English speaking backgrounds (Australian Government, 2020). This is partly attributed to the fact that migratory processes often provide a source of labour that is, at least in the short term, willing to tolerate poorer working conditions as a means of entry into the country, and partly that workplace protections are not offered to those who are working in breach of immigration controls (B. Anderson, 2010, p. 313; Howe et al., 2020).

A growing body of research argues that strict regulatory rules for migrant workers (including temporary visa holders and international students) have created a legally constructed working 'underclass' in Australia by tethering workers to single employers, in the first instance, and through the fear of deportation for breaching strict hourly work limits in the second (Howe, 2018; van den Broek et al., 2019). Temporary working visas tie workers' continuing residence (in addition to their income) to their employers which can further skew the employer-employee power dynamics, making workers especially vulnerable as the fear of employer abuse is compounded by a fear of deportation (B. Anderson, 2010, p. 312). Howe (2016) case study of a Young Asian woman's experiences pursuing a sexual harassment case as a temporary migrant worker highlights the ways gender, migration status and migration period, and precarious work can intersect and compound each individual component of vulnerability to precarity and exploitation.

3.10.4 Precarious work and welfare

Given the central fear of precarious employment is the risk of joblessness, the impact of precarious work is closely linked to the types and extent of social support and welfare available and who receives it (Kreshpaj et al., 2020, p. 44). Standing (2011, p. 12) also argues that precarious workers are vulnerable not only through the loss of wages and enterprise benefits but also to the loss of private, state, and traditional community benefits. As such strong social safety nets have been shown to mitigate the impact of precarious work on a societal scale and is one of the reasons precarious work findings are particular to their country of research (Broom et al., 2006; Dooley, 2004; Landsbergis et al., 2014; OECD, 2015; Wu et al., 2020).

The experience of precarious work is highly variable because it encompasses such a vast array of work-types and workplaces (Campbell and Burgess, 2016: 326). Howe, who has researched and written extensively on the topic of labour regulation and migrant work in Australia and around the world, raises the important point of worker agency that must be understood when considering marginalised workers and precarious employment. She reminds readers that acknowledging capital is the primary beneficiary of temporary labour migration and that migrant workers are often the victims of exploitation, is not to dismiss the transformative potential this work has for migrant workers (Howe & Owens, 2016, p. pp 5). While it is important to identify the ways legislative regulation (or lack of) can enable discriminatory practices by unscrupulous employers, marginalised workers are not always, or exclusively, victims.

In response, this thesis investigates and contextualises worker identity and agency in order to grasp a holistic understanding of the way/s workers exploit, and are exploited by, precarity. Regarding this thesis, South Australian (former) automotive manufacturing workers are particularly vulnerable as many of them sit at a nexus of indicators of precarity including being first-generation migrants, gender, age and locality (Australian Government, 2020; Mavromaras et al., 2015; Mavromaras & Zhu, 2015). The industry consisted of overwhelmingly older men (between 81 and 90 percent of the workforce were men), half of the workforce was over 50 years old, and about one-quarter spoke English as a second language (Australian Government, 2020). Likewise, most auto-workers' redundancy payments excluded them from unemployment benefits in the immediate period (1 – 2 years) after closure. Given their vulnerability, this thesis responds to a need for qualitative research

that provides greater insight into the multifaceted face of precariousness generally, and the impact higher contemporary rates of precarious work have on workers' employment transitions following industry closure, specifically.

3.11 Social impacts of precarious work

Putnam (2000) argues that precarious work is one of the central contributing factors to the loss of social engagement and cohesion. Bourdieu argues that the insidious nature of precarity is that the awareness of it 'never goes away', even for those who are not directly affected by it and that everyone is consciously and unconsciously always aware they are replaceable (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 82).

Subsequent analysis argues that widespread precarity reduced individual 'agreeableness', breeds competition and fear and undermines comradery and, eventually, empathy (Standing, 2011, p. 22; Wu et al., 2020, p. 44). Standing argues that precarious employment necessarily undermines trust and empathy in communities because it fosters 'incipient competition' where workers feel as though they need to conceal information (contacts, resources, etc.) from their peers lest they lose their own competitive edge (Standing, 2011, p. 23). The threat of losing work and income impairs individual desire to maintain cooperative and harmonious relationships, making people more self-focused and transactional and less likely to support others (Wu et al., 2020, p. 44). In serious cases, this can inhibit adult development and inhibit the ability to become productive and supportive members of society (Wu et al., 2020).

Many of the negative social impacts of precarious work can be linked to work-time insecurity common in many precarious jobs. Fluctuating and unpredictable rosters can lead to a fragmentation of leisure time with loved ones and inhibit the maintenance of healthy and committed social relationships (Cai, 2014; Woodman, 2012). As discussed earlier, it can delay major life events for workers including buying a home, relationship formation, marriage and parenthood (Blossfeld et al., 2005; H. Cuervo & Chesters, 2019; McVicar et al., 2019; Steele, Giles, Davies, & Moore, 2014). Delaying and changing the nature of these major life events significantly reshapes the social contract. The erosion of social connection through competition and isolation then has broader economic impacts as discussed in the next section.

3.12 Economic impact of precarious work

High rates of precarious employment are linked to consequences well beyond the individual worker and their family. Employment stability supports political stability and, as such, high rates of precarious work contribute to the growth of economic and political inequality and instability globally (Ilsøe, Larsen, & Rasmussen, 2019; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). It has also been linked with the erosion of the middle-class, and the rise of indebtedness (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 8). And the low and stagnant wages, common in precarious work, have been shown to exert downward pressure on wages across the board, contributing to widespread wage stagnation (Campbell & Burgess, 2018, p. 172).

Widespread precarious work has also been shown to have significant societal impacts, including intergenerational conflict, reduced social cohesion, and the rising costs of welfare (Hernan Cuervo & Wyn, 2016).

3.12.1 Business impacts

There has been a relatively pervasive idea that job insecurity boosts worker productivity; in response to this, the journal Career Development International dedicated a special issue to addressing the topic (De Cuyper et al., 2020; Debus, Unger, & König, 2020; Koen, Low, & Annelies Van, 2020; T. Probst, Chizh, Hu, Jiang, & Austin, 2020; T. M. Probst, Jiang, & Sergio Andrés López, 2020; Tinka van et al., 2020). Using a representative sample of the Dutch workforce Tinka van et al. (2020) found a negative relationship between self-rated job insecurity and job performance consistent with a similar study from Cheng and Chan (2008). Job insecurity was shown to decrease job performance for everyone except temporary and on-call workers, for whom Tinka van et al. concluded insecurity was 'part of the deal' and self-employed workers (with and without employees) who are likely to feel the potential loss of productivity more keenly through the loss of business or customers (Tinka van et al., 2020). This is corroborated by research that links job insecurity to increased psychosocial stress, burnout and depressive symptoms and shows precarious work also impacts company productivity through higher rates of sickness absence due to poor mental health (Blom et al., 2018; Helgadóttir et al., 2019)

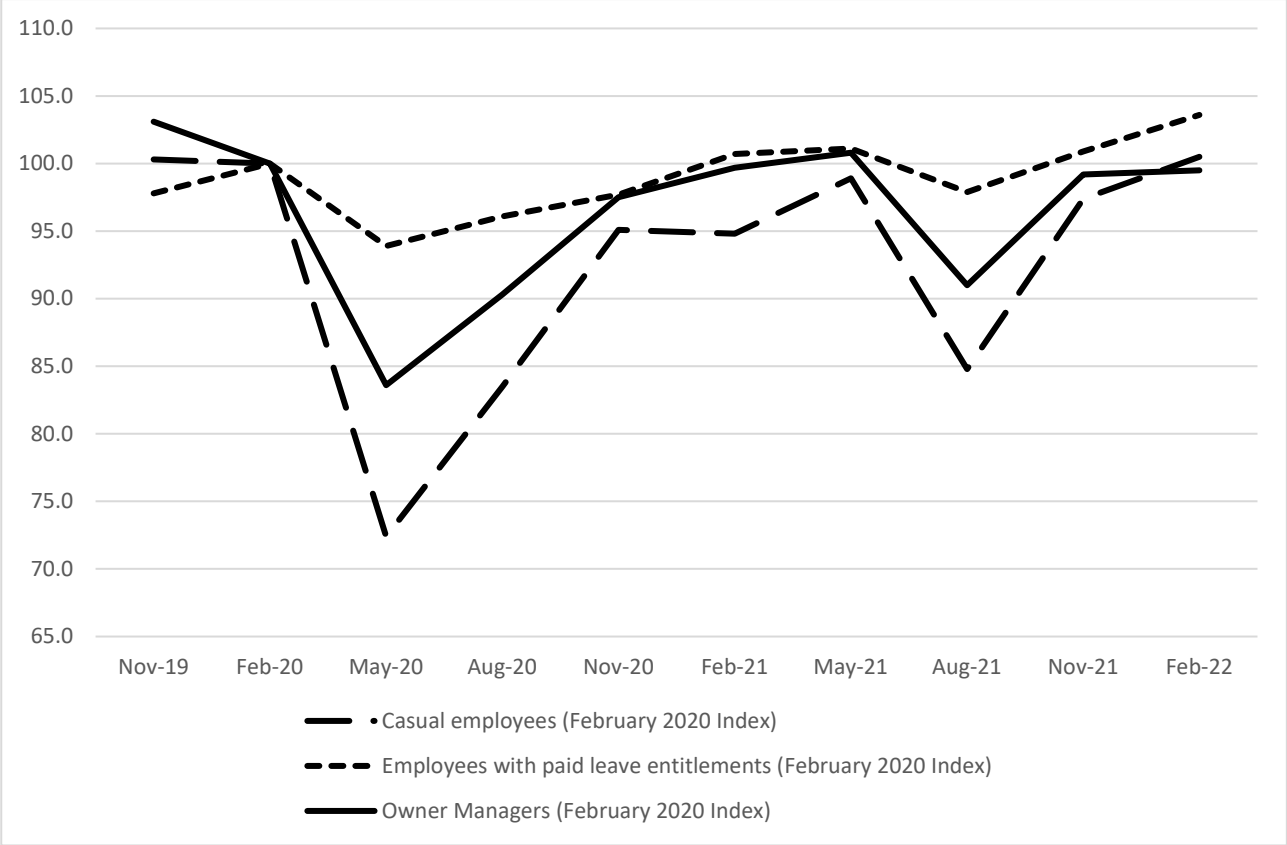
Their conclusion that job insecurity has 'no upside' for employer companies' productivity (Tinka van et al., 2020, p. 229) is supported by similarly robust research out of the United Kingdom that found

a u-shaped relationship between precarious work and company performance and precarious work and financial performance, where low levels of precarious work improved flexibility and performance and high levels harmed both (Wiengarten et al., 2021, p. 2020). In many cases, although precarious work often suits the short-term, cost-saving, interests of employers, there is suggestion that it may have a depressive impact on innovation and productivity in the medium and long term (Cetrulo, Cirillo, & Guarascio, 2019; Hall, 2000)

3.13 Precarity, closures and COVID-19 pandemic

At the time of writing (February 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic has so far resulted in 5.95 million deaths globally and over 5,000 in Australia (Ritchie et al., 2021). It catalysed an unprecedented global economic crisis that exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and inequalities in the Australian labour market (Stephen Clibborn, 2021; Pennington & Stanford, 2020b). Precarious workers often bear the brunt of the economic shocks, and economic crises tend to exacerbate existing inequalities. This is evident in the ABS's 'hours worked index'. It shows that casual employees' and owner-managers' hours were significantly more impacted than standard workers with paid leave entitlements (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021a).

Figure 7: Hours worked index, Status in Employment, Original (Feb 2020 = 100.0)



Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, it was thought increasingly globalised labour markets, advancements in automation and digital technologies, and the looming threat of climate change would see large-scale job losses 'dominate the narrative of industrial areas' (Beer & Evans, 2010, p. 1; Davies et al., 2017, p. 9). The COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent economic crisis, have undoubtedly expedited that process resulting in unprecedented job loss. The pandemic has also seen many precarious workers in Australia bear the brunt of the significant health risks in their roles as essential workers in the health and hospitality industries (Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020; Olding et al., 2021). COVID-19 saw the Federal and State governments enact a suite of significant financial support payments and services for affected workers and businesses. In this way, the pandemic has also highlighted the differing ways government can respond to crisis.

The pandemic shone a spotlight on the underlying risk of high rates of precarious work and has shown Australia needs to be better prepared for future shocks.

3.14 Summary

Research into the specific relationship between precarious work on large-scale job losses and closures is in its infancy. Although the 1980s and 1990s saw elements explored in the context of deindustrailisation (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Rubery & Wilkinson, 1994; M. J. Webber & Weller, 2001; Weller & Webber, 2004) and more recent research has noted its presence (Armstrong et al., 2008; Bailey et al., 2012; Bailey & de Ruyter, 2015; Barnes, 2016; Barnes, Roose, Heap, & Turner, 2016; Beer et al., 2006) but it is only in the last five years that we have begun to see the two issues geuinely considered in tandem (Barnes, 2018, 2021; Barnes & Weller, 2020). Most studies (Barnes, 2021; Barnes & Weller, 2020) have tended to focus on the significant and multifaceted financial ramifications of precarious work on workers leaving the automotive industry.

This literature review has established that both of these areas of study are incredibly complex and that there is a significant need for research that deploys a multi-dimensional framework of precarious work. The Qualitative Framework for Employment In/Security developed for this thesis captures, and operationalises, the objective components of precarious work in the literature to date in order to gather as accurate and holistic an understanding of the presence and impact of precarious work as possible.

This thesis responds to calls for the next generation of research into plant closures to 'shed a light on precarious labour markets' (Barnes, 2016; Beer et al., 2019, p. 387). Beer et al. (2019) call specifically for a greater understanding of how a precarious labour market shapes the decisions made by displaced workers and what policy measures might be taken to assist those workers on the margins of labour markets (Beer et al., 2019, p. 387). This thesis answers that call.

Not only is precarious work risky for individuals in the immediate term, it has been clearly shown that it can have lasting scarring effects on future employment opportunities and income (Hernan Cuervo & Wyn, 2016; Mavromaras et al., 2015; Mooi-Reci & Wooden, 2017). The longitudinal design of this thesis provides an insight into workers experiences of industry closure and precarious work overtime.

Left unchecked, precarious employment is capable of dramatically transforming the Australian employment landscape; there is no evidence of it shrinking or going away on its own accord, especially given the speed of technological advancements that are further reshaping the employment relationship. (Kreshpaj et al., 2020). A holistic understanding of the dimensions of

precarious work and how they impact workers' experience of industry closure over time is needed to ensure future closures are best placed to deal with this phenomenon. It is evident from the literature that precarious work is conceptually and experientially complex, as such analysis needs to be equally dynamic.

The following chapter outlines the methodologies used.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the rationale for the research methods used in responding to the research question: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia? This chapter outlines the research steps and justification for a qualitative, longitudinal study using constructivist grounded theory.

This chapter details the research design and processes used to ensure data validity, reliability, truthfulness, and integrity.

4.2 Introduction

This section presents the sections of this chapter for ease. Section 4.3 details the thesis' theoretical frameworks underpinnings. In line with grounded theory, Section 4.4 outlines relevant elements of the researcher's background for the purpose of researcher reflexivity.

Section 4.5 details the research design from the preliminary literature review through to the analysis and write up of this thesis. The next sections detail the interview and analysis methods, and finally this chapter ends with a summary of the participants demographic break down.

4.3 Theoretical Frameworks

Regardless of whether it is expressed as a traditional hierarchy (Crotty, 1998, p. 44) or as an 'onion' of concentric rings, the importance of clearly and directly stating a project's epistemological grounding to ensure project coherence, replicability, and so that 'others can see your research should be taken seriously' has been well established (M. N. K. Saunders, 2019, p. 128 & 130).

This thesis uses the traditionalist method of constructivist grounded theory outlined by Kathy Charmaz in her methodological textbook 'Constructing grounded Theory' (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory is a branch of Straussian grounded theory, so named after Anselm

Strauss, one-half of the original devisors of grounded theory (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1967). Strauss was a pragmatist and so constructivist grounded theory is 'a direct methodological descendent of the pragmatist research tradition' (Charmaz, 2017). Constructivist grounded theory, like pragmatism, views reality as social; values human agency diverse perspectives; and, centrally to this thesis, seeks to account for temporality (Charmaz, 2017, p. 38; Simpson, 2018). At its core, constructivist grounded theory links the pragmatist intention of democratic social reform with critical inquiry through self-conscious reflexivity (Charmaz, 2017).

4.3.1 Justification for the use of Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory is a contemporary incarnation of Glaser and Strauss's popular qualitative method, grounded theory, first outlined in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Grounded theory arose in response to a growing trend in the social-scientific community toward quantitative research (Charmaz, 2014, p. 55). Strauss and Glaser's substantial contribution to the research community was to advance qualitative research from descriptive work to theory formation by systematising qualitative analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser et al., 1967). Grounded theory has since grown into such a significant qualitative research method that it is the focus of multiple handbooks, textbooks and journal articles and has become the most frequently used qualitative research method in the social sciences transnationally (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014, p. 3; Morse, Charmaz, Clarke, Corbin, & Porr, 2021, p. 3; Partington, 2002).

Initially, for Glaser and Strauss, the data was consulted for the purpose of the '*discovery* [researcher's emphasis] of theory' (Glaser et al., 1967, p. 1). However, more recent iterations of grounded theory, including revisions from Strauss himself, contend theory is actually *constructed*—hence constructivist grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014, 2017; Morse et al., 2021, p. 5).

Having emerged in the 1990s, constructivist grounded theory uses the same iterative approach to social scientific theory laid out in Strauss and Glaser's original work, whereby theory is created through a process of iterative qualitative analysis, in which data collection and analysis reciprocally inform and shape one another (Charmaz, 2014, p. 359). The core difference of constructivist grounded theory, informed by postmodern critics (Conrad, 1990; Ellis, 1995; Richardson, 1993) and

feminist standpoint theorists (Harding, 1991 and Clarke, 2005), is the centring of research and knowledge as constructed through the emphasises on researcher reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014, 2017).

Grounded theory (constructivist or otherwise) seeks to find a balance between procedural rigour and creativity through a systematic and iterative process of analysis (Partington, 2002).

It is well suited to this inquiry into the impact of precarious employment on worker's employment transitions because it aims to find meaning that can be applied to other contexts and groups, such as future large scale job losses or industry closures (Morse et al., 2021). It has three key phases, they are:

1. Descriptive: this stage aims to document, understand and analyse action and change
2. Theoretical Development: through abstraction and generalisation
3. Broad application: that is, importantly, *applied, useful, and widely used*

These three stages inform this thesis to ensure that the theories formed through the case study of the Australian automotive manufacturing closure may be of use for future instances of large-scale job loss during periods of high rates of precarious employment. Put simply, grounded theory allows for a staged but simultaneous process of data collection and analysis, referred to as 'coding' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 360).

A central component of constructivist grounded theory methodology, and a key way in which the data 'guides' the research, is the acknowledgement of the researcher as '*knowledgeable but underinformed about the area of inquiry*' (Melia, 2010, p. 176). In this way, it is impossible for the researcher to say with certainty ahead of data collection and analysis what the focus themes of the thesis will be. Instead, the role of the researcher is to identify areas of concern (in this case: industry closure and a highly precarious employment landscape) and then consult the data (in this case: qualitative interviews) (Charmaz, 2014, p. 9). One of the ways grounded theory ensures the data guides the research is by delaying the complete literature review, including the addition of any further theoretical frameworks, until coding is complete (Charmaz, 2014, p.8).

This is important because it ensures that this thesis is situated in the specifics of *this* closure and *these* workers, that participants are first and foremost 'active agents in their lives rather than

passive recipients of larger social forces' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8). Through open-ended qualitative questioning grounded theory allows for the study of problem-solving practices and social meanings, which will allow for a fuller understanding of the different ways workers and their families approach *this* closure. This systematic yet reflexive approach of continuous data analysis ensures that participants' experiences maintain their position at the centre of the research for the entirety of the thesis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 359). At its core, this thesis is participant guided and constructivist grounded theory enables that.

The next section of this chapter explains how constructivist grounded theory was used to shape the longitudinal design.

4.3.2 Justification for the Longitudinal Research Design

This thesis focused on former automotive manufacturing workers from GM Holden and Holden's South Australian supply chain. Methodological decisions were made after evaluating options from research methods literature (Cassell, Cunliffe, & Grandy, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Derrington, 2019; Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; Wills, 2019).

As established in chapters two and three, the impact of industry closure, precarious work, and unemployment on individuals, families, and communities is complex, variable, and 'always quite particular' (Davies et al., 2017; della Porta et al., 2015, p. 3). In anticipation of this, constructivist grounded theory was paired with a longitudinal design aimed at capturing changes in participant experiences during what was likely to be a time of significant change (Derrington, 2019).

Research from previous mass industry closures, including Mitsubishi's closure in Adelaide's South in 2006, indicates that it can take several years for workers who have lost long-term work to settle into a new path and that the negative individual, community, and regional impacts are likely to arise in aftershocks over time (Anaf, Newman, Baum, Ziersch, & Jolley, 2012; Barnes, 2021; Beer, 2018; M. Webber & Campbell, 1997). Likewise, a key claim of a report into the closure of the automotive industry released in 2016 insisted longitudinal research was needed to fully understand the impact of this closure, as the geographical and occupational and skills profiles of this closure was different to others that have received longitudinal attention and because the economic circumstances at a

national and regional level had changed significantly since the last large closure (Mitsubishi's) (Barnes, 2016).

To track those changes, this thesis employed a fixed-panel longitudinal framework, wherein a single sample is followed in order to gather detailed information on changes in their characteristics (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22). This is the most effective method of gathering accurate information over a longer period (Derrington, 2019). Longitudinal studies have considerable advantages over one-time surveys and are well suited to investigating measures of stability/instability, including time related components of events and causality rather than 'mere association' (Derrington, 2019; Lynn, 2009), All of which are central to this thesis. Short-running longitudinal studies, such as this, have also been a common methodological choice for studying worker outcomes in redundancy studies (Beer et al., 2019).

The impacts of changes in employment situations can occur quickly and have immediate impacts, the details of which might be difficult to recall, especially if participants find themselves in and out of work. Research groups where comparatively high levels of change may occur are better suited to more regular intervals (Lynn, 2009, p.7). Subjective measures such as expectation, intentions, attitudes, and reasons for making choices are especially prone to recall error—longitudinal research enables the collection of information about expectations and decision-making processes comparatively untainted by subsequent outcomes; this is incredibly important for this research and not possible with any other form of data collection (Lynn, 2009, p.8).

Good research design requires a careful balance of the length of time over which changes are to be estimated; the number of times it is reasonable to expect participants to contribute to a project; and administrative and operational challenges or limitations (Derrington, 2019; Smith et al., 2009). Participant attrition rates can increase over longer periods of time as they can become jaded by the process (Derrington, 2019).

To strike that 'careful balance', this thesis was designed around three interviews at 6-month intervals. The literature from similar factory closures suggest that socially related problems tend to occur 18 months to two years after operations end (Henderson & Shutt, 2004, p. 34). As such, interviews began 16 months after Holden's closure (February 2019) and occurred at 6-month intervals thereafter, a total of three times, in order to capture what was most likely to be a period

of significant change. This design is deemed regular enough to help ensure details are not forgotten or missed, but not so regular as to irritate participants.

Taken together, these frameworks complement one another; the longitudinal design allows the exploration of the nature and degree of changes over time, and constructivist grounded theory sees people as experts in their own experience and allows the generation of new perspectives from familiar phenomena, thereby allowing the data, produced by participants and gathered over time, to develop into theory.

4.3.3 Timeline of events

Over the course of the research period, there were several significant events that shaped the thesis; they are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5 Timeline of significant events

Timeline	Significant Event
2013, December	Holden announces it will cease manufacturing in 2017.
2017, October	Closure of General Motors Holden and the Australian automotive manufacturing industry.
2018, February	Researcher commenced her PhD.
2019, January	Ethics approval granted for project No. 8230 (Appendix C).
2019, January	State and Federal Transition Programs discontinue face to face support services, continue to offer access to funding until July 2019.
2019, January - March	Participant Recruitment.
2019, February – April	Conducted Round 1 Interviews.
2019, July	State and Federal transition programs closed.
2019, August – October	Conducted Round 2 Interviews.
2020, February – May[3]	Conducted Round 3 Interviews.

The closure of Holden in October 2017 marked the end of automotive manufacturing in Australia, although some supply chain companies were able to continue by pivoting into other industries. The researcher began her PhD in February of the following year, and the next 12 months were spent

[3] The final interview period was extended by a few weeks due to COVID-19; many participants' work and caring responsibilities were impacted by the virus and the associated health restrictions.

devising the research project and the required human research ethics application. Project 8230 was approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in January 2019 (Appendix C). The researcher began recruiting immediately to ensure the participant call-out was sent by the supporting organisations before they ended face-to-face support services. The first round of interviews was conducted from February to March 2019; the second six months later from August to October 2019; and the third and final round from February to May 2020. The interview period for the final round was extended by one month to allow participants time to adjust to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in Adelaide; many participants' work and caring responsibilities were impacted by the outbreak and the associated health restrictions, and they were less readily available for interviews than they had been in the past.

4.4 Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is a core component of constructivist grounded theory and one of the defining differences between early and Glaserian, objectivist, incarnations of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2021). Researcher reflexivity is also a common requirement for qualitative analysis outside constructivist grounded theory (Wills, 2019). It requires researchers to unearth their preconceptions, develop methodological self-consciousnesses, and expand their knowledge of their place in the research (Charmaz, 2021, p. 154). This thesis draws on Charmaz's (2014, 2021) constructivist method in which she, drawing on Harding's (1991, 2004, 2016) feminist standpoint theory, advocates for 'strong reflexivity'.

Reflexivity begins with a researcher's understanding of themselves in the research process and ends with a clear explanation of the research methods used (Wills, 2019). A reflexive researcher must be self-consciously aware of their position in study design, recruitment, collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2021; Wills, 2019). One central component of reflexivity for Charmaz is 'methodological self-consciousness', which requires researchers to examine who they are, what they do in their research practice, and any taken-for-granted privileges (Charmaz, 2014, 2017; 2021, p. 161). By scrutinising the self, the researcher is more likely to identify intersecting relationships between power, identity, and marginality, especially when research participants might be disadvantaged (Charmaz, 2021).

To that end, the next section briefly outlines relevant elements of the researcher's background.

4.4.1 Researcher's background

The researcher, Gemma Beale, was born in Elizabeth Vale, less than two kilometres from the GM Holden site in 1990 and has spent her life in South Australia.

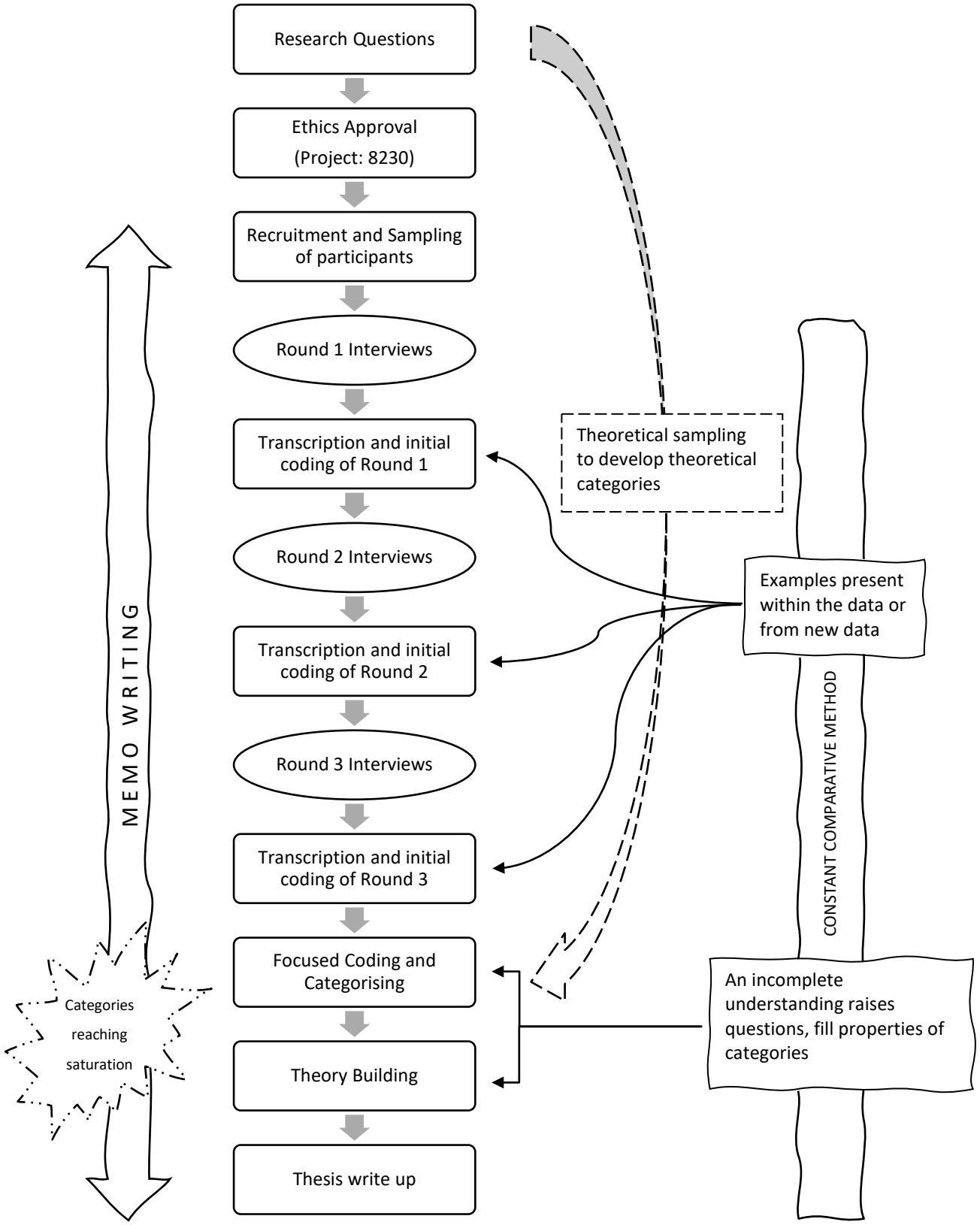
Regarding any 'taken for granted privileges', although she comes from a working-class background, at the time of the interviews, she was a 30-something white woman with no experience of factory work and nearing a decade of tertiary education. In this way, she is at risk of being what sociologist Mark Peel called an 'outsider'. In 1995, Peel wrote, almost presciently, of the tendency for outsider researchers and public servants to define Elizabeth fairly one-dimensionally as 'a housing trust town' or a 'General Motors-Holden town' in a way that allowed the futures of the people who lived there to be '*ruled by the common sense that [Elizabeth's] decline is the inevitable, if unfortunate, consequence of an internationally competitive Australia (p. 2)'.*

In order to mitigate any pre-dispositions (as 'insider' or 'outsider') shaping this thesis unduly, a methodological self-consciousness was maintained through constant and iterative memoing that sought to apply critical scrutiny to her own place in the data and a 'strong reflexivity' that considered 'the participant's standpoint' rather than her own (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014, 2021; Morse et al., 2021). Memo writing is a core component of conscious reflexivity in grounded theory research, constructivist or otherwise (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014, 2021; Wills, 2019). The researcher used a variety of memo methods including handwritten notes, MS Word documents and other digital notes in NVivo during coding, transcription, and analysis. These were further supplemented by manual coding to ensure no data was overlooked.

4.5 Research Design

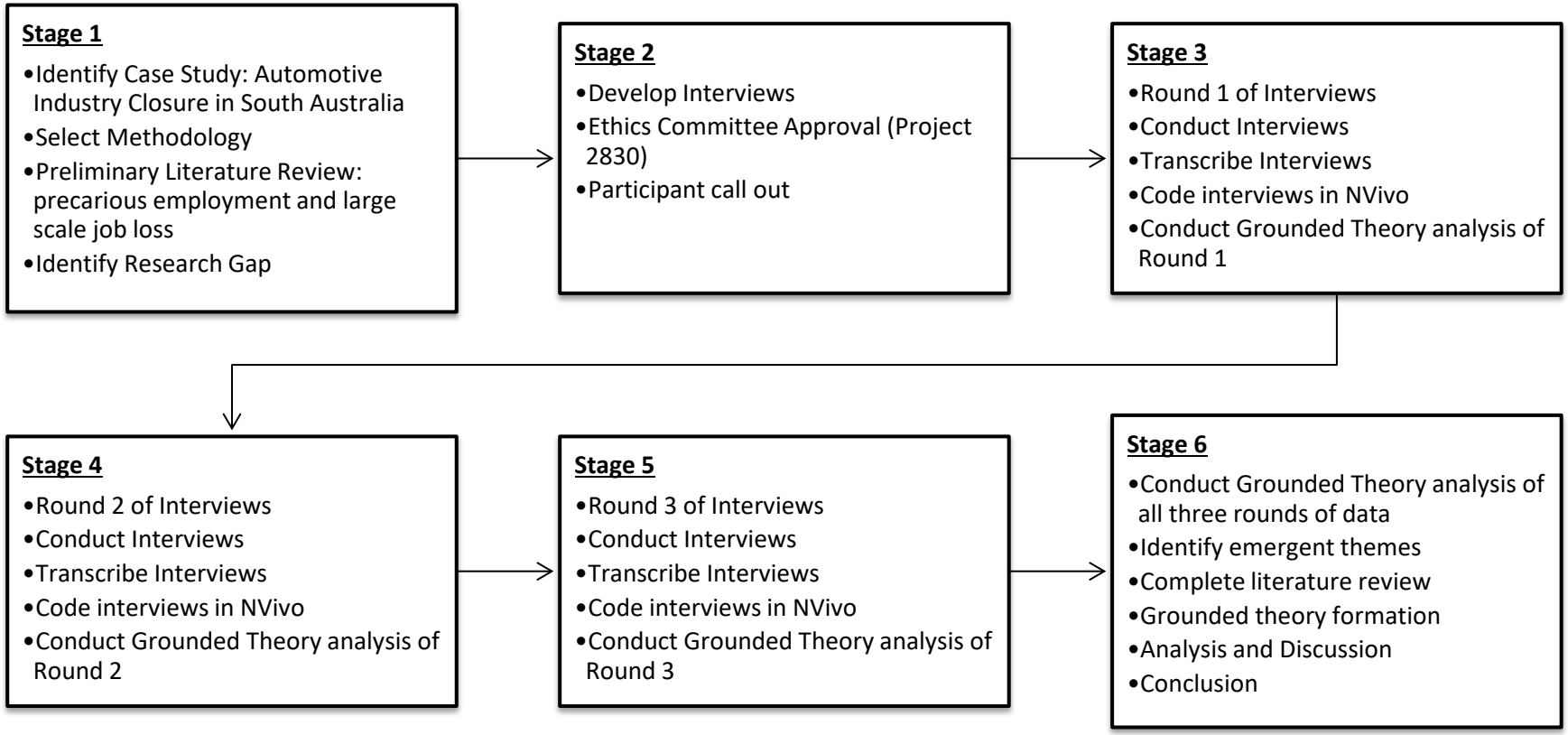
The use of a longitudinal qualitative approach led to the development of a research framework and a six-stage research plan. The research framework developed for this thesis detailing the application of constructivist grounded theory is shown in Figure 8. It is directly adapted from Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory textbook 'Constructing Grounded Theory' (2014, p. 18) with the addition of three rounds of data gathering, in this case, interviews, in line with the longitudinal design.

Figure 8 Research Framework adapted from Charmaz (2014, p. 18)



The research model shown in Figure 9 breaks down the framework (Figure 8) into 6 stages. Stage one contains the identification of the case study; the preliminary literature review, in line with constructivist grounded theory and the identification of a research gap. Stage two includes the development of the research questions and research tool, submitting and attaining ethics approval from the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) for project number 8230 (Appendix C), and the participant call out. Stages three, four, and five are comprised of conducting, transcribing, and coding the qualitative one-on-one interviews conducted with the same group of participants at 6-month intervals. Stage six contains the final stage of analysis, tracking participant outcomes over the course of the study, the comparison and identification of emergent themes over time, the completion of the Literature Review, and the analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

Figure 9 Research Model



4.5.1 Stage 1: Case study and methodology selection and preliminary literature review

The closure of the Australian automotive manufacturing industry, specifically the closure of Holden and their supply chain, was identified as a case study before the researcher formally began her PhD. Holden announced in 2013 that it would close in 2017, and in those intervening years, what would happen to the area and to the people who worked there had been the focus of a book (Kurmelovs, 2016) and news and media stories ("Holden workers vote to accept three-year wage freeze," 2013; Kurmelovs, 2015; Schlesinger, 2017) and numerous reports (Barbaro, 2014; Bowman & Callan, 2017; Burgan & Spoehr, 2013; Productivity Commission, 2014; Spoehr, 2015; Stanford, 2017a). It was, frankly, impossible to have been consuming news media in South Australia during that period and not be aware of the industry's looming closure.

The researcher was drawn to this case study and conducted some initial research to determine what elements of the closure would warrant greater attention and what theoretical and methodological framework would be suitable. Constructivist grounded theory and a longitudinal design were selected for the reasons outlined in Section 4.3. There appeared to be little attention paid to the relationship between industry closure and precarious work, and so, in line with constructivist grounded theory, a preliminary literature review was conducted to determine if this would be an appropriate path to follow. Glaser and Strauss' original grounded theory methodology advocates for delaying a literature review until data has been collected and analysed in order to ensure a researcher is not unduly influenced by 'received theory' (Glaser et al., 1967). In contrast, Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory methodology recognises that this method is impractical in contemporary research because it fails to account for any familiarity researchers might already have with the topic, and because it can see researchers 'rehashing old empirical problems' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 304). Instead, Charmaz advocates for what Henwood and Pidgeon call 'theoretical agnosticism', whereby researchers take a 'first pass' at the literature, alongside their own existing theoretical sensitives, to promote clarity in thinking about concepts and to ensure 'conceptual density' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 306; 2021, p. 160; Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004, pp. 15 - 16). The main message is that researchers are careful to ensure they do not become 'wedded' to any theoretical position in a way that might 'stymie' any original research and that the literature review a researcher begins with is not the one they end with (Charmaz, 2021; Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004). As such, a preliminary literature review into both 'precarious work'

and 'industry closure' was conducted in Stage 1 to identify the core theoretical concerns around both topics and to identify the following Research Questions (RQ):

RQ 1: What were workers' experiences in the automotive industry and how did they feel about leaving the industry?

RQ 2: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?

> **RQ 2.a**: To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious and unemployed workers?

RQ 3: Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply chain?

4.5.2 Stage 2: Development of Questions, and the Research Tool and Ethics Approval

Stage 2 drew on the preliminary literature review conducted in Stage 1 to identify the best approach to data-gathering. It began in mid-2018 and ended with the participant call-out in early 2019. Intensive interviewing was chosen because it is the most common source of qualitative data, it enables participants to direct the flow of conversation, and it allows for a breadth of experiences (2010; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Melia, 2010; Wills, 2019). Specifically, qualitative semi-structured open-ended, one-on-one interviews were selected. Once interviews were selected as the central data gathering method the researcher went about developing the questions and the research instrument (Appendix D). The questions were informed by the preliminary literature review into industry closure and precarious work.

The researcher provided the preliminary questions to her supervisors and to academics from the Australian Industrial Transformation Institute (where she was located for the duration of this PhD) who were familiar with the methodology and content for feedback. Minor alterations were made in line with their feedback.

Research Question 1, '*What were workers' experiences in the automotive industry and how did they feel about leaving the industry?',* was designed in order to gain a holistic understanding of the transition

experience by first gaining an understanding of their experiences in the automotive industry. The first wave of interviews included questions about participants' experiences working in the automotive industry (including when and how they found work, what work they did, and if they enjoyed it); and their expectations in the lead up to Holden's closure (including if they made plans about what they would do for work after the industry closed, what those plans were, and if they had spoken to the transition support services or their partners about them).

Research Question 2, '*What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?',* is the core focus of this thesis. The preliminary literature review exposed a significant gap in the literature in that although there was discussion of precarious work in some closure literature, the two areas of research had remained largely separate from one another. To address this question, participants were asked about four key components of their work at every wave of interviews, informed by the first iteration of the framework of job in/security. They were asked about their employment security, their economic security, their work-time security, and their access to rights and entitlements. Questions asked and their relationship to the precarious work literature are detailed in Table 2 below.

Research Question 2.a, *'To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented physical and mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious, and unemployed workers?',* was informed by the preliminary literature review, which identified that it was common for workers to experience physical and mental ill-health as a result of large-scale job losses *and* precarious work. To answer this question, every participant was asked how they were feeling at each wave of interviews, if they were seeking or accessing any formal mental health support, and if not, why not.

The relationship between the questions asked to participants and the industry closure literature is detailed in Table 2 below.

To answer Research Question 3, '*Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply-chain?',* participants were asked what company they had worked for in order to enable the researcher to compare outcomes at a later date.

Simple contact information and demographic data were also collected, including name, age, cultural background, highest education level, home address, and familial status.

Table 6 Outlining the relationship between interview questions and this Thesis' Research Questions

Interview Questions	Justification for selection
When did you start working at Holden, and what did you do there?	Was informed by the preliminary literature review that indicated long worker tenure in the automotive industry. Addresses Research Question 1 by gathering documentary evidence about their experience in the automotive industry.
What was your job title – did you always work in the same position?	Addresses Research Question 1 by gathering documentary evidence about their experience in the automotive industry.
How did you get the job?	Addresses Research Question 1 by gathering documentary evidence about their experience in the automotive industry—and asked in order to compare to participants' job-seeking experiences after closure.
Did you have friends or family who worked there before you started?	Addresses Research Question 1 by gathering documentary evidence about their experience in the automotive industry—and was asked in order to compare to participants' job-seeking experiences after closure. The literature showed workers had often gained employment through word-of-mouth or existing relationships.
Did you enjoy the work? And were you happy working there?	Addresses Research Question 1 by gathering documentary evidence about their experience in the automotive industry.
What was a typical day like?	
When did you leave? (voluntary or forced redundancy)	
Did you talk to friends or family about when to leave and what to do?	
How did you prepare to leave?	
Did you visit a Transition Centre? What was that like?	
Did you access the State or Federal government funding for retraining? Why or why not?	Addresses Research Question 3 by gathering transition experience data for comparison.
Have you found work since? Why or why not?	Partially addresses Research Question 2, if participants had found work they were asked about the quality of it as detailed below.
If not: How are you/your family coping? Have you sought or used any formal support networks along this journey? Why/Why not? If yes: how have you found it?	Addresses Research Question 2.a. The literature from previous closures, outlined in Section 3.2.1, identifies that following large scale job loss workers can experience poor mental and physical health and periods of unemployment. And that workers, especially older male workers, might be hesitant to seek professional employment, mental health, and medical assistance.
If so: How and what kind of work? How do you get it? Are you trained in this area?	Addresses Research Question 2. The transition programs offered financial assistance to retrain into new industries, this question sought to find out if these participants had found that helpful.
If so: Do you enjoy the work?	Addresses Research Question 2.
If so: What sort of contract/s are you on?	Addresses Research Question 2. Contract type is a core indicator of employment security and access to rights and protections as detailed in Sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.4.

If so: Is your income consistent week to week?	Addresses Research Question 2. Economic insecurity is affected by fluctuating or volatile income as detailed in Section 4.5.3.
If so: Are you earning a similar amount to what you were before the closure?	Addresses Research Question 2. Economic insecurity is affected by fluctuating or volatile income as detailed in Section 4.5.3.
If so: Are you working a similar amount of hours to what you were before the closure? Is it consistent week to week?	Addresses Research Question 2. Working-time insecurity is affected by fluctuating hours or shifts as detailed in Section 4.5.2.
If so: If you're doing any shift work, do you have any say over what shifts you work? Is it consistent week to week?	Addresses Research Question 2. Working-time insecurity is affected by fluctuating hours or shifts, and a sense of control over hours worked, as detailed in Section 4.5.2.
If so: Have you made new friends?	Addresses Research Question 1 and 2. The literature from previous closures, outlined in Section 3.1, identifies social isolation caused by the loss of workplace social relationships as a concern following large scale closures. Likewise working-time insecurity and economic insecurity has been shown to negatively impact peoples social lives, as detailed in Section 4.11.
Do you still catch up with old workmates?	
Have you sought or used any formal mental health support along this journey? (or since we have last spoken?) Why/Why not? If yes: how have you found it?	Addresses Research Question 1 and 2.a. The literature from previous closures, outlined in Section 3.2.1 (and the literature on precarious work outlined in Section 4.9), identifies that following large scale job loss workers can experience poor mental and physical health even if they find work. And that workers, especially older male workers, might be hesitant to seek professional employment, mental health, and medical assistance.
What's been the biggest change for you since the closure? Is there anything else you would like to add?	Addresses all Research Questions and, in line with constructivist grounded theory, provides participants an opportunity to raise concerns or issues the researcher may not have considered.
What are your plans/hopes for the next 6 months?	Central to the longitudinal design of this is thesis, provides a data point for the researcher to compare and contrast participants expectations during this period of change with the reality of what does occur.

The questions were the same for each round of interviews, barring the exclusion of the questions about working in the automotive industry in Rounds 2 and 3 and the inclusion of a question about the impact of COVID-19 in Round 3.

Questions were then assembled into a research instrument in order to assist with the flow of conversation during interviews. The research proposal and design were submitted to the Flinders University Human Research Ethics committee. The committee is run according to international best practice standards and its requirements guided this research. Approval was sought from the Ethics Committee of Flinders University by submitting an ethics application which was approved as project no.8230 on the 7th of January 2019 (Appendix C). Following approval, a participant call-out was administered as detailed in Section 4.6.2 Participant Recruitment.

4.5.3 Stages 3, 4, and 5: Conducting, transcribing, and coding the interviews

Stages 3, 4, and 5 are collated because they follow the same format at 6-month intervals, in line with the longitudinal design, beginning with the first interview in February 2019 and ending when the final interview was transcribed and coded in September of 2020. These stages consist of each round of data gathering (interview) for this longitudinal study, which included contacting participants to organise a suitable interview time, securing fully-informed consent, conducting and (with participant permission) audio recording the interviews, transcription of the interviews (by the researcher), and then coding the interviews in NVivo. Further details of the interview method are provided in Section 4.6 and of the data analysis in Section 4.7.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was conducted either in person or over the phone. For interviews conducted in person, participants were able to select whichever space was more convenient for them out of the Flinders University Campuses (in Adelaide's CBD or Tonsley, 20 minutes south of the city) or in the offices at the Playford City Council (in Adelaide's north).

It was important to the researcher that participants felt at ease; to assist with this, coffee, tea, and biscuits were provided for all face-to-face interviews to help create a comfortable atmosphere in what was an unfamiliar location (Flinders University Campuses).

Constructivist grounded theory requires constant and iterative process of analysis whereby the researcher is always attuned to the data; to aide in this, the researcher kept memos throughout the interviewing process.

4.5.4 Stage 6: Analysis, grounded theory formation, literature review and discussion

Stage 6 began once all 79 interviews had been completed, transcribed, and undergone their first round of coding in NVivo in late 2020. It consisted of the final stage of focused coding and categorising; as categories reach theoretical saturation, theory is built, and findings are made. It also included revisiting and completing the literature review with the inclusion of the emergent themes and the writing up for the thesis including the analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

The findings were reached through the application of abductive reasoning common in constructivist grounded theory and through the use of NVivo for digital coding and categorisation in addition to manual coding, memoing, and analysis (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 200 - 204).

4.6 Interview Method

This thesis uses data collected throughout a longitudinal study consisting of three one-on-one semi-structured interviews, conducted at 6-month intervals, with 28 former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers, totalling 79 interviews.

4.6.1 Sample selection

This thesis used non-probability theoretical sampling common for in-depth depth interviews and grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2014; M. N. K. Saunders, 2019, p. 315; Tranter, 2019, pp. 121 and 133-134). Theoretical sampling is a form of purposive sampling that is often used when conducting case study research (M. N. K. Saunders, 2019, p. 321). Unlike traditional statistical sampling, the exact number of cases is not so crucial to constructivist grounded theory; instead interviews cease when the researcher has reached a point of conceptual rather than descriptive saturation; that is, when the data no longer generates 'new leads' (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory requires sample size to be driven by the aims of the project, where theoretical saturation is met when the researcher reaches the point that is 'counterproductive' to continue and when 'the new' does not add anything to the overall story of the framework (Glaser et al., 1967; Mason, 2010). It is then impossible to say at the outset how many participants it will take to reach theoretical saturation however it is generally agreed that qualitative studies require more than 15 interviews and that 20 to 30 should suffice for grounded theory research (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Mason, 2010; Morse et al., 2021). Though the variation in a study can be significant, Mason conducted an analysis of sample sizes in 174 grounded theory PhD studies and found the sample size ranged from 4 to 87 interviews (2010). Sample size is also guided by what is judged as credible by academic peers and what can be achieved within the available time frame (Mark N. K. Saunders & Townsend, 2016)

Having taken the literature into account, it was predicted that between 25 and 30 participants, each participating in three 45-minute interviews (for a possible 90 interviews), would generate enough data

for theoretical saturation, especially given the heterogeneity of the population with automotive manufacturing workers being overwhelming older, white, and male (Australian Government, 2020; M. N. K. Saunders, 2019). This prediction proved accurate, and the data gathered from the 28 participants the researcher recruited generated sufficiently conceptually dense data and thereby meet theoretical saturation at each round of interviews and over the course of the study (Charmaz, 2014). By the end of each round of interviews, the researcher was no longer encountering new information.

4.6.2 Participant recruitment

Participants were recruited using an initial group of informant organisations that agreed to assist in the circulation of targeted advertisements through whatever method they deemed most appropriate for their contacts including social media posts, and email and print newsletters. In line with purposive sampling that makes use of what the researcher knows about the population sample, the following organisations were selected for their existing relationships with automotive manufacturing workers:

- **The South Australian state government's 'Drive Your Future' transition program.** This group was deemed suitable because the State Government was supportive of the project, had invested a lot of resources in ensuring they were able to contact as many of the former automotive workers as possible and had a mailing list of 1,844 Holden and supply-chain workers.
- **The South Australian branch of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU)**. The automotive manufacturing industry was a highly unionised industry and Holden especially so. The AMWU had also invested significant resources in maintaining contact with all Holden and supply-chain workers that had been union members and had hosted a Support Officer position (funded by the State Government) for 12 months following Holden's closure. The Support Officer was employed to support and check in with relevant members and produce monthly reports detailing their findings.
- **Women in Male-Dominated Occupations and Industries (WIMDOI)**. WIMDOI was selected to help capture women workers, given the ratio of women in the industry it was predicted it would be difficult to recruit enough women participants.
- **SA Unions**. SA Unions was selected to help capture workers who might have already moved to a new industry and, consequently, union.

- **Anti-Poverty Network SA**. The majority of Anti-Poverty Network members are based in Adelaide's North and so it was selected to help capture workers who might have been struggling to find regular work in the area.

The researcher was invited to attend some of the regular morning teas run by the Drive Your Future program to introduce the project to reduce some of the potential barriers between participant and researcher. These organisations circulated the Information Sheet approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix C). The information sheet provided a brief description of the study and its purpose; outlined what was required of a potential participant; promised anonymity and the freedom to withdraw at any time; and explained participants would receive two $25 supermarket vouchers (at the commencement of the second and third interviews) in recognition of their contribution. It also included the contact details of the researchers Supervisors and links to counselling and support services.

Participants were asked to express interest by contacting the researcher directly by phone or email. Participants were required to have been working at Holden's Elizabeth plant or in Holden's supply chain at the time of the announcement of the closure in December 2013. This was designed to capture and compare the experiences of those who left 'early' as well as those who stayed until the end.

Following an expression of interest, potential participants were asked a series of questions over the phone or by email to determine if they meet the criteria. The questions were to ensure participants met the core criteria that they were: over 18 years of age and working at Holden or in any of the supply-chain companies (eligible for state and federal transition support) at the announcement of Holden's closure in December 2013. In line with grounded theory's aim to search for the 'maximum number of differences', the form of work within Holden (white or blue-collar) was not considered relevant to this project although attempts were made to achieve a balance across work types, gender, and age. Participants were accepted if they met the criteria and were excluded if they do not.

Once accepted, participants were asked to select their interview preference. Face-to-face interviews were the researcher's preference as they have been shown to improve rapport; however, phone interviews were also offered if face-to-face interviews proved difficult to arrange. This was in acknowledgement that workers might be juggling fluctuating work schedules, that they were being

offered nominal monetary compensation for their time (in the form of two $25 supermarket gift cards), and that participants may move house to find work over the course of this study. Overall, there was a preference among participants for phone interviews which was easily accommodated. This was especially true for the second and third interviews once the researcher was a familiar person and, even more so after the COVID-19 outbreak. Participants who still preferred in-person interviews tended to be unemployed and socially isolated, and so they appreciated the chance to meet and talk with someone. In two cases the participants' hearing loss also made phone conversations impractical.

4.6.3 Conducting the interviews

The first round of interviews, conducted in February through May of 2019, had 28 participants. This dropped to 25 for the second round of interviews and grew again to 26 in the final round of interviews, as one 'lost' participant from the second round was able to participate again. Prior to convening the interviews, participants were provided with all the official documents required by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

The first round of interviews began in January 2019 and ran until May 2020. The questions for that round of interviews spanned the broadest period, inquiring about time working in the automotive industry and experiences since the closure was announced in December 2013. The subsequent two interviews sought to track changes between interview periods. This is because literature from similar large-scale closures suggests that socially related problems tend to emerge '18 months to two years' after operations cease (Henderson & Shutt, 2004). 18 months after Holden's closure was April 2019; these interviews began before that and preceded in 6-month intervals thereafter in order to capture the earlier, more stable period of closure, as well as what was likely to be a period of significant change. It could not have been predicted, at the outset of this project, that the interview period would also include the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the associated—globally significant—period of change and economic crisis.

With the consent of all participants, semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded such that the conversations could be transcribed, coded, and analysed at a later date. The justification for the interview questions is detailed in Section 3.5.3 and the questions included in the Research Instrument (Appendix D). Upon transcription, participants were assigned a pseudonym to safeguard their

anonymity. Five months after their first interview participants were contacted again to begin organising their second interview, and likewise, for their third and final interview. They were again asked about their interview preference (time, location, face-to-face, or over the phone) and reminded that they could withdraw at any time.

The researcher conducted the interviews, transcribed, and coded them herself and made memos throughout the process to imbed herself in the research. Conducting each of these processes ensured she was incredibly familiar with the data and its themes to ensure the rigour of the coding and analysis.

4.6.4 Response Rate

This study had an unusually high retention rate with 25 out of 28 participants engaging in all three interviews, totalling 79 qualitative interviews, spanning 16 months.

Two participants withdrew after the first interview: one for health reasons, and one without explanation. A third participated in the first and third interviews but did not participate in the second interview, explaining that they were busy during the period of the second interview.

The low attrition rate is attributed to high participant motivation and the strong rapport built between researcher and participant over the course of the study. Multiple participants commented, without prompt, about how much they enjoyed being interviewed about this topic.

No interviews, nor participants, have been excluded from this thesis.

4.7 Constructivist Grounded Theory Analysis

As detailed in Section 3.5, constructivist grounded theory analysis was applied in four key stages (Stages 3 – 6). The first three stages were a process of open line-by-line analysis and coding of each round of interview transcripts alongside the examination of memos, taken by the researcher during the interview and transcription stages (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014, 2017, 2021). The final stage was an overarching analysis of the emergent themes over the course of the study.

Once the interviews were transcribed, they were entered into NVivo version 12 for coding. NVivo was used to help manage the large and (potentially unwieldy) amount of data produced by the interviews.

The researcher used memoing, hand-coding during the transcription process, and NVivo coding as a method of constant iterative analysis and to help ensure data was not overlooked. The thesis' research framework (Figure 8, Section 4.5) is based on Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory method and adapted for this thesis' longitudinal design is grounded in a 'constant comparative method' and a process of 'constant theoretical sampling'. Memoing is one of the central tools of this process and the researcher maintained extensive memos across notebooks, digital word files, voice memos, and in NVivo.

Coding and memoing require the researcher to maintain a constant sensitivity to 'emergent' themes. The construction (as opposed to Glaser's 'discovery') of emergent themes began with the initial round of open line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2014; Wills, 2019). These themes were then sorted into overarching categories (Wills, 2010, p.423). Some data was coded to more than one code. This process was completed for each round of interviews as stand-alone datasets, and then emergent themes were compared across interview periods.

Given the first interview asked participants to discuss their work history and plans for the future, some of the overarching categories are temporally static to allow for ease of comparison between experience within and outside the auto industry and to compare differences between expectations and eventuality across subsequent interviews. Other categories emerged as reoccurring issues or themes; some were predictable, like 'health', which sits atop an extensive hierarchy of sub-categories that include descriptions of good and ill physical and mental health. Others were less predictable, like the emergence of COVID-19 and 'closure's impact on the area', in that participants were not asked directly about the impact of the closure on Adelaide's north, but it was a reoccurring topic of conversation initiated by participants.

The final stage of analysis requires the 'focused coding and categorising' of all three rounds of interviews and their emergent themes until theoretical saturation was met. In this stage, emergent categories from the first three stages of analysis were put through a process of comparative selective coding to seek out core variables (Charmaz, 2014). It is this stage of abductive reasoning and analysis where the thesis' findings emerge and the conceptual model is built.

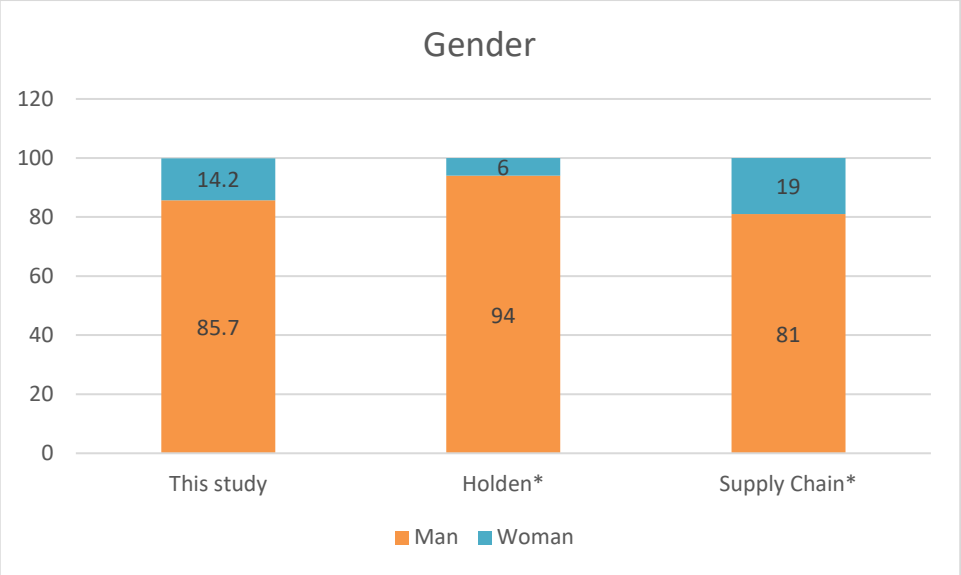
4.8 Demographic and Employment Data

The thesis relies on census data, and data collected and collated by Wallis and ACIL Allen for the Federal Government (Australian Government, 2020), to triangulate the qualitative results and provide a fuller picture of the demographic profile of South Australian auto workers.

4.8.1 Gender

There were four female and 24 male participants. The quantity of women participants was lower than desired and limits the extent to which gendered comparisons can be made. It is, however, reflective and representative of an industry that was overwhelmingly dominated by men. At the time of closure only 6% of Holden and 19% of automotive supply chain workers were women (Australian Government, 2020, p. 29).

Figure 10 Gender of Automotive Manufacturing Workers



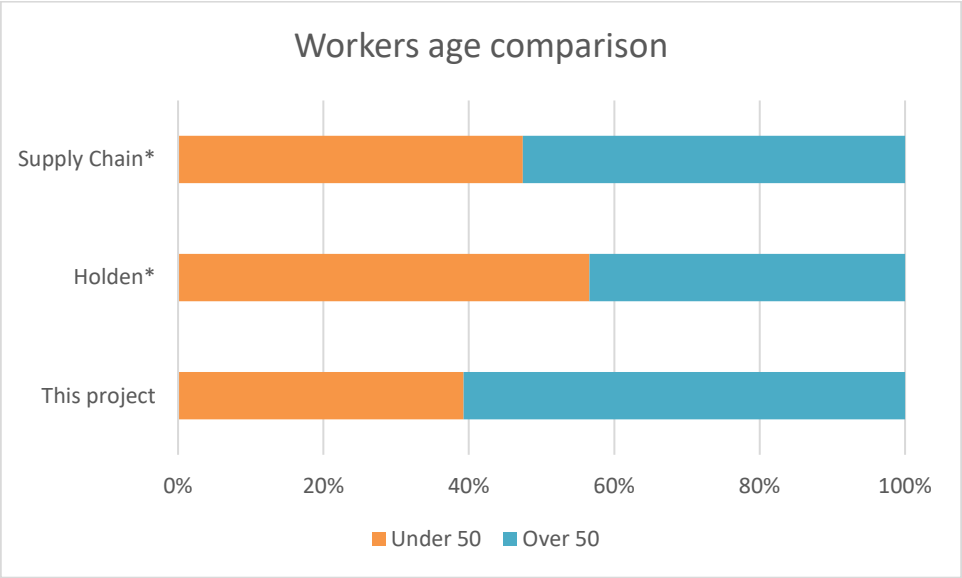
*Source: * Holden and Supply Chain figures (Australian Government, 2020)*

4.8.2 Age

At the time the participants left the automotive industry, eleven were under 50 years of age (with the youngest being 30 years), fourteen were between 50 and 59 years old, and the remaining three were over 60 years.

For comparative purposes, participants' age in this project has been calculated as the participant's age the year they left the industry, which ranged between 2013 and 2017. The Australian Government's (2020) report collated demographic data supplied by the three main car companies affected by the closure in Australia (Holden, Ford and Toyota); supply chain data collected by the Victorian State government; and their own survey data. Figure 5 below shows that, based on the Government's demographic profile of the industry, participants in this thesis skew older than average. With 42 percent of Holden workers and 46 percent of supply chain workers being over 50, compared to 61 percent of participants in this study.

Figure 11 Participants age comparison



**Holden and Supply Chain figures (Australian Government, 2020, p. 94 & 100)*

This is an imperfect but adequate way to compare the age of the participants given the difficulties comparing demographic data from multiple datasets across a moving timeline. Age profiles are only ever going to be able to provide a limited guide and this project has no intention of perfectly reflecting the industry's demographic profile (Charmaz, 2014; Mark N. K. Saunders & Townsend, 2016). It is, however, important to be cognisant of this discrepancy given the well documented difficulty older workers have securing work after closures (Armstrong et al., 2008; Cook et al., 2013; Davies et al., 2017) and that older workers are vulnerable to being precariously employed (Callan, Bowman, Fitzsimmons, & Poulsen, 2020; Jetha, Martin Ginis, Ibrahim, & Gignac, 2020; Rayner, 2018).

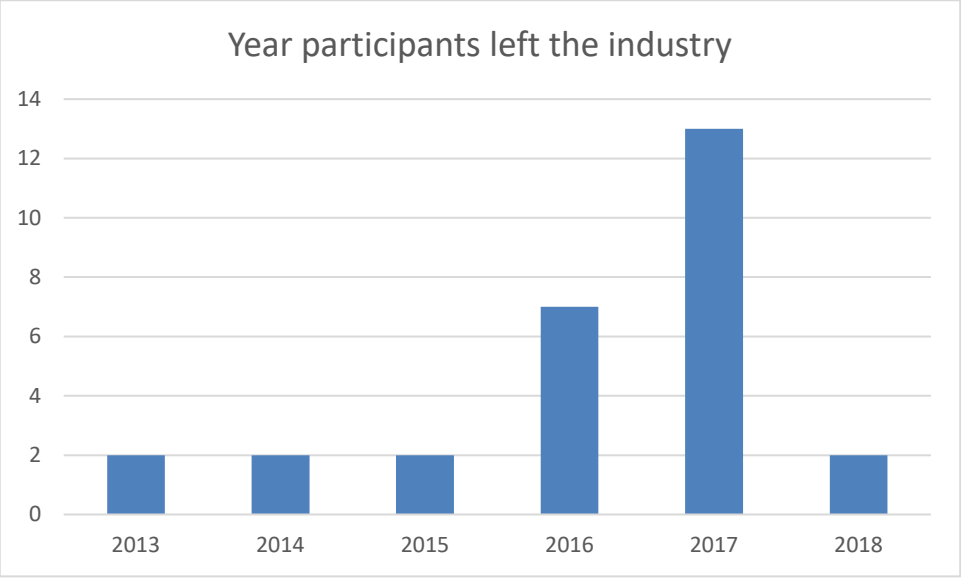
4.8.3 Years of service

Participants who had worked in the automotive manufacturing industry for a long time, or who had worked multiple jobs since leaving, had some difficulty narrowing down their exact start and finish dates; to counter this, participants were asked to estimate to the nearest year.

That said, the earliest a participant began working in the Australian automotive manufacturing industry was 1974 the latest was 2010. Many participants (Holden and supply chain alike) were still working in the industry in 2017 despite Holden announcing their closure in December 2013. In fact, two stayed into the following year (2018) to assist with the disassembly of their factories. Four participants left in late 2013/early 2014. The remaining nine chose to leave between 2015 and 2016.

Participants had worked in the industry for between eight and forty years. The mean length of time participants spent in the industry was 19.6 years; the median was 16 years. This mirrors similar figures from the Australian Government (2020) that indicate the average length of service of Holden workers was 17 years (Snell, Gekara, & Schermuly, 2016, p. 9). No average is supplied for supply chain companies, but it is expected to be slightly lower (Australian Government, 2020).

Figure 12: Year Participants left the industry



This work was considered a job for life and that was reflected by many of the participants who explained that they had intended to continue to do the same work, in the same factory, for the rest of their

working lives. Hamish worked across multiple employers in the industry, and although he knew to expect the closure he explained, in his first interview, that he '*always felt, in my heart of hearts, that common sense was going to prevail, and they were going to somewhere salvage it. Because I just felt that it was political pragmatism'.* Another participant, Bruce, put it bluntly: '*34 years is a long time to be in the same employment, and there's guys that are still there [in the supply chain] that have been there nearly 45 years - and I'm sure if that happened to them they wouldn't know what to do. So, it is hard'.*

For this reason, the closure came as a shock. And the shock of it is one of the reasons participants identified that it took time for them to realistically consider their next steps. This was also true of past closures and was one of the reasons best practice for closure transition programs advocates for early multi-sector mobilisation, including the early implementation of a response group or task force (Davies et al., 2017, p. 36). The longer period of time working in one industry, and, in some cases, role, also means that workers have limited transferrable skills.

4.8.4 Race and cultural background

Eleven participants were born overseas, and a handful that were born in Australia mentioned they were first-generation migrants. Although participants were not required to specify their cultural background, most did, and most came from and Anglo-Celtic or Central European background. Two participants had migrated from Asia (one from China, and one from Korea).

This speaks in part to both Elizabeth's and Holden's history. Elizabeth was built around the Holden car plant in the 1950s, as a 'worker's city' by the South Australian Housing Trust for mostly British migrants and their families (Peel, 1995b, p. 110). In 1971 64% of Elizabeth's population were British-born or Australian born with at least one British parent—the rate was substantially higher in some neighbourhoods—up to 80% in Elizabeth Downs and Elizabeth Fields (Peel, 1995b, pp. 135 - 136).

At the time of closure, it was reported that 24 percent of automotive workers spoke a language other than English as their primary language (Australian Government, 2020, p. 94).

4.8.5 Education

19 of the 28 participants had a non-school qualification, and at least 7 had left school before year 12 (or the equivalent internationally). Their qualifications included trade certificates and trade qualifications, technical diplomas, and two university courses.

The demographic profile of the automotive manufacturing industry indicates 77% of supply chain workers had finished year 12, and 67% had a post-school qualification (2020, p. 100). Education attainment data for Holden was limited, but we know 55% of Holden's workers were production workers, specifically vehicle builders and that most of them had a Certificate II or Certificate III; and 11% had trade qualifications (Snell et al., 2016, p. 10).

4.8.6 Location

Automotive workers tended to live in the suburbs surrounding the Holden site in Adelaide's north or the former Mitsubishi cite in Adelaide's south. The City of Playford, home of the Holden factory and many (though not all) of the supply-chain companies, is the most disadvantaged Local Government Area in the Greater Adelaide Region and one of the most disadvantaged urban areas in Australia (Hordacre et al., 2013, p.29).

4.8.7 Workplace

Seven participants had worked at Holden—eighteen in the supply chain (across fourteen different companies) and three at both Holden and in the supply chain over the course of their careers. Supply chain participants came from both large and smaller companies, including AI Automotive, Bridgestone, Munroes, Tennaco Automotive, Toyoda, Walkers, SMR Automotive, Car Components, TI Automotive, Hirotech, Woodbridge, TG Australia, SMR Automotive, and Futuris.

None of the supply chain participants had stayed at their companies after the industry's closure. This is a limitation given reports that only twenty of the seventy-five supply chain companies in South Australia closed as a result of the automotive closure (Australian Government, 2020, p. 48). This is likely this is a result of project participants being recruited through the state government's transition program; it makes sense that workers who did not lose their job may not have engaged with the

transition program, or they may have disconnected or stopped paying attention to the program's communications by the time the call-out for this project was made.

4.8.8 Positions

The majority of participants in this project (10) were production workers; four were leading hands within production. Of the remaining, three were qualified engineers, two tool makers, two welders, two supervisors, and one forklift driver, IT worker, quality control, storeman, and trainer.

Table 7: Positions held by participants

Roles	Number of participants
Production	10
Leading Hand	4
Engineer	3
Fitter and Turner / Tool Maker	2
Supervisor /Project Manager	2
Welder	2
Forklift Driver	1
Information Technology	1
Quality Control	1
Storeman	1
Trainer	1
Total	28

4.9 Ethics in Research

Ethics is fundamental to social research, and the primary ethical concern is the safety of participants. Ethical research is more than just ensuring participants are not exposed to undue risk or harm, though it certainly includes that (Walter, 2019). Ethical research requires researchers to be sensitive about their own behaviour and accurate and diligent in their acknowledgement of sources and other researchers' ideas (M. N. K. Saunders, 2019; Walter, 2019).

The Flinders University Human Research Ethics Committee requires all researchers who wish to undertake research involving human subjects to obtain ethics approval before commencing their study. Flinders University reviews human ethics applications in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2018). Approval was sought from the Low-Risk Panel of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and was received under Project No.8230 on 7 January 2019. As part

of the HREC submission the researcher submitted her project plan, preliminary literature review and interview questions.

Following an expression of interest, potential participants were sent an Information Pack that included a Signed Letter of Introduction, an Information Sheet, and a consent form. At the start of each interview, consent was also confirmed, and participants were reminded that their anonymity was guaranteed and that they could withdraw at any time or decline to answer a question. Participation in this research was voluntary. Two participants withdrew, one without explanation, and one as a result of illness.

The researcher was aware that in discussing their work (contemporary or historical) or job-seeking experiences that some participants might become distressed. To ensure safety, all participants were repeatedly reminded of their right to withdraw, and a safety protocol was developed to minimise the potential for emotional discomfort and to address it if it occurred.

If emotional discomfort were to occur, the researcher would:

- Offer to pause or completely stop the interview;
- Ask the participant if they had someone they could talk to about the issue at hand;
- Provide an information sheet with the details of relevant support services including Beyond Blue, the Fairwork Ombudsman, SafeWork SA and the SA Working Women's Centre (where appropriate);
- Have a conversation and make an assessment as to whether it is appropriate to resume the discussion or if it should be ended.

There were multiple instances of emotional discomfort, in every instance the protocol was followed. No participant chose to end the interview.

Another key component in ensuring participants' safety is maintaining anonymity. All participants expressed their interest directly to the researcher (Gemma Beale) such that no external party was aware of their participation in the project. In all publications and public presentations, pseudonyms have, and will be, adopted and any identifying information removed. In order to further ensure

anonymity, no one participant's account will be relied upon in such a way that their identity could be uncovered through their 'resume'.

Where positions are discussed, it is in the broadest terms possible so as not to allow participants, known to a reader, to be identified. Although supply chain workers came from fourteen different companies, some of them of considerable size, specific companies will not be named as workplaces for the same reason. Holden was deemed large enough, and the comparative distinction between experiences of Holden and supply chain company workers significant enough, to identify those participants who worked at Holden. In total seven participants had worked at Holden, eighteen in the supply chain and three at both Holden and in the supply chain over the course of their careers.

Participant anonymity and confidentiality was maintained over the course of this research and will be into the future. All information collected was confidential and can only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisors. There was no perceived risk beyond the participants normal day-to-day activities. All data is stored securely at Flinders University as required by the HREC.

4.10 Summary

The research was undertaken using a qualitative longitudinal design and constructivist grounded theory analysis. This thesis employed a fixed-panel longitudinal framework, wherein a single sample is followed in order to gather detailed information on changes in their characteristics (Smith et al., 2009, p. 22).

Twenty-eight former south Australian automotive manufacturing workers were recruited for three open-ended one-on-one interviews. The interviews were conducted at 6-month intervals beginning 15 months after Holden's closure in October of 2017. This study had an unusually high retention rate with 25 out of 28 participants engaging in all three interviews, totalling 79 qualitative interviews, spanning 16 months.

Constructivist grounded theory was selected to ensure that the findings may be of use for future instances of large-scale job loss during periods of high rates of precarious employment. Data analysis was conducted with the assistance of NVivo.

The next chapter presents the thesis' analysis and findings.

5 ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

5.1 Objective

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of the longitudinal qualitative data collected over the course of three waves of interviews, conducted at 6-month intervals, with 28 former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers. Constructivist grounded theory analysis was conducted in three stages after the completion of each round of interviews. The chapter details the way the interview data was analysed using constructivist grounded theory methodology and the thesis' core findings.

5.2 Introduction

The closure of the automotive manufacturing industry offered a unique opportunity to investigate the intersection of two areas of study that had, to date, remained largely isolated from one another. They were precarious work and industry closure. Australian automotive manufacturing workers had enjoyed some of the most stable and secure work in the Australian employment landscape and, as such, this thesis also provided an opportunity to explore the impact of precarious work on workers who were well accustomed to secure work.

This chapter will examine the core findings that emerged from the participants transition experiences. This chapter beings with a brief note on data truthfulness and the researchers approach to analysis and then the findings are presented in the same order as the research questions outlined in the methodology of the thesis. The findings were reached through the application of abductive reasoning common in constructivist grounded theory and through the use of NVivo for digital coding and categorisation in addition to manual coding, memoing, and analysis (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 200 - 204).

Each research question is informed by the extant literature on the topics of precarious work and of industry closures. They are:

> **RQ 1:** What were workers' experiences in the automotive industry and how did they feel about leaving the industry?

RQ 2: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?

RQ 2.a: To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious, and unemployed workers?

RQ 3: Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply chain?

The following section provides an overview of the researcher's approach to data analysis and a demographic summary of the participants in this thesis.

5.3 Data Analysis

The central concern of this thesis is the exploration of the intersections and impacts of high rates of precarious work on workers transitioning into new employment following industry closure. To address this, a longitudinal, qualitative case study was conducted using constructivist grounded theory. The data for this thesis includes all interview data, gathered at three points in time over the 18-month duration of the study. It consists of 79 interviews with 28 former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers.

5.3.1 Data truthfulness

Checking for qualitative data validity and accuracy was conducted by assessing whether the information obtained through the interviews was accurate. The accuracy of data about the automotive industry, transition services, and demographic data was triangulated with several sources including the large-scale automotive worker report produced by the Australian Government with assistance from Holden, Toyota, and Ford (Australian Government, 2020), contemporaneous governmental reports and information sheets, and the ABS. Triangulating the data in this way provided considerable confidence in the reliability and truthfulness of the interview data.

Transcription and coding of each round of analysis was completed before the next round of interviews was conducted, and this enabled the researcher to follow up and query any part of the previous interview that was confusing or unclear.

The primary focus of the thesis is workers' perspectives and experiences of industry closure and their transition into new employment during a period of high rates of precarious work. Subjective experiences such as expectations, intentions, and reasons for making choices are prone to recall error—the longitudinal design of this thesis enabled the collection of information about workers' expectations and decision-making processes comparatively untainted by subsequent outcomes; this is incredibly important for this research and not possible with any other form of data collection (Lynn, 2009, p.8).

5.3.2 Approach to data analysis

As detailed in the Methodology (Chapter 4) constructivist grounded theory *analysis* was applied in line with the research framework adapted from Charmaz (2014, p. 18) in four key stages (Figure 8, Section 4.5).

The first three stages of analysis involved the researcher transcribing and open coding each wave of interviews. The interviews were coded using NVivo in order to help manage the large amount of data produced, and the researcher used memoing and manual coding during the interviewing, transcription and analysis process'. The memos, taken by the researcher during the interview and transcription stages, were examined and revisited throughout the analysis to help ensure data was not overlooked (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014, 2017, 2021).

The final stage of analysis involved a process of abductive reasoning that included revisiting the entirety of the longitudinal data produced as part of the thesis. It included tracking participant outcomes over the course of the study; the comparison and identification of emergent themes over time; the completion of the literature review; and the analysis and findings, discussion, and conclusion chapters of this thesis.

5.3.3 The participants

The participants' demographic data is presented in Table 8 to help contextualise the participant cohort. It is a deidentified and summarised in the case classification table produced using NVivo. Ordered by participant age, it shows that 17 of the 28 participants were 50 years or older, most were men, and almost every participant (25 of 28) had worked in the automotive manufacturing industry for more than a decade.

Table 8: Participant Demographics (sorted by age)

Pseudonym	Gender	Left the auto industry (year)	Left the auto industry (age)	Last position in the auto industry	Holden or Supply Chain	Years in auto industry	Interviews participated in
Jack	Male	2013	30	Project Manager	Holden	13	1, 2, 3
Andreas	Male	2017	37	Production	Holden	14	1, 2, 3
Alice	Female	2016	41	Leading Hand	Holden and Supply Chain	10	1, 2, 3
Michael	Male	2017	42	Production	Supply Chain	16	1, 2, 3
Stephen	Male	2016	42	Engineer	Holden and Supply Chain	17	1 and 3
Tim	Male	2018	44	IT	Supply Chain	8	1, 2, 3
Barry	Male	2016	46	Production	Supply Chain	13	1, 2, 3
Christopher	Male	2015	46	Leading Hand	Supply Chain	14	1, 2, 3
Lloyd	Male	2017	46	Production	Holden	28	1, 2, 3
Matthew	Male	2016	47	Production	Supply Chain	30	1, 2, 3
Rosemary	Female	2015	48	Engineer	Supply Chain	7	1, 2, 3
Sarah	Female	2016	50	Production	Supply Chain	12	1
Simon	Male	2016	50	Forklift	Supply Chain	13.5	1, 2, 3
Richard	Male	2017	51	Quality Control	Holden	14	1, 2, 3
Toby	Male	2014	51	Storeman	Supply Chain	29	1, 2, 3
Walter	Male	2016	52	Leading Hand	Supply Chain	27	1, 2, 3
Cameron	Male	2017	53	Production	Holden	19.6	1, 2, 3
George	Male	2017	53	Fitter and Turner	Supply Chain	9	1, 2, 3
Robert	Male	2018	54	Engineer	Supply Chain	26	1, 2, 3
Rebecca	Female	2017	55	Welder	Supply Chain	15	1, 2, 3
Ted	Male	2017	55	Leading Hand	Supply Chain	28	1, 2, 3
Frank	Male	2017	57	Welder	Supply Chain	16	1, 2, 3
Hamish	Male	2013	57	Trainer	Holden and Supply Chain	30	1, 2, 3
Shaun	Male	2017	57	Production	Supply Chain	17	1, 2, 3
Garry	Male	2017	58	Production	Holden	30	1
Bruce	Male	2017	60	Tool Maker	Supply Chain	33	1, 2, 3
Joseph	Male	2017	60	Production	Holden	15	1, 2, 3
Phillip	Male	2014	60	Supervisor	Supply Chain	16	1, 2, 3

Table 8 also depicts the diversity of roles, ranging from production line to supervisor, represented in this participant pool and the incredibly high participant retention rate of this thesis, with only two participants withdrawing completely (one due to sickness, one without explanation), and one participant (Stephen) who was unavailable for the second interview but returned for the third.

This overarching demographic profile is consistent with the demographics of the automotive manufacturing industry that was dominated by older men, with an average tenure of 17 years with their employers (Australian Government, 2020).

5.4 Findings

Constructivist grounded theory analysis requires the researcher maintains a constant sensitivity to 'emergent' themes. This was managed through the concurrent use of manual note-taking, in addition to coding and memoing facilitated by NVivo.

The next sections present the key findings of this thesis as they relate to the research questions.

5.5 Research Question 1: What were workers experiences in the automotive industry and how did they feel about leaving the industry?

To understand the transition experiences of South Australian automotive manufacturing workers, the researcher sought to first gain an understanding of participants experiences in the industry they had left. Participants were asked about their time making cars, including how long they had been working, how they first secured work in the industry, and what role/s they had held.

During the first wave of interviews, participants were also asked if they enjoyed their work in the automotive industry. Participants were then asked the same question about any subsequent work they found once they left the industry. During the initial stage of open coding participants' comments on their time in the automotive industry were coded in NVivo into three broad categories of 'Positive experience working in auto industry' and 'Negative experience working in auto industry' and a third category of 'General experience working in the auto industry'. During subsequent focused coding, the first two categories of positive and negative experiences developed into themes, while the third category of generalised experiences was excluded from the study as it largely contained participants' neutral explanations of their job (tasks, start times, and other miscellaneous commentary).

5.5.1 Finding 1: Employment security bred a love of work

One reoccurring sentiment, and key finding of this thesis, was how positively participants spoke about their time working in the automotive manufacturing industry, in some cases how much they 'loved' it. This is not to imply there were no complaints, or that they were not subject to some of them same

doldrums or industrial disputes that come from working at the same place, and in the same industry, for a long time. But their workplaces—Holden and the supply chain alike—were recurringly likened to 'a family', and so many participants were grieving that loss.

Table 9, produced in NVivo, shows that overwhelmingly the participants spoke positively of their time in the industry, with 187 positive references over 29 interviews compared to 42 negative comments over 20 interviews. Table 9, derived from coding conducted in NVivo, presents the aggregated interview and reference count for each theme (highlighted in green at the top of the table) and the sub-categories ordered by the number of interviews they occurred in.

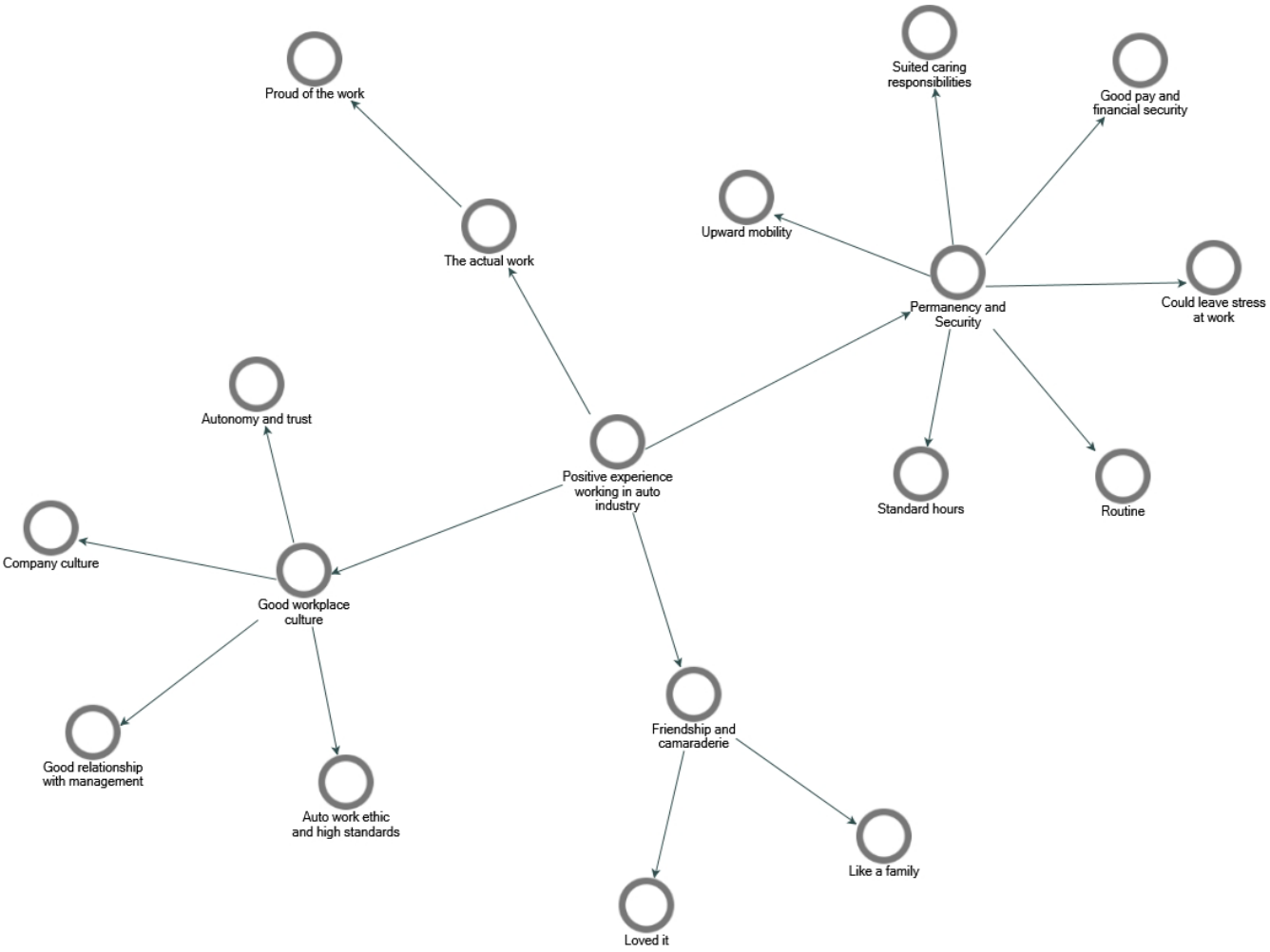
Table 9: NVivo Coding: Positive Experiences in the SA Automotive Industry

Code	Interviews	References
Positive experience working in auto industry	27	177
Friendship and camaraderie	13	18
Auto work ethic and high standards	10	17
Good pay and financial security	9	12
Autonomy and trust	9	12
Standard hours	7	8
Loved it	7	12
Good relationship with management	5	6
Company culture	5	5
Like a family	4	11
Upward mobility	3	4
The actual work	3	3
Proud of the work	3	6
Suited caring responsibilities	2	2
Routine	2	2
Could leave stress at work	1	3

The data demonstrates that the overwhelming majority (25 out of 28) of participants spoke positively about their time making cars. A core tenant of constructivist grounded theory is the exploration of the meaning participants give to their experiences (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser et al., 1967), and the participants of this thesis ascribed significant meaning to their time working in this industry. In order to fully comprehend workers transition experiences, it is important to understand the industry they are transitioning out of.

Table 9 shows that participants ascribed their positive experiences in the automotive industry first to '**friendship and camaraderie'** which, in some cases, saw participants refer to their (former) workplaces as 'like a family'. During the focused coding stage, the researcher grouped the remaining codes into three additional categories: first, **permanency and security,** which included the initial codes 'standard hours' that 'suited caring responsibilities', fostered 'routine', and allowed workers to 'leave work-stress at work', for which they received 'good pay and financial security' and 'upward mobility'. Then **the 'actual work',** which included a sense of 'pride' and, finally, **good workplace culture** represented by the codes 'work ethic and high standards', 'good relationships with management', 'company culture', and 'autonomy and trust'. This coding map, produced in Nvivio, is depicted in Figure 12, for ease.

Figure 13: Coding tree: Positive experiences working in the auto industry



When considered through the lens of the framework of employment in/security, it is apparent that many of the positive components of working in the automotive industry can be related directly, and indirectly, to secure ongoing employment rather than the mechanics of car making.

5.5.1.1 ***Permanency and security***

In the instance of the 'permanency and security' code, it is a very straightforward relationship. 'Upward mobility' is closely related to career pathways offered through employment security. And work-time security is evident in the presence of 'standard hours', 'routine', 'suited caring responsibilities', and 'could leave stress at work'. Strict work-time security meant a firm delineation between work-time and home-time, as Richard explains:

> ***Richard****: Once that siren went, that's it, you're turned off.*
>
> ***Researcher****: and that was a good thing?*
>
> ***Richard****: it was a good thing. It means that mentally there was no worries or—as long as you were prepared to just turn up, do as you were told, go home at the end of the day there was nothing else to worry about.*

This work-time security, in conjunction with the timing of the shift times, also enabled participants to pick up their children after school, as Andreas and Christopher discuss below.

> ***Andreas****: I finished at just after 2 o'clock so I was able to quickly get to the school and pick the kids—well, my oldest daughter - up from school.*

> ***Christopher****: And we'd finish up by about, I think it was, 2:30pm was our official knock-off time. Normally we'd be out of there by about 3pm to get home for the school run for the kids.*

5.5.1.2 ***Friendship and camaraderie***

In the instances of **'friendship and camaraderie**' and 'like a family', the relationship is, though still apparent, less conspicuous. Lloyd, one of multiple workers who described '*loving'* car making, worked on Holden's production line for thirty years. When asked to elaborate, he explained that:

> ***Lloyd:*** *I just loved it. It was one of those places, when I first started there—I thought: 6 months to a year and I'll be out. Then a year came, I thought; oh okay, probably another 6 months to a year. And before I knew it 10 years had gone.*

It is important, however, to be wary of romanticising this industry. Oftentimes, the work could be physically taxing and repetitive. Christopher, who was retrenched in his late 40s, speaks bluntly to this sentiment:

> ***Christopher:*** *I mean all jobs are slightly repetitive and it was a bit of 'same sh*t, different day'. But there would always be something that would be—even if it was an annoying thing, like a machine breaking down. It would still add that little bit of variety to keep it reasonably interesting.*

Likewise, Hamish, who worked in the industry across multiple workplaces, over the course of forty years, reminds us that loving the work does not mean there were no complaints or that workers were not subject to the kind of industrial grievances you would expect from working at the same place, and in the same industry, for a long time:

> ***Hamish:*** *I absolutely loved it. There was - like in all jobs - there was some troubling times along the way. But you overcome those.*

Hamish and Christopher's love of their work, despite its more mundane or frustrating elements, mirrors the sentiment of other participants who recurringly likened their workplaces, Holden and supply chain companies alike, to a 'family'. A large part of the enjoyment of the work was attributed to a sense of camaraderie and friendship with their colleagues. Participants repeatedly identified their former colleagues as a central reason they enjoyed the work and, later, one of the main things they missed after they left the industry.

What became clear throughout the analysis was that this long-term workforce fostered long-term friendships, reflected in the codes 'friendship and camaraderie' and 'like a family'. And that a long-term workforce is reliant on employment stability. For example, the stability of employment offered by Holden meant that, after 14 years there, Andreas had worked with some of his colleagues for 'about' a decade:

> ***Andreas:*** *Because most of them there, you'd worked with them—well, in the end, I'd worked with a couple of the same people for about 10 years. It was like a little family.*

Barry echoes the importance of long-term working relationships, explaining that in manufacturing the friendships were also about trust and safety:

> ***Barry:*** *Probably the loss of network is the biggest difference—or negative. Because you're working with these guys—me being one of the safety reps—you've got their back and they've got your back. And you know that if something happens—it was like an extended family.*

Andreas and Barry were not alone in likening their workplaces to a family; Walter, who worked on the production line in the supply chain for twenty-seven years, repeatedly referred to the relationships with his former colleagues as familial:

> ***Walter:*** *It was two families. When I went to work it was my family there, and I came home, and it was my other family.*

He also described the importance of other acts of workplace comradery; explaining that on Saturdays they would place bulk orders of '60 to 100' Vietnamese rolls for lunch but that on special occasions some of his Vietnamese co-workers would make enough pho (Vietnamese soup) for the entire shift's lunch break, while the remaining workers covered their workload:

> ***Walter:*** *The girls they would bring in Pho, Vietnamese soup. They would make a big pot. So, all the other girls would cover their work. And they would make it.*
>
> *And then when it came to the 20-minute break we would have a big bowl of soup together. It was fantastic. You don't see that anymore.*
>
> *People don't actually realise we had 48 different cultures and we worked together as a team.*

Moments like Walter's shared pho, or the Saturday barbeques other participants mentioned at Holden, could be dismissed as hardly central to the work. But that would be unwise. For some, like James, these shared moments over meals were fundamental to the work:

> ***Walter****: The saddest thing is, the thing that I miss the most, when it [the industry] did shut; Friday night pizza night. It took me 3 months to get over that. That it wasn't happening anymore.*

What is apparent from this research is that, for a lot of these workers, the loss of the work meant the loss of more than just a job or their income. Although the loss of work and income was, and is, significant, for some, the closure of the industry meant the loss of a significant portion of their social networks and, in extreme cases, led to social isolation and depression as is discussed in Section 5.7.

5.5.1.3 ***Good workplace culture***

The focused code of good workplace culture emerged from some of the more nebulous or subjective components of work. Participants spoke of being attracted to the high standards of automotive

manufacturing, specifically. Rosemary worked as an engineer who migrated to Australia for work. She worked in a supply chain company for seven years and explained she was attracted to the high standards and quality of work in the automotive industry:

> ***Rosemary:*** *You know. In the automotive industry, one project lasts more than two years. So different projects are at different stages. You always have something to do. Because I need—for example: I need to run test specification, test plan, and also as a team we do like, design failure analysis, product design, process design involves many, many things.*
>
> *And at product launch stage that means we hand over the new product to the production people, that means we need to train them. And we have many times—a trial production, like a small scale—to check our design and our product design and our process design for any problems.*
>
> *Because automotive industry is very—we make high volume product so everything has to be very robust. If you have glitch during production you lose productivity then unit cost will be higher. So it's not allowed.*
>
> *Automotive has the best system than any industry, apart from maybe aviation. We have very strict systems you have to follow. And you have to try many times to make sure the failure rate is—like—it's professional jargon—we have to check that process capability indicator is high enough. That means that you almost—we're talking about six sigma—like every million only have less than like 6/40 units. Something like that.*
>
> ***Researcher****: almost perfect?*
>
> ***Rosemary****: yeah, almost perfect.*

This sentiment was echoed in other interviews and aligns closely with the code of 'autonomy and trust'. Despite these high standards, participants also appreciated a sense of autonomy ranging from a relaxed sense of trust Jack describes at Holden or Joseph in a supply-chain company…

> ***Jack:*** *So long as you were doing your job, they were pretty relaxed with the way they treated you.*
>
> *- - -*
>
> ***Joseph****: I don't know, I think it's just—it was just the routine you had. You had a routine and you knew exactly what you had to do, and nobody really bothered you as long as the job was done. And it was done properly. So they were happy.*

…to a much broader intersection of the importance of responsibility, autonomy, and company culture described by Toby. Toby, a 55-year-old storeman, 'loved' working at the same supply chain company for twenty-nine years. For him, the trust and autonomy offered to him as a storeman was life changing.

> ***Toby:*** *Because I took responsibility, coming from a low education base—you get more… your education is part of your life. How to do a job, how to talk to people, and how to organise people. So it was a great job. And the owners were fantastic.*

Later in the same interview, he described missing the industry because:

> ***Toby:*** *You actually got somewhere, you were looking ahead and you could plan. And you could think.*

In this way, Toby is drawing a clear line between autonomy and good company culture and, in this instance, permanent employment. Permanency offered Toby stability and the opportunity to plan for the future. And he valued that incredibly highly. He actively chased permanency after he left the industry, deliberately working undesirable shifts as a casual labour-hire for two and a half years in what would be a successful attempt to endear himself to management at his new company.

> ***Toby****: You get cluey—and they [the employer] say: what's your priority? What shift?*
>
> *So, number one: night shift. Because nobody wants to do night shift, or they do night shift but they take time off. Up to this stage I showed up every shift being casual. Every shift: yes, I'm here.*
>
> *So they look at your attendance record and think: yeah, okay. And they go along and you say to them: I'm going to be here I will show up every day for you.*
>
> *And I said I would do night shift for you if you give me permanency and full hours, I will do night shift for you.*

As such, in considering good workplace culture in the context of employment security, we can see a positive reciprocal relationship between satisfied employees and employers that trust their workers.

5.5.1.4 ***The actual work***

The final element of participants' positive experiences in the industry, 'the actual work', reflects the unique nature of manufacturing. Participants discussed enjoying and being proud of *making* something concrete. Sarah, who was a welder in the supply chain for ten years, counters what she perceived as a public dismissal or belittling of manufacturing work:

> ***Sarah:*** *I mean whatever I did - many people think: this is a job and they don't care much. But for me, whenever a product comes out from my hand, I was very proud of myself: I could make this!*

Cameron was also proud of making cars and explained the tangible importance of his job at Holden:

> ***Cameron:*** *I worked on b-line, where we made engine compartments. We used to make the engine compartments on the commodore. It holds your bumper on and it's your front crash protection and it holds your engine in—so it's a very important part of the car. It's your primary safety in a head-on collision.*

This relationship between the tangible nature of automotive manufacturing, the high standards of the industry, and a sense of responsibility for public safety informed participants' sense of pride. Stephen was an engineer at Holden who worked on what he called 'safety critical' checks.

> ***Stephen:*** *That's automotive. And you do have to do it [high standard of safety checks] because you can't trust people. We all do it. you don't mean to do it. The day that the lady doesn't put the needle tester down the break hose and the little tiny piece of steel tubing that's inside of there, that's a buffer, if that isn't correct then she hasn't tested that and if someone puts that on the car you won't know until—guess when?*
>
> *We know this: when the car turns hard-lock left and goes down a gutter, that's when you'll know. It's a freak of a thing, it's happened before and people can die.*

In this way, workers were grieving not only the loss of their job and social networks, *and* the loss of secure employment, but also the loss of a very specific type of work that they had genuinely enjoyed and believed to be very important.

This finding supports research from past closures, but what is significant about this finding is that it also alludes to how significant a change this was for many of the workers, a change that extended beyond the difficulties of retraining in a new career and finding a new job. First, because they loved this work, and part of that love was attributed to the security of a job for life and the sense of being part of something bigger. Second, because there is a tendency to conceptualise much of this work as unskilled and therefore unfulfilling and that was certainly not reflected in this research. And finally, because issues occurred in the transition program when participants encountered people (at transition centres or elsewhere along their transition journey) who did not appreciate this, who they perceived as being insufficiently sympathetic to their loss, or who they felt were trying to minimise their skills and

experience. At the far end of the spectrum, this led to complete disengagement with transition support programs

5.5.2 Acknowledging Negative Experiences in Automotive Manufacturing

Turning briefly to the data on participants' negative experiences in the automotive industry, reflected in Table 10, produced using NVivo, it is noteworthy that the largest incidence of negativity (14 references across 12 interviews) was attributed to the loss of morale and increased workload following the announcement the industry would close.

Table 10: Negative Experiences in the SA Automotive Industry

Code	Interviews	References
Negative experience working in auto industry	**20**	**42**
Downturn	12	14
Sexism	2	5
Workplace injury	1	1
Stress	1	1
Racism	1	1
Dispute with HR	1	1
Glad to leave auto industry*	2	2

The responses from Phillip and Rosemary, two participants who had worked in the industry for 16 and 11 years, respectively, are typical examples of this phenomenon.

In fact, Phillip decided to leave the industry early, taking a voluntary redundancy in late 2014, in part because of what he perceived as a palpable drop in morale:

> ***Phillip:*** *Morale went right down. Because a lot of the men—some of them had worked there since they were 16 years old. They didn't know any other job. When that started happening you could see the morale changing. The men didn't care anymore: 'It doesn't matter if I don't do my job, I'm going to get the sack anyway, so who cares'.*

Other participants mentioned the change in tasks and responsibilities as staff began to leave and companies stopped designing new products. Rosemary was a quality engineer for one of the larger supply chains and she describes some of the difficulties of duty allocation while the company was downsizing:

> ***Rosemary:*** *Because some people had been fired - voluntary redundancy –their responsibility was spread over the remaining people. But there was no clear allocation of who was doing what.*

And things were getting very slow. Like, we have a project meeting they say: 'oh Sam, for example, is responsible for this part' but he's on holiday because he's collected so many years of leave, he's on leave. Then, [there was] no clear assignment of while he's away who's going to do his job. So, we'll wait for him to come back.

So, one job, in the past, you would be finished in one day, was dragged, and dragged. You don't know how long. I'm a quality engineer. I have to submit each phase of a document to OEM, like Holden and Toyota. If one part was delayed, you can't do your part. So, it was very, very inefficient.

…So, I felt frustrated even though it was a nice job to do, you still use too much energy—I got stressed so I decided to quit.

These findings speak to some of the internal difficulties of managing industry closure rather than to participants' transition experiences. As such, once the 'downturn' code is eliminated, some negative components of the work, including racism and sexism, though very serious, are not unexpected in such a large workforce.

Two (of the four) women participants in this thesis reported instances of serious sexual harassment and workplaces that were not considerate of women workers. Sarah described attending a work-mandated welding course at TAFE in the early 2000s that she was unable to complete because the equipment was not suited to smaller bodies.

Sarah: *…he [the welding trainer] told me that I have no talent so I couldn't pass. Even the helmet didn't fit, it was too big for me. I was trying really hard, I wanted to get the certificate but, in the end, they didn't give it to me.*

As an Asian migrant, she also explained that over the course of twelve years in the supply chain she was a victim of racialised and sexualised harassment from co-workers that had sometimes left her in tears '*because I'm also different—all of them were white, Australian kind of men it was very tough'.*

Similarly, although Alice enjoyed working in the automotive industry, she was glad to leave her supply chain company after what she described as management's failure to treat multiple allegations of bullying and sexual harassment against one perpetrator seriously.

Alice: *There were sexual harassment claims and the person was never fired or even demoted. And I actually placed on of those sexual harassment claims myself, against this person. And about 3 other women did within 5 – 8 years, placed sexual harassment claims against this*

person. And then in the last couple of days before I left, I was made to train that person up in my job.

These accounts are serious, and it is important that, in documenting the positive elements of this work, this thesis does not dismiss its darker side. The participants of this study, including both women above, overwhelmingly spoke positively of their time in the automotive manufacturing industry, but it would be inauthentic and misleading to omit these issues.

5.6 Research Question 2: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?

To determine participants' exposure to precarious work, this thesis applied the qualitative framework for employment in/security established in Figure 2 of Section 3.5 (page 60). The four elements of precarious work applied to this qualitative study are **employment in/security** (the risk of job loss as well as the loss of paid hours), **working-time in/security** (predictability and consistency of working hours), **economic in/security** (adequacy and stability of income), and **access to rights and entitlements** (access to social benefits and employment conditions including paid leave).

5.6.1 Finding 2: Every participant who found work experienced at least one component of precarious work.

The longitudinal qualitative design of this thesis found that precarious work is a more pernicious problem than past studies have suggested. Every participant who found work experienced at least one component of precarious work. This stands in contrast to the accepted wisdom informed by the Mitsubishi closure in South Australia that (three years after the closure) one third of workers found full-time work, one third were unemployed or under-employed, and one third had left the workforce (Beer et al., 2006; Browne-Yung et al., 2020).

The central finding of this thesis is that, in the almost three years (29 months) following the industry closure, the only participants not to experience at least one component of precarious work were three participants who were unable to secure *any* work during this period. Table 11 is a crosstab table produced using NVivo that depicts the presence of working-time insecurity, economic insecurity, limited rights and entitlements, and employment insecurity for each participant over time. It

demonstrates that over the course of this study every participant who found work experienced at least one of the four components of precarious work.

Table 11 also includes the presence of a fifth coding element: unemployment. Employment insecurity and unemployment are undoubtedly intertwined concepts and experiences. Although unemployment is distinct from precarious employment, it is the most severe risk, or threat, of precarious work. Periods of unemployment have also been shown to make workers more likely to accept precarious jobs as they become more desperate for work.

Table 11: Crosstab table: Participant exposure to components of precarious work, over-time

Pseudonym	Employment Insecurity	Income Insecurity	Work-Time Insecurity	Limited Rights and Entitlements	Unemployment	Components of Precarity[4]
Barry	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Tim	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Garry	No	No	No	No	Yes	0/4
Jack	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	1/4
Lloyd	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3/4
George	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Andreas	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	2/4
Simon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Rebecca	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	3/4
Phillip	No	No	No	No	Yes	0/4
Joseph	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	1/4
Rosemary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Frank	No	No	No	No	Yes	0/4
James	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Walter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Sarah	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Hamish	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3/4
Bruce	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	2/4
Matthew	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Cameron	No	No	No	No	Yes	0/4
Richard	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	3/4
Christopher	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Shaun	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Alice	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3/4
Robert	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
Stephen	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	2/4
Ted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	4/4
Toby	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4/4
TOTAL	19/28 (68%)	16/28 (56%)	21/28 (75%)	26/28 (93%)	105/140 (75%)	

Over the course of the three waves of interviews, participants were asked about their employment situation since their last interview (or, in the case of the first interview, since the closure of the automotive industry). If they had work, they were asked what type of contract they were on and, if their hours, shifts, and income were consistent week to week. They were also asked to talk more

[4] Unemployment is not considered a component of precarity.

generally about their work and their satisfaction with it. It was through this more generalised line of questioning that some of the less common components of precarious work emerged. In three separate instances, it was not until quite late in the interview that a participant thought to mention they had done some work, often for less than a week, during the interview period.

Figure 14 isolates the exposure to the four components of precarious work at each wave of interviews in addition to unemployment. In Figure 14, the researcher has combined three crosstab tables, produced using NVivo, that capture the presence of each component of precarious work for each wave of this longitudinal study. They are presented side by side in order for the reader to more easily visualise changes in employment over time. It shows that participants' exposure to each of the elements of precarious work fluctuated over the course of the study. This finding is important because it shows participants' employment outcomes were not static or linear. Participants' exposure to each component of precarious work is totalled in the final column of the table.

Figure 14: Crosstab Longitudinal Analysis: exposure to components of precarious work

Figure 14 Key
1 = Employment Insecurity
2 = Income Insecurity
3 = Working-Time Insecurity
4 = Limited Rights and Entitlements

Pseudonym	Round 1				Round 2				Round 3			
	15 months after closure				21 months after closure				27 months after closure			
Component of PW	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Alice	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Andreas	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Barry	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bruce	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cameron	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Christopher	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Frank	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Garry	No	No	No	No	Exited the study				Exited the study			
George	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Hamish	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Jack	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
James	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Joseph	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Lloyd	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Matthew	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Phillip	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Rebecca	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Richard	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Robert	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rosemary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sarah	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Exited the study				Exited the study			
Shaun	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Simon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stephen	No	Yes	No	Yes	Unavailable for this interview				No	No	No	No
Ted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tim	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Toby	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Walter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Total	16/28	13/28	11/28	16/28	12/25	11/25	9/25	10/25	14/26	14/26	10/26	13/26

A participant was considered employed if they self-reported as having worked during the interview period. In instances where participants had experienced unemployment *and* employment in the six-month period between interviews, their interview transcripts were coded to reflect this. In this way,

the data is not a static representation of their employment situation on the day of their interviews but of their exposure to precarious work over the entirety of the research period.

If participants had employment, they were asked what contract type they were employed on and if it was ongoing in order to determine employment in/security and access to rights and entitlements. They were also asked if their income and working hours were consistent week to week to determine if they were experiencing worktime or income insecurity. Using this framework, the data shows that, almost three years after closure, the only participants who had not experienced at least one of the objective components of precarious employment (employment insecurity, worktime insecurity, income insecurity, restricted access to rights and entitlements) were the few who had been unable to find *any work* since leaving the industry.

Through longitudinal, qualitative analysis, this researcher was able to identify changes in employment status over time that would not have been possible through quantitative methods, in part because many elements of precarious work are difficult to identify without further inquiry through additional questions. For example, some participants were working full-time hours on casual contracts, while others had held multiple jobs in the period between interviews and so cycled in and out of work-types over time.

Two participants found standard employment immediately after they left the industry. By the final round of interviews, almost three years after closure, that number had only grown to five participants. Some participants were working full-time hours, or close to, on casual contracts or through sole-contracting arrangements. Ten participants were employed precariously, nine were experiencing long term-unemployment but still looking for work, and two had left the labour market after 'giving up' on the hope of work.

5.6.2 Finding 3: Qualitative insights into the experience of the components of precarious work

This Section explores participants' experiences of the four key components of precarious work: employment insecurity, economic insecurity, working-time insecurity, and limited rights and entitlements.

Table 12, produced in NVivo, depicts the number of files (where each file represents one interview) and references (within each interview) that were coded to each of the four components of precarious work. It is important to note that a 'reference' can be a relatively large portion of an interview. Each category consists of codes that describe or define their overarching category *and* experiential manifestations of each component, as is explored further in the following sections.

Table 12: NVivo codes: Components of Precarious Work

Code	Files	References
Employment Insecurity	44	124
Economic Insecurity	39	112
Working-time Insecurity	30	174
Limited Rights and Entitlements	40	121

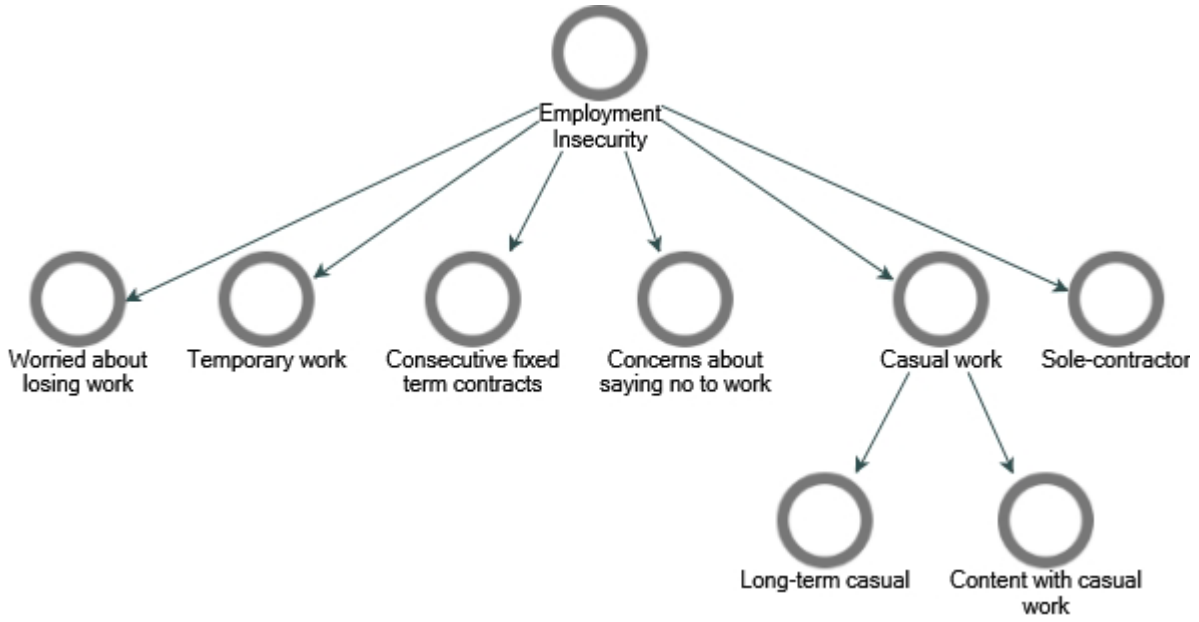
What is apparent is that each component of precarious work has a relatively similar coding presence in this thesis. This is reflective of the intertwined nature of these components and of that fact that some of the secondary codes were present in more than one of the core components of precarious work. For example, the code 'casual work' is present in 'employment insecurity' and 'limited rights and entitlements' because the nature of the casual contract in Australia means that casual workers have (almost) no employment security *and* limited access to the rights and entitlements of standard work as detailed in Section 4.5.1 and 4.5.4, respectively.

The intertwined nature of the components of precarious work makes it difficult to separate any one component wholly from another; however, the following section explores some of the experiential impacts of each of these components of precarious work on the participants.

5.6.2.1 ***Employment insecurity***

Figure 15 is a coding hierarchy map, created using NVivo, of the codes in this category. Within this category, the most common sources of employment insecurity were the result of casual contracts and unemployment. As established in Section 3.5.4.1 casual workers experience employment insecurity because they can lose both hours and work without notice, and limited rights and entitlements, because they do not accrue any paid leave entitlements and, in the case that they are fired, are not entitled to any financial compensation. Casual employment is a common form of precarious work in Australia and this data reflects that.

Figure 15: Coding Hierarchy Map: Employment Insecurity



No participants in this study were employed on permanent part-time contracts. One was employed on consecutive short-term contracts; although his work was otherwise stable and consistent, he was at risk of losing work through contract non-renewal. The other elements of this category 'worried about losing work' and 'concerned about saying no to work' are both manifestations of employment insecurity rather than defining features of it.

Protective power of financial security

It is important to acknowledge that not everyone experiencing employment insecurity was experiencing ontological precarity. This is consistent with findings from Lain et al. (2019), among others, who found 'house-hold circumstances' including homeownership, household composition, and financial resources can act as a buffer between precarious work and ontological precarity. In this thesis, the code 'content with casual work' is reflective of this, and participants largely attributed it to being debt and mortgage-free, which meant fluctuating work and income was not as serious a concern for them, as is discussed further in the following Section. A sense of financial security also enabled participants to pursue their preference for reduced working hours on their path to retirement. Richard's perspective below is typical of this position. He left Holden in his early 50s and found a full-time casual job working on the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN). Because his employment was tied to a finite federal government program, there was an added level of precarity to

it as he was aware the project, and therefore his job, was coming to an end at an unspecified time in the foreseeable future:

> ***Richard**: So, when the NBN finishes then I'll have to decide what I'm going to do.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Okay are you worried about that?*
>
> ***Richard**: No, I'm not worried about it at all.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Why aren't you worried, not to suggest that you should be, I'm just interested?*
>
> ***Richard**: Probably because I don't have the financial pressures of a mortgage, or things like that. So, in reality, I can probably do casual work 3 days a week and still manage quite well.*

Here Richard clearly articulates the protective power of his existing 'household circumstances' against some of the more negative impacts of precarious work, namely the fear of the loss of income and of work.

Normalisation of precarious work

Other participants were content with precarious work because they believed that if they were to lose their job suddenly, they would be able to find work elsewhere with relative ease. Rebecca, 56, at the time of leaving the automotive industry, retrained and found work in the aged care sector after being a welder in the supply chain for fifteen years, and she spoke to both points in her third interview:

> ***Researcher:** Last time we spoke, you said that you wanted to stay as a casual. Is that still what you want?*
>
> ***Rebecca:** Yes, I don't want to be permanent. They said in the government job you will never be permanent. And I thought: that's fine I'm quite happy with that.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Gives you a little bit more flexibility, is that the idea?*
>
> ***Rebecca**: It does. And if you're not happy, you don't have to work. You can just finish straight away, within about half an hour, she said.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Wow.*
>
> ***Rebecca**: I said: oh gosh, I would never do that. I'm not that kind of person. And she said: it works our way as well, if we need to get rid of you—we don't have to give you any notice. So, it's a two way street.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Does that concern you at all, that you could lose work with that little notice?*
>
> ***Rebecca**: No, because they're just crying out for people in aged care. So, if I did lose my job, I'm quite sure that I would get another job.*

Although Rebecca cites being able to find work relatively easily as her main reason for being content with casual work, it is also worth noting that her partner was employed, she was not supporting any dependents, and had paid off her mortgage. Rebecca relaying being told that '*in a government job you will never be permanent'* also speaks to the wide-spread normalisation of precarious work in the aged care sector.

'Permanent doesn't mean what it used to'

This is related to an interesting finding of this thesis, reflected in the emergent code 'permanent doesn't mean what it used to', that highlights the participant's perspective that standard work was no longer much more secure than casual work. The two excerpts below from Richard and Shaun's third interviews are reflective of what industrial relations theorists have been calling the 'creep' of non-standard employment practices into seemingly secure work:

> ***Researcher****: I mean, it's early days, you haven't even started [your new job] yet. Do you know if there's going to be - if there's likely to be an opportunity for permanency within that role?*
>
> ***Richard****: Yes, there could be.*
>
> ***Researcher****: Is that something you'd like?*
>
> ***Richard****: In this day and age, I don't see it making a great deal of difference. Because even permeants now get laid off at the drop of a hat, as quickly as a casual does. So, they get sick leave and annual leave, but I get paid more so…. permanent doesn't mean what it used to.*
>
> - - - - - - -
>
> ***Researcher****: How do you feel about being a casual still, is that causing any issues or any concerns?*
>
> ***Shaun****: Oh, not really. Not with the job that I have. You know, the work's there or it's not. And whether you're casual or full time really wouldn't matter, if the work wasn't there, he'd [his employer] lay you off anyway.*
>
> *The difference between the two is not of great concern to me.*

This is interesting for two reasons: first, it is indicative of the normalisation of the components of precarious work in otherwise 'standard work', and second, because it shows the creep of precarity is impacting workers' contract-type 'preferences'.

Low wages shaping workers' preferences

This was also evident as low-standard wages caused participants to select casual contracts in order to receive casual-loading. The drop in pay from automotive manufacturing to a smaller electrical manufacturing company led one participant, James, to turn down multiple offers to convert to a full-time contract in favour of his existing casual contract because he was reliant on the extra casual loading income:

> ***Researcher**: and are you casual or part time?*
>
> ***James**: Casual, yeah. They offered full-time to me a couple of times, but I just can't live off their wages.*
>
> ***Researcher**: So it's less than you used to earn?*
>
> ***James**: Yes.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Can I ask how much less?*
>
> ***James**: Quite a bit less—it's not just $5 or $10. You have to count the shifts, the pay difference, and all that—it's roughly around $300 a week less.*
>
> ***Researcher**: that is significant.*
>
> ***James**: That's a big drop, and I still can't get adjusted to it. When I first went there—I'll be honest I was the highest paid one in there at $20.20 an hour. That's the highest paid. The girls in there are on under $18 an hour.*
>
> *So, I mean $20 an hour - you put casual loading on top it's around $27—so that's not bad. But $20 an hour, I'd have to foreclose on my mortgage.*

This highlights the importance of understanding workers' preferences given the choices, or lack of, available to them. In this scenario, James' preference for precarious work is more reflective of the problems of low and stagnant wages across the Australian economy than a testament to the benefits of precarious work.

Employment insecurity and individual and familial stress

In contrast, Tim was over a decade younger (44 at the time of industry closure) and had a young family. He struggled to find work in his desired field after losing his job as a Network Administrator in the supply chain. A problem that was further compounded by having two separate health problems, as he explained in his first interview:

> ***Researcher**: That's very unfortunate timing [having his gallbladder removed].*
>
> ***Tim**: Yeah. Very much so. So, I lost a lot of time and I got very far behind and I'm struggling now to try and get work.*

I've just been working pretty hard for the last few months applying for work but I haven't been getting interviews even in roles that are the same as what I used to do, and even in a bit more junior roles then what I was doing. I can't seem to even get an interview. And the feedback I've been getting is that this had a really strong range of people—so they've got a lot of people applying. And obviously that's been a big negative for me, struggling to get work.

***Researcher**: I imagine that's stressful?*

***Tim**: Very much so. And we did get a bit of luck a few weeks ago, one of my friends was finishing up a job and he said 'oh look, I'm trying to get out of a job. It's only a part-time job, it's only 8 hours a week but it's some work, I can put your name in'.*

I spoke to them and I got the job. And I thought 'oh, this is good, something positive happening'. And then a week later when I was doing my Tae Kwando I did a flying side kick - beautiful kick—landed very, very badly and then I ripped my ACL and I've done my ACLs and MCLs they're both strained. So now I'm not able to do that job until I get an operation to fix my knee. So yeah more bad luck.

In the first instance, we see that a health problem interrupted his search for work, but in the second instance, we see that employment insecurity meant that when he was injured, he lost his work and his income completely. Tim did not find more than 8 hours of work a week until the third wave of interviews in this study. For Tim, and his family, his inability to find both stable work and enough work was incredibly stressful. He describes the way his own employment instability affected his own, his wife's, and his daughter's mental health:

***Tim:** I have been struggling, for the last few months I was struggling quite a bit with depression. felt quite down and very aimless. I'm a lot better at the moment, I'm not sure if that's the weather change or once I got back to my training or whatever it is, but I'm feeling better at the moment. But yeah, there was a few months there where I was very down. Especially after my knee. I couldn't do anything.*

So, it was very, very much a struggle.

***Researcher**: Did you see a psychologist or seek out any kind of mental health help like that?*

***Tim**: No, we haven't mainly because of costs. Don't have the finance to do so.*

You know, our daughter's - one of my daughters, she's suffering from anxiety. So, we want to get her help, but we can't. We've been dealing with it as we can. When it works. Yeah. It's been a bit of a struggle. My wife suffers from anxiety and stress too soon she's on medication for that. And she's been okay. She's been handling everything really well.

We'd be in trouble if she didn't. She deals with our budget and My Budget and all that. We're with My Budget, so they help us with covering finances. We did get a rebate from Centrelink - some amount and that was a decent amount of money, so that's helped a lot. And she got a pretty decent tax return as well. That helped a lot. But all that really did was give us a bit more time.

***Researcher**: So it sounds like things are pretty stressful at the moment, really?*

***Tim**: Yeah, very much. Very much so. I mean, I'm good at handling stress, but yeah, my wife struggles a lot with it, but her medication helps. But yeah, I mean, if it wasn't - it would be a lot better if it wasn't so stressful and it's been what - a year and a half since I was unemployed. Since I lost my role.*

And I still can't believe how hard it's been for me to get new work. Usually when they see you've got like eight, nine years of experience in an area, it's pretty good - strong to get in. But I know there's a lot of other people out there as well. And I wonder if it's partly to do with my age, my experience level for my age. I'm in mid 40s and I've only got 8- or 9-years' experience in that role where there might be people that are younger than me that have got more. So, it's a bit tricky I don't really know what I can do to improve it.

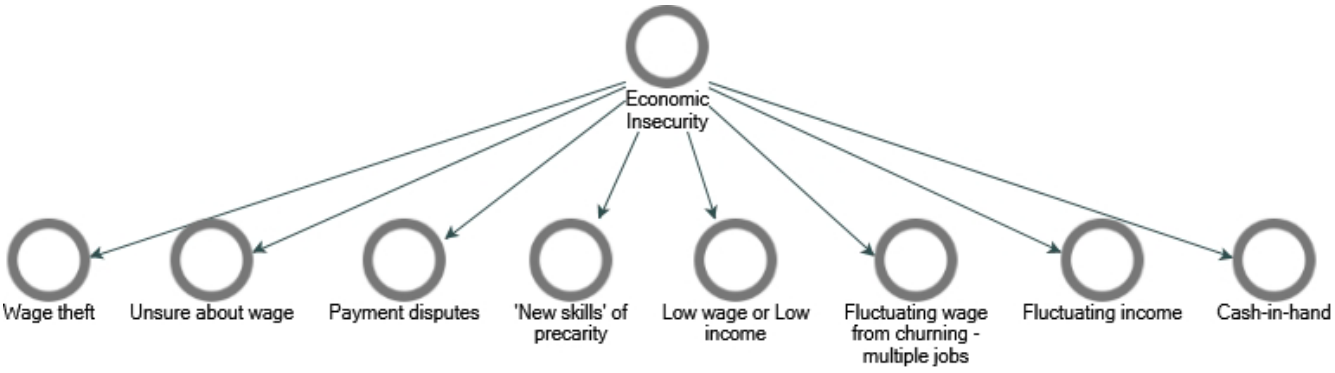
What became apparent throughout the interviews and is evident in the two examples above is that the people who were content with their precarious work were so because of their own existing, external safety nets. Most often this was a combination of being debt-free or having a large enough superannuation fund to float them if needed. Those who were dependent on precarious work for their livelihoods, like Tim, tended to be much more severely impacted by the negative components of precarious work.

This is also an example of the nuanced ways the components of precarious work interact—for Tim employment insecurity is inseparable from economic insecurity.

5.6.2.2 ***Economic insecurity***

The data highlights the close relationship between employment insecurity and economic insecurity in that the most common contributor to income insecurity was a fluctuating income week to week as a result of either casual or sole-contractor work.

Figure 16: Coding Hierarchy Map: Economic Insecurity



This data reflects the literature on economic insecurity and shows that participants experienced varying levels of financial hardship, and related stress and anxiety, as a direct result of economic insecurity brought on by precarious work. Tim, who was introduced in the previous section, was in conversation with his bank about hardship clauses and, at one stage, was worried he was going to have to sell his house. In contrast, Richard, who was a decade older than Tim, explains that although he was experiencing economic insecurity and earning 'very much less' than he had been in the automotive industry, it was not causing him financial stress because fourteen years in the automotive industry had enabled him to pay off his debts, including his mortgage:

> ***Researcher**: And are you earning a similar amount now to what you were before?*
> ***Richard**: No, less.*
> ***Researcher**: Very much less?*
> ***Richard**: Yeah. Well, as a casual I was on, let's see, about $3 an hour less.*
> ***Researcher**: That's not insignificant.*
> ***Richard**: No.*
> ***Researcher**: Is that an issue?*
> ***Richard**: Well it's fine because I'm debt free, so I can live on a lot less than what I'm getting.*

Economic insecurity and the 'new skills of precarity'

For others, like Frank, a 58-year-old welder from the supply chain, who were unable to find any work after they left the automotive industry, economic insecurity forced them to make adjustments, what the researcher has called 'the new skills of precarity'. Initial optimism during his first interview about being able to find work as an occupational health and safety consultant had waned considerably by the third wave of interviews when he explained the 'learning curve' he and his wife saw as the 'only way' to meet their financial commitments.

> ***Frank:** Yeah it can get - a bill comes in - $200, can't afford it this week, it can wait. They might send you a notice: okay I better pay it. That's what most pensioners do. It's the only way.*
> *With your council rates and your water rates you're talking about $1800 - And they expect you to pay it within seven days.*
> ***Researcher**: That's a lot of money.*

***Frank**: It's a lot of money. We never used to have a problem with the money, we used to earn. A bill would come in and you'd pay it.*

***Researcher**: Is that not always possible now?*

***Tim**: No, had to learn. It's a new learning curve you see.*

***Researcher**: Learning how to delay it?*

***Tim**: Yeah, it becomes a skill*

Frank's experience is an important indicator that the combination of nearing retirement age and a long tenure in the automotive industry did not *guarantee* workers would be financially secure after closure.

5.6.2.3 ***Working-time insecurity***

The data reflects the close relationship between income insecurity and working-time insecurity. It is expected that a participant pool that was exposed to a fluctuating income as indicated in Figure 15 would also be expecting fluctuating income and fluctuating hours as depicted in Figure 16.

Figure 17: Coding Hierarchy Map: Working-time Insecurity

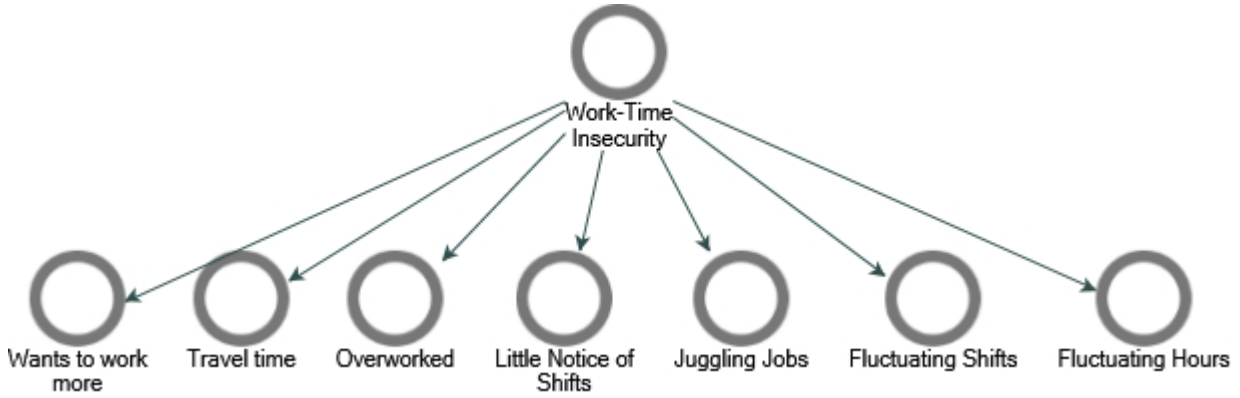


Figure 17 also reflects participants' desire to 'work more', indicating that not only were participants precariously employed but they were also under-employed. In contrast, only one participant experienced being overworked. This is indicative of the relationship between high rates of precarious work and high rates of underutilisation.

In addition to fluctuating shifts and under-employment, participants highlighted short notice of shifts, in some instances less than 24-hours' notice, and the subsequent difficulties they had with financial planning as well as planning their working and leisure time. Barry, 48 at the time of closure, spent a

brief time working in construction before retraining as an aged care support worker. He describes how the extreme work-time insecurity of working as a sole contractor for an aged care company made it difficult to pay his bills:

> ***Researcher**: Do you get much notice about shifts?*
>
> ***Barry**: No, sometimes you don't know until the day before. So, it was very inconvenient for trying to afford paying anything else.*

In addition to short notice of work, he also had no minimum shift out on weekdays and only one hour on weekends, and his hours would fluctuate from 12 to 25 a week.

> ***Researcher**: Do you have a minimum 3 hourly call-out?*
>
> ***Barry**: No.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Is there any minimum?*
>
> ***Barry**: On a weekend, even if it's a half hour job you get an hour's pay. But then if it's one job and you've got kilometres there and kilometres back [to travel], it's like effectively you're not getting paid very much at all.*
>
> *I try not to say no to any of the jobs that they offer me, because in some cases the more jobs I do the better I get known the more requests I might have to do some more ongoing stuff.*
>
> *I've asked for at least 25 hours a week. Sometimes I might get 12.*

Short notice of highly fluctuating shifts also made it difficult for workers who were working multiple jobs concurrently. Rosemary retrained into the tourism industry and was unable to find enough work at a single employer and so worked casually across two different tourism companies. Although she enjoyed the work, her work-time insecurity made it difficult to juggle both workplaces and to plan her social life.

> ***Rosemary**: The type of work I enjoyed. I didn't like the—that you don't have a roster to tell you earlier what—sometimes the roster comes very late. You can't plan things ahead.*
>
> ***Researcher**: How late is very late?*
>
> ***Rosemary**: Sometimes within a week. It's supposed to be a month ahead, but sometimes it's only a week.*
>
> *Researcher: that makes thigs pretty difficult?*
>
> ***Rosemary**: Yeah, very difficult.*

Something that she acknowledged would have been especially difficult if she were not able to be incredibly flexible due to, caring responsibilities, for example.

> ***Rosemary**: I don't think I'm socially supported. If I had a kid, I would think it's a bit hopeless. Because the only advantage I have is flexibility—of course you have to be competent for what you're doing—that part aside, you have to be very flexible to get into this temporary casual job. If you have kids it's really hard.*

This highlights one of the ways many of the participants of this thesis, a majority older men, were shielded from the added stress of juggling work-time insecurity with family commitments.

5.6.2.4 ***Limited Rights and Entitlements***

The limited rights and entitlements described by participants reflect the literature on precarious work in Australia, in that most were a result of casual or temporary contracts.

Figure 18: Coding Hierarchy Map: Limited Rights and Entitlements

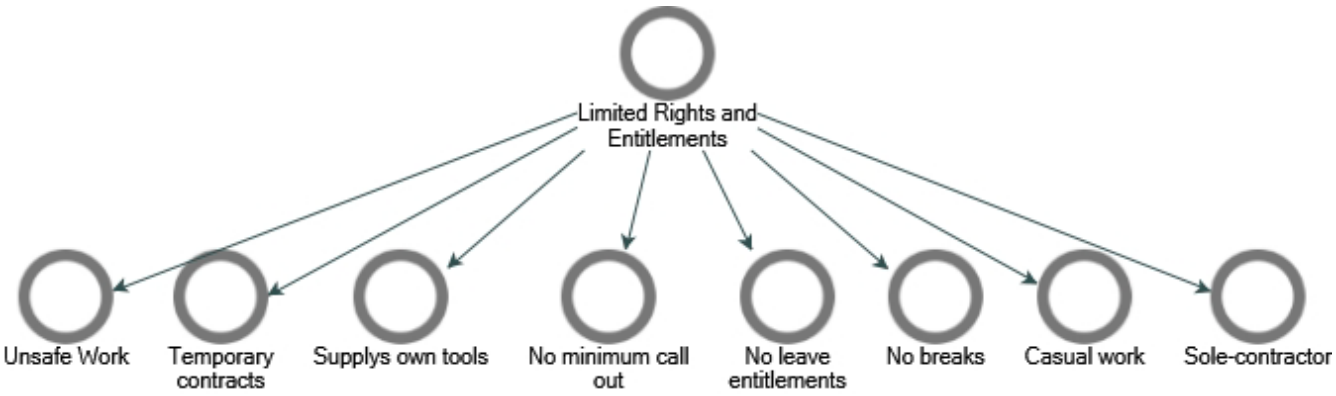


Figure 18, produced in NVivo, shows that in addition to limited access to rights and entitlements like minimum shifts, paid breaks, and paid leave entitlements, members of this cohort who were working in aged care either as support people or maintenance workers were also required to supply their own vehicles and tools. This is one of the ways employers were shifting the cost of business onto employees, as Rebecca explains:

> ***Rebecca:** I do love this job but there's a lot of travelling around so it's putting quite a bit of mileage on my car.*

Participants were compensated differently for this; some were reimbursed for petrol or received a small hourly wage increase for supplying their own tools. Others were not.

Take, for example, Matthew, who worked in maintenance for an aged care organisation servicing people who lived in their own homes. Matthew was required to supply all his own tools for which he was compensated an additional $1 an hour on his casual rate.

> ***Matthew**: I applied more with the handyman side of it and said that I have all the gardening stuff—which I do, I have mowers, snippers and stuff.*
>
> ***Researcher**: So, you supply all of that yourself?*
>
> ***Matthew**: I do, I get an extra $1 an hour because I'm using my own stuff. All my tools.*

To complete a job where he would receive very short notice of his shifts via text message, sometimes less than one day's notice. And for which he was assigned a single client booking at a time, so that he had to build and print his own roster on his own computer.

> ***Matthew**: I'm just casual, and they just send messages to my phone and to my email and I print them off on the computer. I print the job-sheets off, and then I go and do the jobs and get my job-sheet signed, and send them back in.*

For which he was required to travel across metropolitan Adelaide. He was not provided breaks, compensated for travel time, and in some cases was not even provided adequate travel time.

> ***Matthew**: There was one day that I had to be at—I was up just near Greenhill/Port Rush road—I had to go from there back to Prospect, and then after Prospect I had to go back to Glen Osmond, which is right at the bottom of the freeway. Those were my 3 jobs that day, one then right back to the other.*
>
> *…Even yesterday I had exactly half an hour to get from Modbury North—which is up virtually just past Tea Tree Plaza—to Glen Osmond at the bottom of the freeway. I had exactly half an hour to get there and do the travel in between jobs.*

For those that are unfamiliar with the suburban Adelaide, Matthew is describing a day where he had to repeatedly drive across metropolitan Adelaide. Although Matthew was quite content with his new career path, what is evident in the conversation and is clear in these excerpts is that this work was incredibly precarious and that each of the components demonstrate another small way the administrative and running costs of this work were being foisted onto the worker. Taken individually,

many of the components of precarious work seem tolerable; however, it is when we bring them all together that is easier to see the more pernicious side of precarious work.

The framework for employment in/stability has also enabled this thesis to identify and gain a greater understanding of the components of precarious work in a real-world scenario.

5.6.3 Finding 4: Participants struggled to find work of equal or greater quality

The high instance of precarious work also meant participants struggled to find full-time standard employment, of equal or greater quality, than the jobs they had lost in the automotive industry. The longitudinal data shows that only four participants were able to secure full-time work that paid as well, or better, than their jobs in the automotive industry.

This does not mean other precariously employed participants did not report being content with their work, but rather that they had, for whatever reason, adjusted to less secure or well-renumerated work.

Table 13 depicts the coding presence of participants' self-reported financial status. A greater proportion of participants reported being financially stressed after leaving the automotive industry than reported being financially comfortable.

Table 13: NVivo Coding: Self-reported financial situation

Finances	Interviews	References
Financial Difficulty	35	80
Financially Comfortable	15	18
Financial Improvement	3	5
Acute Financial Hardship	2	5

The single most impactful reason participants reported being financially comfortable was that they were debt-free or nearly debt-free and, therefore, less stressed about, and negatively impacted by, low or fluctuating incomes or that they had secured full-time and well-paid work. In the following examples, participants were asked how they were going financially. Joseph, 62, had been unable to find any work, but his children were no longer dependent on him, and 28 years in the automotive industry had enabled him to pay off all of his debts:

Researcher: *And how are you going financially?*

***Joseph**: Financially, I'm alright*

***Researcher**: Can I ask why?*

***Joseph**: Well, I've got no debts. So, I've got no mortgage, no debts, no nothing. So, it's fairly easy.*

In a similar fashion, Rosemary, 52, was working two very precarious jobs in the tourism industry as a casual in an information booth in the airport and as a casual travel agent. She was earning, in her own words, '*a lot, lot less*' than she had been as an engineer in the automotive industry, but she had paid off her mortgage and so was protected from her widely fluctuating and low income.

***Researcher**: And are you supporting any family members or anyone?*

***Rosemary**: no, no.*

***Researcher**: That can just make a difference sometimes.*

***Rosemary**: It does. Financially I'm not that stressed.*

***Researcher**: You feel relatively comfortable financially?*

***Rosemary**: Yeah, I just need to—if I don't have a job I just need to cut my spending.*

This was also true of Ted, 57:

***Researcher**: is your income consistent week to week?*

***Ted**: no.*

***Researcher**: does it fluctuate a lot?*

***Ted**: it can, yes*

***Researcher**: is that concerning?*

***Ted**: for the time being, no.*

***Researcher**: why is that?*

***Ted**: well basically, at this stage I am debt free. Apart from the usual bills that you get—for gas or whatever. So the house is paid off, car is paid off, so it's just the usual every day weekly bills that we get so I'm not really all that stressed out.*

Later in the interview, he went on to say:

***Ted:** Like I said, you need a bit of work because you need to top up that bank balance. There's not much stress on my behalf because I am debt free. It's just that eventually you need the work to get the income coming in.*

And I've got a couple of things that I do on the side. I could retire now but I don't want to. I've got another 10 years of working life in me. And I want to keep topping up that superannuation and it should be alright. Even if I do retire I can still do what I do on the side—that's ok.

In contrast, Andreas, 39, still had a significant mortgage, but had been able to find secure work that paid more than his job in the automotive industry.

Researcher: *And how are you going financially?*

Andreas*: Yeah. I'm pretty happy. We're actually in the midst of looking at refinancing our mortgage—to get a cheaper interest rate.*

Conversely, the participants who were in the most acute financial stress were those who had been unable to find any or enough work and had begun withdrawing money from their superannuation to cover living expenses and were renting or had not yet paid off the mortgage on their home.

Over the course of their third interview, James, 43, revealed a very troubling situation. An old injury had forced him to leave the casual position he had secured, and he was '6 weeks' away from defaulting on his mortgage and losing his house.

Researcher: *Have you paid your mortgage off?*

James*: no, I'm about to lose my mortgage.*

Researcher*: okay. Tell me about that?*

James: *Yeah, I'm just about to lose it. Because basically with my shoulder I ended up - got shafted by my accident cover.*

In memos from the time, the researcher made a note of how palpably stressed he had been about his situation and that this had made it difficult to keep the interview running in a linear fashion. Later in the same interview, he explained that he had been able to access welfare payments, but they were insufficient to keep up with his mortgage.

James*: The food and fuel is coming from NewStart. So I'm getting through—I just don't know what I'm going to do in two months.*

But hopefully the ATO it will let me cash in my Super, and then I can pay the mortgage.

Researcher*: So you said you've got a two month window?*

James*: That, end of April. Six weeks*

Researcher*: so what happens if you don't have money by then? Do you have a plan?*

***James**: I probably have to access my super for financial hardship or access my super through the ATO. One way or the other. I don't know which way to go.*

In his final interview, Walter, 55, who had only been able to secure very short stints of precarious work and had been forced to sell his mobile phone and share with his wife because his family could not afford to have two, described his acute financial stress in this way:

***Walter:** It's like you're in the bottom of a pit and it's all muddy and you're trying to get clawing, and you get a tree branch and then suddenly poof you're down again.*

This finding alone has serious implications for future industry closures, especially closures of companies or industries with younger workforces who may not have been in the workforce long enough to pay down their mortgages or personal debts.

5.6.4 Finding 5: Participants worked multiple jobs after leaving the automotive sector

The longitudinal data, also summarised and identified in Table 14, shows that 14 of the 28 participants worked in multiple, often precarious, jobs after leaving the automotive industry. In some cases, concurrently, as a way of supplementing inadequate income in part-time and casual roles. In most cases, as a consequence of job unsuitability, loss, or 'churning', a phenomenon discussed in Section 3.10.

Table 14: Deidentified participant classification: Multiple Jobs

Classification	Participants
Did work multiple jobs	14
Had multiple contracts with one employer	1
Unable to find any employment	7
Did not work multiple jobs	7

Table 14 is a deidentified count of the participant classification 'multiple jobs' created by the researcher. Below, Barry, a 50-year-old (at the time of interview) former supply chain worker, explains working two jobs concurrently (in a tyre workshop and in construction) before deciding to pursue aged care work.

Barry: *So, I did some work experience with a tire place—yes, I liked it, it was fine. But at the time I could also see that it was a filthy job and I had been working in a filthy job for 30-odd years in the factory. And then I registered with MAIDEC [labour hire company] - I did that just outside the 6 months and they said to me that they had a Cert 3 in Aged Care course coming up, would I be interested in that?*

And I thought: why not? I'll give anything a shot at the moment. Because I was actually doing casual work on a building site, so it was just a case of: there's going to be demand, it's not really an industry that's going to be killed off by the government, we're all getting older. And so, I thought I'll give that a shot. So, I went through that.

This finding provides important context for the duration and type of support future transition programs need to consider. It also validates the importance of this longitudinal study that continued to follow workers who had found work. The data shows that without greater support, it is ill-advised to assume that the first job a worker finds after their industry closes will be the right job and that precarious work poses a significant underlying risk, even for those workers who are comparatively financially secure.

5.6.5 Finding 6: Precarious work presents an underlying risk that is exposed in times of crisis

An interesting code to emerge over the course of the interviews was the relatively high number of participants who were content with their precarious employment. Table 15, produced in Nvivo, shows the coding presence of this sentiment.

Table 15: Coding table: Feels okay about precarious work

Code	Files	References
Content with precarious work	15	21

Some of the reasons for this, including existing financial security and a desire to work part-time hours as they approached retirement, have already been discussed in this thesis. One of the pernicious elements of precarious work, however, is that it presents a serious underlying risk even in situations where participants 'feel' relatively content with their employment situation.

Barry, the same participant introduced above (who described seeking out aged care work because it would be easier on his body and cleaner than manufacturing work) was able to secure (casual) work in the aged care sector, which he enjoyed, within a year. Although that work was insecure and did not pay as well as his previous job, in the first and second interviews, he was happy with his choice. He was

in a relatively secure financial situation because he and his partner were debt-free (they had paid off their mortgage), and their children were grown up.

> ***Barry**: So my wife and I—our family—are in a reasonable position, as in I have one dollar on my mortgage.*

As such, at the time of the first interview, although precarious work required Barry and his wife to be more 'mindful' and thoughtful about the way they spent money, he was not overly concerned.

> ***Barry**: Just trying to be mindful of what we've got going in and keeping an eye on finances going out. Had to be very strict.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Is that quite different to when you were at [supply chain company], when you had much more steady income?*
>
> ***Barry:** Well we didn't have to be as stringent. If we needed something we could go and get it, or wait for a month and get it. Here it's: nope, can't get it. Is there any other way we can get it?*
>
> *Now you've got the marketplace on Facebook, so you hunt, you try and find it at a reduced price or, me, being a fitter and turner; can I make it?*
>
> *My wife needed somewhere safe to sleep for when she goes away overnight for a volunteering thing. Couldn't afford to buy—so I had to make something safe for her. So I built a frame up on the trailer that can be removed. So she can lock herself in there at night and be safe.*
>
> ***Researcher**: more time consuming and more thoughtful*
>
> ***Barry**: and trying to do things on a budget. That's where we're luckier than a lot of other people from the automotive area that have still got their mortgages. So for them it's been a lot harder.*

In this way, he was protected from some of the underlying risks of precarious work, in the short term. However, in the third interview, which fell a few months into the COVID-19 crisis in Australia, he was in a considerably more vulnerable position because—as a result of having to quarantine while being on a casual contract—he had lost, at the time of speaking, more than five weeks of work and income, and his partner had lost 75 percent of her work.

He and his wife had been caught interstate when the borders closed and had, consequently, lost five weeks work and he had not been eligible for any government support payments because he was a casual and the industry he worked in (aged care) had not experienced the 30% downturn then required for employees to access government assistance payments.

> ***Andrew:** But I'm just not getting paid work. And I fell outside of all of the parameters or else for any help from the government.*

> *Because the company that I work for, hasn't really experienced an overall downturn by 30%. And they're a pretty big company. And I'm casual. Have I lost income, have I lost hours because of all of it? Yes, I have because I had to be in quarantine, so I couldn't do anything. So that hasn't helped there.*

Once he returned to work (after quarantining), he was struggling to secure the same number of hours as he had been before the virus. His bank had offered to defer bills but as he explains below, deferral only offers short-term relief.

> ***Andrew: T****he bank balance has gone down. I still have to pay the bills; the bank says they'll help but all they'll do is defer things and add it on at the end. So, you're still paying for everything there. They're not losing out; they're not really helping you in big terms. They're still getting all their money out of it.*

His concluding remarks in that final interview speak to some of the uncertainty and fear at the time, both of which were being compounded by the underlying uncertainty of his precarious employment.

> ***Andrew:*** *I'm sort of glad my life is half over. I'd hate to be bringing someone into the world at the moment. Because it would be a very scary option.*

In this way, COVID-19 shows the ways in which, for many, precarious work is a problem when 'things go wrong' at an individual level (Barry also had a serious underlying health condition that fortunately had remained under control) or at a macro level (a global pandemic or an economic crisis). Although that risk is less apparent during times of individual or macroeconomic stability, the risk is ever-present.

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Australia, and South Australia specifically, in the middle of the last wave of interviews in this thesis.[5] At the time, it was unclear how serious and long-lasting a health and

---

[5] The last wave of interviews was due to be conducted in February through April of 2020. However, the researcher paused the interview process for two weeks in mid-march following the State Government's declaration of a public health emergency on the 15 March 2020 (Keane, 2020). The state and the country were in a state of flux and many participants' work and caring responsibilities were being impacted by changing work and health advice, and this was making it difficult to schedule and conduct interviews. As such, the final wave of interviews finished in May 2020. Twenty-four of the twenty-six participants who participated in the final wave of interviews mentioned Covid-19.

economic impact the virus would have, and that is reflected in the data. In addition to offering a contemporaneous glimpse into some of the ways workers were being impacted by, and navigating, the virus, COVID-19 also provides an example of some of the ways precarious workers are more vulnerable than their securely employed colleagues during a crisis. This reinforces concerns around the ever-present, underlying risk caused by precarious work at an individual level. Without employment security to support workers during times of individual or macroeconomic stress, the impacts become unpredictable and inconsistent.

The COVID-19 crisis, and the subsequent loss of work due to public health measures and isolation advice, and the significant loss of superannuation late in life as a result of significant market fluctuations, thrust some participants, like Frank, 59, from the position of precarious worker to a state of near-complete ontological precarity, fuelled by his own inability to find suitable retraining and work and a general sense of worry and anxiety about the virus and uncertainty about the future.

> ***Frank:*** *I'm very, very scared. One, because I am lost within myself. Now I am quite willing to learn skills but there's no one to teach me the skills. So I'm very scared about that. And now because corona [COVID-19] and what's happened with superannuation. You, for example, you've [the researcher] got another say 50 years of work, or whatever it is.*
>
> *By rights I've got only 6 years. So how do I get back the money I lost? And it's scary because, before you used to get the pension. They're making it harder and harder and harder and harder to get the pension. And I don't want to sell my house If they start looking at houses—if you've got property that you can sell that and live off that. It's scary what they are planning to do. They will look at every cent so I'm really, really scared of being able to survive.*

Plenty of participants were, at least at the time of the interview, relatively unaffected by the virus. The expectation appeared to be, in line with public health advice at the time, that the virus would cause a short interruption—six weeks to three months. Further, longitudinal qualitative research into the impact of the novel coronavirus on precarious workers would be needed to understand the protective impact of workers' expectations that this would be a short-term problem.

These sections have shown that participant employment outcomes were overwhelming precarious, that high rates of precarious employment did have a significant impact on the transition experiences of former automotive manufacturing workers, and that precarious work presents a significant underlying risk, even for workers who are comparatively satisfied with their employment arrangement.

5.7 Research Question 2.A: To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious, and unemployed workers?

This thesis relied on self-reported mental health status and found that participants did experience the documented ill-health common in retrenched and precarious workers.

5.7.1 Finding 7: Participants did experience the documented ill-health common in retrenched and precarious workers

The longitudinal data captures a high incidence of poor mental health, with 257 references over 48 interviews, in participants following the closure as depicted in Table 16. Although it is important to avoid 'quantifying the qualitative', the highest instances of poor mental health were attributed to depression, social isolation, and stress and frustration.

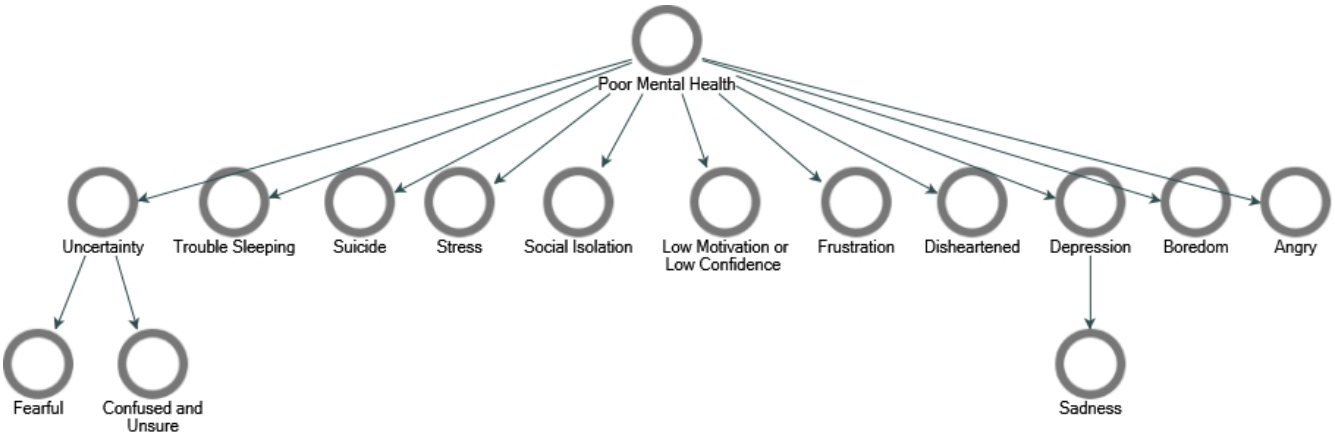
Table 16: Coding presence: Poor Mental Health

Codes	Files	References
Poor mental health	48	257
Depression	24	69
Social isolation	23	40
Stress	14	20
Frustration	14	21
Low motivation or low confidence	11	21
Uncertainty	8	17
Suicide	7	18
Disheartened	7	7
Boredom	7	10
Sadness	5	7
Trouble sleeping	3	4
Angry	3	4
Fearful	2	8
Confused and unsure	2	4

An interesting outcome of this thesis is that the participants who found secure work did not report any poor mental health outcomes. The data reflects that mental health impacts fall within a spectrum of severity, across several components of participants' working and personal lives. For some, the impacts were severe and, in the worst cases, led to stress from acute financial hardship, social isolation and alienation, fear and uncertainty, and depression, including suicidal ideation. In general, negative mental health outcomes were more severe for those participants experiencing unemployment compared to

precarious employment. Figure 19, created in NVivo, depicts the coding hierarchy of the parent code 'Poor Mental Health'.

Figure 19: Coding Hierarchy: Poor Mental Health



The components of poor mental health present in this code reflect a combination of those linked with industry closure and with precarious work in the literature. Because of the high rates of precarious work in this participant cohort, it is impossible to separate the experience of job loss, as a result of industry closure, from the impact of precarious work and/or unemployment. However, Table 17 is a crossable table produced using NVivo that depicts the coding *overlap* between the four components of precarious work and the first tier of poor mental health codes.

Table 17: Crosstab table: Components of Precarious Work and Poor Mental Health

Codes	Work-Time Insecurity	Limited Rights and Entitlements	Employment Insecurity	Economic Insecurity
Poor Mental Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Disheartened	No	No	No	No
Uncertainty	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trouble Sleeping	No	No	No	No
Suicide	No	No	No	No
Stress	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social Isolation	No	No	No	Yes
Low Motivation or Low Confidence	No	No	No	Yes
Frustration	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Boredom	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Angry	No	No	No	No

This reveals the times in which participants *directly* related a component of precarious work to a poor mental health outcome. From the table, it is evident that, for participants in this thesis, precarious work and poor mental health outcomes were undoubtedly linked. It shows a strong relationship between precarious work and uncertainty, stress, frustration, and boredom, many of which are reflected in the qualitative insights to precarious employment depicted in Section 5.6.2.

The most severe, and ongoing, cases of poor mental health were linked to those workers who were unemployed and severely under-employed. Walter was 53 when he left the supply chain company and had worked for twenty-seven years. He was heartbroken to lose the social elements of his job in addition to the work. And he was in the unfortunate position of experiencing long-term unemployment, excluding two very brief stints of casual work. And, due to a confluence of caring responsibilities and some health issues, in addition to the loss of work, he became incredibly socially isolated, financially stressed, and depressed.

In his first interview, he disclosed a suicide attempt, shortly after leaving the automotive industry, that had left him hospitalised. He attributed it to the stress and loss of losing his 'second family' and being unable to secure any ongoing work or welfare support.

> ***Walter**: We [he and his family] are struggling like hell. People don't really see that. They're like 'yeah, yeah, yeah' but it's very stressful. And sometimes I feel like committing suicide. Just getting a knife out and stabbing it in my chest.*

Over the course of both subsequent interviews, he mentioned that he was still experiencing suicidal ideation, for which he was seeking intermittent professional help.

> ***Walter:** I'm trying to keep it all together. I mean I tried to commit suicide, like I said. And I try to keep going. But it makes it hard when you're trying to survive on bugger all when you worked all your life and paid your taxes. And it makes you wonder why—where are the government?*

Walter was not the only participant to disclose suicidal thoughts, but he is the only participant to have disclosed a suicide attempt.

5.7.2 Finding 8: Participant engagement with mental health support was inhibited by precarious work

Participants who revealed they were struggling with their mental health were asked if they had sought any formal mental health support services in the form of counsellors, psychologists, or General Practitioners (GPs). It was relatively encouraging that many of the participants had sought out some form of assistance, as is shown in Table 18.

Table 18, produced using NVivo, depicts the coding presence of mental health support over the entire course of this thesis. Although there is a relatively high instance of participant engagement with mental health practitioners, it also reveals a high instance of participants who identified themselves as being depressed but who had not (yet) sought out any formal support for this.

Table 18: Coding: Sought Formal Mental Health Support

Sought Formal Mental Health Support	Files	References
Psychologist	15	19
GP	3	4
Depressed but hasn't sought support	10	12

Examination of the reasons participants had not sought out any formal mental health fall into five categories: stigma and pride, low motivation as a result of depression, cost, difficulty scheduling appointments with working-times, and that some participants associated their problem with material conditions that they believed psychologists are unable to ease.

From this data, it is evident that participant engagement with mental health support was inhibited by precarious work in three ways. First, low income meant participants felt they could not afford to pay a psychologist. Tim experienced an extended period of very precarious work that had put significant financial strain on his family and had, consequently, negatively impacted his mental health. In his second interview, he explained that although he knew he had been 'struggling quite a bit with depression', he could not afford to speak to a psychologist, even with a mental health plan that would reduce the cost of a visit:

> ***Tim**: I have been struggling, for the last few months I was struggling quite a bit with depression. I felt quite down and very aimless. I'm a lot better at the moment, I'm not sure if that's the weather change, or once I got back to my gym or whatever it is, but I'm feeling better at the moment. But yeah, there was a few months there where I was very down. Especially after my knee. I couldn't do anything.*
>
> ***Researcher**: That makes sense.*

***Tim**: So, it was very, very much a struggle.*

***Researcher**: Did you see a psychologist or seek out any kind of help like that?*

***Tim**: No, we haven't mainly because of costs. Don't have the finance to do so.*

For Tim, and other participants of this thesis, precarious work was both the cause of his financial and mental health difficulties and the main factor stopping him seeking out assistance.

This is related to the second way precarious work inhibited participants engagement with mental health support: that participants who recognised insufficient work as the cause of their depression and stress saw little utility in seeking help from someone who would not be able to assist with the cause of their stress, their material and employment conditions. Below, Frank, a participant who had difficulties with the retraining course he enrolled in and was unable to find any work over the course of the study period, describes this frustration as 'the tablets don't take your problems away'.

***Frank:** A psychologist tells me 'this is how you handle it'. They haven't taught me how to handle it. I know I've got a problem. She points out the problem, but she doesn't do anything to fix it. So now I'm just relaxed.*

***Researcher**: Are you seeing a psychologist at the moment?*

***Frank**: I have been, but I'm frustrated because—going to the same thing again—is that they tell you the problem, but they don't actually tell you how to fix it. And then I tried tablets [medication] and my wife says she notices I'm different. The tablets don't take away the problems. And that's why I don't understand how people shoot up drugs and all that to make them feel good. The world doesn't stop because of those bloody drugs. I can't understand. Or get drunk. You feel good for a little while yeah, but it doesn't take your problems away. And the tablets don't take your problems away. Those tablets do not fix the situation.*

***Researcher**: The situation being not having a job?*

***Frank**: yes.*

Frank's insight demonstrates the importance of a holistic transition support program that provides mental health support *and* assistance to find appropriate retraining options and secure work.

The final way precarious work inhibited participants' engagement with mental health support services in this thesis was through work-time insecurity in the form of both fluctuating shifts and short-notice of shifts. At the time of her second interview, Rosemary, below, was employed on two very precarious contracts in the travel industry, both of which would sometimes provide as little as one day's notice of

her shifts. During her second interview, she alluded to the fact that this, in conjunction with the cost, made it difficult for her to schedule an appointment with the counsellor she had been seeing.

> ***Researcher**: last time we spoke you said that you had seen a church counsellor? Have you seen her since, or anyone else?*
>
> ***Rosemary**: No, no because after I started work when I had time, she didn't have time.*
>
> ***Researcher**: Do you feel like you would like to talk to a counsellor or psychologist again?*
>
> ***Rosemary**: I would like to, but it's not free though.*

From the data, it is evident that the intersection of precarious work and industry closure can be linked with poor mental health outcomes and that, in turn, precarious work can make it difficult for workers to seek the mental health support they need.

5.8 Research Question 3: Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply-chain?

The central difference in the transition experience between the workers from Holden and those from the supply chain revolves around access to transition support services.

5.8.1 Finding 9: Supply chain workers were more likely to be confused about availability and eligibility for transition support funding

A crucial finding of this study is that participants from the supply chain were more likely to be confused about how much transition support funding was available, who was providing it, and, consequently, how to access it. Almost no participants of this thesis understood there was more than one pool of funding available to them. There was significant confusion about the difference between, and in many cases availability of, State Government and Federal Government funding for supply chain workers. This meant many participants did not access all of the transition support available because they were unaware of it.

This was not true of Holden workers who were provided paid work-time to visit the transition centre on the Holden premises and for whom transition support was made explicit by their employer.

Table 19 outlines the three pools of transition funding available to South Australian automotive manufacturing workers. Holden employees could access the Holden Skills and Training Initiative and the Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Programme (AISAP) for a total of up to $4,300 in transition funding. Supply chain workers could access the Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Programme (AISAP) and the Automotive Workers in Transition Program (AWITP) for a total of up to $3,800 in transition funding.

Table 19: Transition support for South Australian automotive workers[6]

Program Name	Holden Skills and Training Initiative	Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Programme (AISAP)	Automotive Workers in Transition Program (AWITP)
Administered by	Holden's Transition Centre	The Australian Federal Government via the jobactive Network	South Australian Government
Eligibility	All Holden employees.	Holden and supply chain employees who registered with jobactive three months before closure or up to 6 months after closure. Workers had to provide a letter of redundancy.	Available to any supply chain workers, not just those that had been made redundant.
Purpose	Career counselling, training advice, training and skills development (licences and tickets), labour market and job search assistance	Labour market and job search assistance, training advice, vocational training and skills development (licences and tickets), work experience, other assistance including expenditure on work related items (clothing, tools, equipment).	Career counselling, RPL, vocational training and skills development (licences and tickets)
Transition funding available	$2,000 - $3,000	Up to $1,300	$2,500
Requirements	Employees could use the training provider of their choice as long as they made an employment plan.	Training options were assessed by jobactive.	N/A

[6] Program details amalgamated from (Australian Government, 2020) and contemporaneous program websites.

In addition to the $500 difference in available transition funds between workers from Holden and those from the supply chain (not an insignificant amount by any means) it is possible to identify some of the initial confusion from the programs' similar names and acronyms. Supply-chain participant confusion became apparent during interviews when they were asked if they had accessed any transition funding, if they had used all of it, and what they had used it for. Very few participants were aware there was more than one pool of funding, including those participants who through further discussion revealed they must have accessed both pools of funding due to the amount they had spent (i.e., had used more than $3,000). Phillip's response to this line of questioning was typical. He had worked with the same supply chain company for 16 years before he took a voluntary redundancy in late 2014 and summarises his (lack of) understanding of the programs in this way:

> ***Phillip:*** *I wouldn't have a clue. It was just the automotive transition funding thing I knew about.*

Similarly, Rosemary was asked in her first interview if she accessed all her allocated transition funding, to which she explained:

> ***Rosemary:*** *I had already used before so I don't think I can get more.*
>
> ***Researcher****: there was state and federal funding, did you know about that?*
>
> ***Rosemary****: I don't know. Maybe I need to talk to them again and see what's available.*

By her second interview, she had discovered the following:

> ***Rosemary:*** *Actually, you know the automotive industry closed - I had $2,500 training funds? I found out I still had $800 left, I used that towards the course, a certificate 2 course. That after that paid for the license fees, so I got the license. I'm a security officer.*

Even George, who was highly engaged with the State Government's transition support program, had a very positive experience, likely accessed all the support available, and found secure full-time work incredibly quickly, was unsure.

> ***Researcher****: It sounds like you did—but did you access the State and the Federal transition money?*
>
> ***George****: Look, I'm not quite sure I think I accessed everything I could because I was advised by different people. I've forgotten the names of them at the moment, that I met on my journey from auto to where I am now, But a lot of them were government employees as well. That were in that field.*

This confusion is significant because it meant participants did not access all the transition support available to them. Not because they did not want or need it, but because they did not know about it. It also inhibited their ability to plan their path forward and created an unexpected secondary problem in that confusion about support services—about multiple funding sources, with different eligibility criteria and spending regulations—led to a kind of misinformation through word-of-mouth.

For example, multiple participants detailed their frustration that the funding allowance did not cover equipment or training costs but, at least on paper, the Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Programme should have done this—assuming the jobactive staff member deemed the equipment purchase appropriate.

> ***Hamish****: I'll give you an idea then. I went there [transition centre] and she [a staff member] said: we can provide you with upgraded resumes.*
>
> *I said: I really don't need that, I actually teach people how to do resumes. So, I don't need it.*
>
> *I said: I'm a trainer is it possible to get a laptop and a new projector?*
>
> *She said: Oh no, definitely not.*

Similarly, Christopher decided to retrain as a high school teacher at university after leaving the automotive industry. He was incredibly frustrated at what he perceived as the Government's failure to support more extensive retraining in the tertiary sector.

> ***Christopher:*** *Very disappointing: there was nothing, no funding for me because I opted to go to tertiary education. If I had done something through a TAFE course—to become a truck driver or I don't know - we were told, while I was still at work, that there was funding for a number of TAFE options.*
>
> *But that was not what I wanted to do. I wanted to—I needed to go to uni to get the qualifications for me to lead into my next job. So I did make a number of requests for financial help for things like textbooks or laptop or computer—a new phone. I put in a lot of applications; what money can you give me to help supply the resources I need for the education I'm about to undertake? And each time I was told: no.*
>
> ***Researcher:*** *How did that make you feel?*
>
> ***Christopher:*** *Pretty shit. I was disappointed that it should be restricted to TAFE. I should have been encouraged and congratulated for making the bold step to take on tertiary education, not had that held against me.*

So yeah, I got no support. It got to a stage actually where discussions with various tutors at UniSA—they actually approached the automotive transition course on my behalf—put in requests. And that was also knocked back.

This confusion also alludes to a communication breakdown between transition support programs that impacted workers' ability to plan. Christopher's example, of being unable to access transition support because he had decided to pursue a tertiary qualification, instead of a new trade, also speaks to the restricted expectations government had for these workers.

5.8.2 Finding 10: Changing transition support regulations compounded participant confusion

It appears that both the State and Federal Government's transition programs incorporated adaptive programming, in that elements of the programs (including what was covered by transition funding and what assistance from the jobactive and centre staff cost) would change if a change was deemed an improvement. This is a core part of best practice, especially for long-running programs.

But a finding of this project is that it also caused confusion and that further problems arose when workers who were alienated early did not return. Adaptive programs need to communicate changes transparently and clearly. To clearly communicate if a mistake has been made, or if an improvement was made that changed what was available for workers. Throughout the interviews it became clear to the researcher that some of the guidelines about how transition funding would be used had been changed for the better, but that these changes had confused participants. Alice explained in her first interview that the JobActive service provider responsible for administering the State government's transition support was charging auto workers for each visit to their offices.

Alice: *well eventually they capped it at $300 no matter how many appointments. But to begin with it wasn't capped. Until people started to complain.*

They did change the rules like 3 or 4 times during the process. When we first went there we were told you have to go and get your funding but we weren't told that we were going to be charged $100 at each point. We didn't even know that. When we were told to do it.

Researcher*: That seems like useful information to be given?*

Alice: *Yeah it's like—okay, that came out of your funding money but we were told 'oh you get 2 and a half thousand dollars training' and then you find out to get your 2 and a half thousand dollars training you have to attend various meetings that are 2 or 3 hundred dollars—so it brings it down to less than $2000. Or around the $2000 mark. And we weren't told that originally.*

This clearly impacted Alice and some of her former colleagues' ability to plan. It is also unclear if changes were retroactive, in the sense that it was unclear if workers who had approached the transition support services early and spent their allowance in the old way' were alerted to the changes.

5.8.3 Finding 11: Varying communication about transition support

A final difference in the experiences of supply chain workers compared to Holden workers that this thesis uncovered regards the communication about transition support services. Holden workers were given (limited) paid time to visit the transition centre, which was located on the Holden premises, to ensure all workers were familiar with the centre and the services it provided.

In contrast, supply chain workers were required to travel to transition centres off-site. One supply chain worker explained a problem he had encountered with the way services were communicated to, and through, his company:

> ***Frank**: But we got treated like crap, afternoon shift. We got no training, no support, nothing.*
>
> *For example: we would get a meeting on the noticeboard; 9am in the morning. Well that was an hour's drive for me. I've just gone to bed. And an hour's drive to go for an hour meeting. And I had to drive back. Sit down on the chair at home and then go back to work. So, it was really not set up—mind you I was about the only one who had that distance to travel.*
>
> *Sorry, I take that back. Someone was coming from Mount Barker.*
>
> *So it was really not good—we kicked up a little bit. But what can you do? They didn't want to do it. They've given you the information, or else—the information would come out two days [before]. So, for example: you plan your RDO and next minute, 'oh, there's a seminar at GMH'. And you go: hang on?*
>
> *And I'm also looking after my Mum who's 93. And I'm thinking: hang on—I've just had my day planned, to change all that to go to Elizabeth. I was going to Elizabeth for sessions. Two days' notice! If they gave me a week, that's alright. But two days!*
>
> ***Researcher**: not enough time?*
>
> ***Frank**: not enough time.*

Frank's main concern was the short notice he received about information and support sessions and what he perceived as a failure to account for the schedules of afternoon-shift workers. He speaks explicitly of the difficulty he had juggling his shifts and his caring responsibilities.

From a worker's perspective, it is impossible to determine if this can be attributed to poor communication between the transition support services and the company he was working for, or if it is reflective of delays within the company. But it does speak to the difficulty of communicating changing information to a large number of workers across disparate worksites.

5.9 Summary

The central finding of this thesis is that, in the almost three years following the industry closure, every participant who found work experienced at least one component of precarious work and that the only participants who did not experience precarious work were the three participants who were unable to secure *any* work during this study. Precarious work was a central problem for workers transitioning out of the South Australian automotive manufacturing industry.

The application of the framework for employment in/security has enabled this thesis to draw a more holistic picture of the experience of precarious work for these workers in transition. It has shown that following the closure participants struggled to find work of equal or greater quality, that there was a high instance of working multiple jobs, and that precarious work creates an underlying rise that is exacerbated and exposed during times of crisis.

This chapter has also shown that the participants in this study experienced instances of poor mental health as a result of their job loss and the transition process *and* as a consequence of precarious work and unemployment. The most acute instance of ill health was from the people who sat at the intersection of this and experienced them concurrently.

This stands in stark contrast to their experience working *within* the automotive industry. Participants' transition experiences were shaped by their time in the automotive industry, which had been an overarchingly positive experience. Participants 'loved' making cars, and the application of the framework for employment in/security shows that a lot of those positive feelings can be linked to employment security.

The central difference in the transition experience between the workers from Holden and those from the supply chain revolves around access to transition support services. This thesis found that participants from the supply chain were confused about how much transition support funding was

available, who was providing it, and, consequently, how to access it in a way that Holden participants were not.

Taken as a whole, these findings provide evidence that precarious work is now a significant enough concern for Australian workers that the quality of work needs to be addressed directly by business, government, and transition support programs.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Objective

The purpose of this chapter is to present a discussion of the findings and analysis presented in Chapter 6, in the context of the literature reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4. It will examine how the findings relate to the existing research.

This chapter is structured into sections corresponding to the thesis' research questions. Within each section, the relevant findings and literature is discussed in the context of their significant contributions to precarious work and industry closure literature.

In line with constructivist grounded theory, this chapter draws the discussion together in order to expand upon the Framework of Employment In/Security developed for this thesis into an overarching conceptual model.

6.2 Introduction

The qualitative, longitudinal design of this thesis provided rich data on the experiences of former South Australian automotive manufacturing workers as they navigated their transitions following the closure of the industry. The thesis is especially concerned with the quality and type of work these workers sought and secured, given the high rates of precarious work in South Australia and Australia.

In order to gather a holistic understanding of workers' experiences, Section 6.3 focuses on workers' experiences and perspectives on the industry they were leaving, the South Australian automotive manufacturing industry.

The sections that comprise the chapter are as follows: Section 6.3 addresses Research Question 1 'How did workers feel about leaving the automotive industry?'. Section 6.4 speaks to Research Question 2 'What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?'. Section 6.5 summarises the findings as they relate to Research Question 2.A 'To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious and unemployed workers?'. And

Section 6.6 looks at Research Question 3 'Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply chain?'.

Section 6.7 then draws together these findings in the context of future closures and, finally, Section 6.8 concludes the chapter in line with constructivist grounded theory to expand upon the Framework of Employment In/Security into an overarching experimental conceptual model.

6.3 RQ 1: What were workers experiences in the automotive industry and how did they feel about leaving the industry?

This thesis provides an in-depth account of the human dimension of deindustrialisation and precarious employment. In order to gain a holistic understanding of the impact of industry closure, this section focuses on workers experiences of, and perspectives on, the industry they were leaving: the automotive manufacturing industry. Until it's closure in late 2017, the Australian automotive manufacturing industry had been a key generator of full-time secure employment and had played a central role in the development of skills-based career paths for Australian workers. As a highly unionised industry, it had also, for many decades, set the standard for health and safety regulation in Australia (Spoehr, 2015). Elizabeth, South Australia, the home of the Holden plant, was built around and dependent on the industry.

In addition to being a central producer of secure full-time employment, the automotive manufacturing sector was also an anchor for one of the most vertically integrated and complex value chains in Australia (Worrall et al., 2021). The closure of this industry undoubtedly marked a significant step in the deindustrialisation of the Australian economy, but it also stands out as a significant moment of change for the individual workers, their families, and communities. Because large-scale industry closures are rare, and because it marked the end of some of the most secure employment available to Australian workers, interviewing these workers at this time provided insight into both secure and insecure work.

Outside of automotive manufacturing, the high rate of casual (and otherwise precarious and insecure) employment in Australia has led to a normalisation of non-standard employment practices. ABS data shows that at least one in five Australian employees do not have access to paid sick leave entitlements, and it is understood that the true rate of precarious work is likely higher than that (Burgess et al., 2008). As such, the researcher hypothesised that these workers, who had spent the majority of their lives in

permanent and secure employment, would be able to provide a unique insight into the experience of precarious work from the perspective of workers who were accustomed to quintessentially standard employment.

Past closures have shown that it is common for workers to experience a kind of grief after large-scale job loss (Anaf et al., 2013; Beer et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2017; Verity & Jolley, 2008), and that was reflected in this thesis. For many of these workers, the closure of the automotive industry meant the loss of more than just a job and income. This thesis found that participants reported feeling lonely, depressed, and socially isolated as a consequence of losing their work, as was established in Section 5.7.

6.3.1 The closure of the automotive manufacturing industry and the end of employment security

What is unique about this thesis, and this closure, is that this already difficult change extended beyond the difficulties of retraining in a new career and finding a new job. This thesis found that for the majority of participants, it marked the complete loss of employment security and the lifestyle that security affords.

The negative individual experiences of mass unemployment that are expected after large-scale industry closure were exacerbated because these workers were grieving the loss of a way of life and adjusting to a new one. Simple things like being able to pay bills as soon as they arrived, or being able to purchase their preferred groceries at the supermarket, suddenly required budgeting and careful consideration; the 'new skills of precarity'. This was a direct result of economic insecurity brought on by the intersection of industry closure and precarious employment. The risk of economic insecurity, specifically, was heightened for these participants because it is both a defining component of precarious work and a symptom of job loss and unemployment.

The insight this thesis provides into the overwhelmingly positive experiences participants had in the automotive industry goes some way to understanding why that change was so stark and difficult for some workers. Cameron worked for more than 19 years in the body shop and was in his mid-50s when he left Holden. He neatly summarised the impact of the financial security offered to him by his work at

Holden when the researcher asked him if he was financially stable enough to support himself, as he had not found any work over the course of the interview period; he replied:

> ***Cameron:*** *I am. And for my whole life—a lot of when I was a teenager and in my early 20s, I was unemployed for a long time—never ever did I think that I would be financially so happy. So, to Holden's credit, what I would say about Holden is that 20 years—almost 20 years working at Holden - enabled me to buy a house and be financially secure. That's what I got out of Holden.*

Finding 1 of this thesis, that employment security bred a love of work, provides a holistic insight into the value of that security, financial or otherwise. An emergent theme of this thesis was workers' love for the time they spent working in the automotive industry. A key finding of this thesis is that the love was not particularly tied to the mechanics of car making, although participants were proud of their work and passionate about manufacturing processes and customer safety. When this thesis analysed what the participants attributed their positive experiences in the industry to, through the framework for employment in/security, it became evident that permanency and working-time stability fostered a sense of trust, camaraderie, and friendship that enabled workers to live and plan their lives around their work with relative certainty. In the context of employment security, it is also evident that mutually beneficial relationships between satisfied employees, and employers who trust their workers, manifested as good workplace culture that many of the participants had actively sought out when they began working in the industry.

This stands in stark contrast to the negative components and ramifications of precarious work established in the literature and reflected in this thesis. In his early sociological work on the impacts of precarious work, Bourdieu argues that precarious work deprives workers of their 'temporal structures' and, in doing so, ensures the 'deterioration of their whole relationship to the world, time and space' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 82). In 1998, he argued that 'casualisation' was so pernicious because it erodes 'the whole future' for precariously employed workers.

> *Casualization profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable. (*Bourdieu, 1998, p. 82*)*

Bourdieu expands upon the concept to argue that the threat of insufficient employment or unemployment breeds cynicism, undermines collectively, and arouses *fear* [researcher's emphasis]. In

a similar fashion, Standing contends that precarious workers experience anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation—what he calls 'the four A's of precarity' (2011, p. 19). Anger at exclusion from meaningful work, trusting work relationships, and real opportunities to progress in their field; anomie caused by a sense of persistent defeat and social and political stigmatisation; anxiety fed by income insecurity and the fear of unemployment; and alienation that they should be grateful for work that does not sustain or support (Standing, 2011, pp. 20-21). When considered in conjunction with recent psychological scholarship that links the stress of precarious work to anti-social behaviours which, in turn, reinforce workplace isolation, we see contemporary psychological evidence for Standing's (2011) proposal that, at its pinnacle, widespread precarious work erodes fraternity. In summary, the complex impact of the erosion of workplace solidarity leads workers to see themselves as always in competition with their colleagues which, in turn, undermines workplace-voice and collective organising, and contributes to an imbalanced power relationship that favours employers (Bourdieu, 1998; Standing, 2011; Wu et al., 2020). If we understand that an environment of cynicism and fear is the result of widespread precarious work, as Bourdieu and Standing claim, this thesis contributes to the literature on precarious work by providing qualitative evidence that, in contrast, employment security is important because it fosters an environment of fraternity and love.

The moment of contrast provided by the closure of the automotive industry provides an uninterrupted insight into the experience of precarious work as experienced by workers who had become accustomed to some of the most secure work in the Australian employment landscape. But it also shines a light on the value of a type of secure employment that is increasingly rare. The employment stability that was inseparably tied to the automotive industry fostered a supportive substructure that extends far beyond economic security. The closure of the automotive manufacturing industry in Australia has had, and will continue to have, significant macroeconomic impacts including significantly hampering the nation's sovereign capability capacity. But it was also a bastion of secure employment advocacy across the economy. The novel findings of this thesis contribute to the literature on precarious work by contrasting and emphasising the holistic importance of secure employment.

This is not to imply that workers did not find satisfaction in subsequent work. The closure of the industry forced participants to make career changes they were otherwise unlikely to have made, and many of those who secured work, found it rewarding and enjoyable. It was, however, overwhelmingly precarious, and it is the underlying risk of precarious work that this thesis is concerned with.

6.4 RQ 2: What was the impact of high rates of precarious employment on the transition experience of former automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers in South Australia?

Through the design and application of a unique, longitudinal, qualitative framework, this thesis' original contribution to knowledge is the confirmation that precarious work is now prevalent enough in Australia that it poses a significant risk to workers' transition experiences following large-scale job loss. By focusing explicitly and exclusively on the presence and impact of precarious work on workers' experiences of employment transition after industry closure, it is evident that job quality must become a central consideration for future worker transition support programs.

The researcher developed the qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security in response to a lack of consensus around the definition of precarious work and as a way to operationalise existing research on the topic. The intention being to capture as accurate a picture of workers' employment stability, in a real-world setting, as possible. The framework is grounded in the four objective components of precarious employment: employment insecurity, economic insecurity, work-time insecurity, and access to rights and entitlements. An early version was used to inform the open-ended interview questions posed to participants at each wave of this study.

It ensured the data collected could gauge the real presence of precarious work in the participant pool. This thesis reveals high rates of precarious work in this cohort of participants, finding that every participant who found work experienced at least one component of precarious employment. The only participants not to experience at least one component of precarious work were those that were unable to find any work at all. In total 24 of 28 participants experienced at least one component of precarious work after they left the automotive industry. This finding is significant and shows that insecure employment is a serious concern for workers in transition.

6.4.1 Every participant who found work experienced components of precarious work

This thesis adds to the literature on contemporary experiences of precarious employment and industry closure. It provides a (South) Australian context to the experience of both large-scale closures and precarious work, which is important given the significant impact local socio-economic and welfare policies have on workers' transition journeys.

It has been well established in the literature that precarious work is difficult to measure. This is partly attributed to a lack of consensus on its definition, partly to differences in employment regulation and legislation that makes it difficult to both measure and compare precariousness across regulatory borders, and partly because there are no individual statistical indicators that completely capture the presence or extent of precarious work (Alberti et al., 2018; J. Benach et al., 2014; Carney & Stanford, 2018; OECD, 2015).

One such example is the way the ABS tracks casual work. As was discussed in Section 2.12, there is a trend towards 'multiple job holding' in Australia, and the ABS does not count second (or any subsequent) jobs in their employment figures. This is especially relevant given that second and subsequent jobs are likely to be precarious (Burgess et al., 2008). Because of this, academics have long suspected that the true rate of casual work (and other forms of non-standard work) in Australia is higher than current figures indicate (Burgess et al., 2008, p. 164).

The unique qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security devised for this thesis supports this supposition. By identifying the components of precarious work, this thesis was able to operationalise the findings of the existing literature in order to gather a more holistic and therefore accurate picture of the presence of precariousness in work and the ways it affected these workers. In order to understand these findings, it is worth returning to Campbell and Price's (2016) five analytical levels of precariousness, as introduced in Chapter 3. Campbell and Price argue that the experience of precarious work sits on a spectrum from 'precariousness in employment' to complete 'precarity'. It highlights that not every worker who experiences 'precariousness in employment' is necessarily going to experience complete ontological precarity (Campbell & Price, 2016). This thesis shows that the risk of precarious work being transmitted into ontological precarity is increased in times of crisis.

The qualitative framework found very high instances of precariousness in work and outrightly precarious work in the participant cohort. The framework extends the literature on employment in/security for workers in transition by defining and engaging with precarious work holistically as a stand-alone component rather than in contrast to standard-work. It supports recent work conducted by Barnes and his colleagues that explored the financial experiences of older former automotive workers, precarious work, and financial insecurity after the industry's closure (Barnes, 2021). Many of the participants in this thesis, like that study, who were already financially stable, were insulated from

some of the more immediate and negative aspects of precarious work over the duration of the research period.

However, the qualitative insights of the experience of 'economic insecurity' offered in this thesis also highlight the dangers of assuming older workers nearing retirement will be financially secure. A long tenure in a stable job should be considered a protective factor, but not a guarantee. This highlights the core finding of this thesis: that high instances of precarious work inhibit the likelihood of workers finding work of secure work of equal or greater quality after industry closure and that this poses a significant underlying risk for workers in transition, as well as their families and, likely, the broader economy.

6.4.2 Auto workers struggled to leverage precarious work into secure work

This thesis also contributes to the hotly contested literature on whether precarious work can act as a 'stepping-stone' to secure work. That any work is better than unemployment is a persistent rhetorical concept in Australia. It is embedded in our employment services, exemplified by the fact that JobSeekers (recipients of unemployment welfare payment) can have their welfare cancelled without notice if they refuse a job offer. The underlying assumption being that once workers find a job, in whatever form, they will be able to climb the employment ladder to better quality work.

This assumption prevails, despite research that suggests a more complicated trajectory. A 2011 Australian study using HILDA data investigated whether *casual* employment had an impact on securing non-casual work in the future and found that men were much more likely than women to be in non-casual work one year later, suggesting a possible gendered component to employment outcomes and that workers should not rely on precarious work acting as a pathway to secure work (Buddelmeyer & Wooden, 2011). The same study found that fixed-term contracts offered a more likely pathway to standard employment than casual contracts (Buddelmeyer & Wooden, 2011). Further Australian research based on HILDA data conducted by Cai (2014) also found that, all things being equal, low-paid workers were more likely to be low-paid in the future than people who were not in the labour force, unemployed workers, and higher-paid workers. Earlier qualitative research into Australian casuals' experiences that found casual employment was rarely a pathway to secure or permanent work (Pocock et al., 2004). Similarly, American research found temporary work was more likely to be a pathway to

reduced wages and ongoing insecurity (D. H. Autor et al., 2017). And Autor and Houseman (2010) found no evidence that temporary work provided a pathway to stable employment. Although these studies looked at different components of precarious work, over different times and geographical locations, each of them reveals a complexity in the relationship, suggesting that workers should not rely on precarious work acting as a gateway to more secure work and that, in some cases, it can actually have the opposite and a scarring effect.

This thesis adds to this literature by showing that very few participants managed to use precarious work as a 'stepping-stone' to secure work and that there was relatively little movement between job-types between the first and third round of interviews. This is despite the finding that half of participants who found work had worked multiple jobs over the course of the interview period. For participants of this thesis, it is true that overwhelmingly a precarious job only acted as a stepping-stone to a different precarious job.

In contrast, the data does show that participants who did find standard work tended to keep it. This reinforced the importance of ensuring that quality of work be a central concern of transition support programs assisting workers seeking new employment.

6.4.3 The temporal experience of industry closure and precarious work

Precarious work and industry closure have been linked to poor mental health outcomes, high instances of stress and anxiety, financial stress, and social isolation, which are discussed further in the next section. This thesis reflects those findings and further contributes to the literature on the intersection of these two variables by examining the temporal experience of both industry closure and precarious work. The qualitative and longitudinal structure of this thesis enabled the researcher to closely follow these workers over time.

Precarious work and industry closure are both temporally contingent phenomena. This thesis shows that, in the short term, high rates of precarious work meant very few participants found work of equal or greater quality than the jobs they had left in the automotive industry. It also found a high instance of multiple job holding and 'churning' between precarious employment and unemployment and between precarious jobs more generally. Work-time insecurity and the resultant income insecurity,

both of which were present in this cohort, affected all aspects of workers' non-work lives, including their social time and caring responsibilities.

Previous studies on industry closure and large-scale job loss have shown that instances of negative mental health tend to fade over time (Beer et al., 2006; Beer & Evans, 2010; Davies et al., 2017). What is difficult about the intersection of closure and precarious work is that the reverse tends to be true of precarious work, in that long-term exposure to precarious work is more dangerous than short-term exposure (Mavromaras et al., 2015). This thesis shows that long-term precarious work led participants to wear through both their own resilience, and any financial safety nets they may have had, and left them in a vulnerable position for any future crises. This thesis contributes to the literature on industry closure by showing that a serious problem of transitioning workers into precarious work after industry closure is that, in addition to the well-established problems of precarious work, it also leaves workers in a vulnerable position for any subsequent crises, whether those crises were individual (as in the case of injuries or illness, for the individual worker or for family members) or a large-scale economic crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The literature on large-scale job loss warns about the 'after shocks' of industry closure, as the reality of job loss—and in the case of industry closure often *career* loss—are not evident until 18 months to two years after the closure. This thesis provides insight into some of the ways the exposure to the risk of financial insecurity, social isolation, and depression are exacerbated by extended periods of precarious work.

In the long term, given how few participants moved from precarious work to secure work, and that such a high proportion of participants who found work were still precariously employed 43 months after closure, it is probable many of these workers will remain in precarious work for the rest of their working lives. The qualitative insights included in this thesis show that there are a range of reasons why this might be the case, including low availability of secure work and worker's preferences for reduced hours and 'flexibility'.

This thesis shows that the risks of precarious employment can be obscured for precarious workers who are earning or working 'enough' at any given time. It was only through following workers for an extended period of time that the risk of these somewhat short-sighted preferences became apparent.

This thesis shows that precarious work becomes a more severe problem when 'things go wrong', whether those 'things' occur at an individual or economy-wide scale is, to some extent, irrelevant. Although the risk of precarious employment is less apparent during times of individual or economic stability, the risk is ever-present. In this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic provides an example of some of the ways precarious workers are more vulnerable than their securely employed colleagues during a crisis.

The intersection of the beginning of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis in Australia, and the end of this thesis' research period, showed that when subsequent crisis emerged (industry closure being the first crisis for participants in this thesis), precariously employed participants were less well placed to weather subsequent storms than their securely employed counterparts. Early research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that Australian precarious workers bore the brunt of lost hours and lost work as a result of public health measures implemented to deal with the virus. Analysis from the Centre for Future Work found casual and part-time workers accounted for over half of all job losses in the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns and that casual workers were 8 times more likely to (Stanford, 2021).

Importantly, this thesis also highlights that precarious work is an underlying risk, even for participants who were relatively content with their employment and financial situation. A fascinating concept to arise from this thesis that would benefit from further research is the possible protective power of *perceived* job security. Perceived job *insecurity* has been linked to poor mental and physical health outcomes as well as job dissatisfaction (Kalleberg, 2018, p. 91; Wu et al., 2020) and is a key component of ontological precarity (Barnes & Weller, 2020; Lain et al., 2019; Millar, 2017). There were multiple instances of participants in this thesis that were 'not too worried' about their objectively precarious employment arrangements as a result of both the 'normalisation of precarious work', their belief that 'permanent doesn't mean what it used to', and a sense that they would be able to find a new job if they needed to. Given how important the perception of insecurity is, because of the causative role stress plays in many of the poor mental and physical health outcomes linked with precarious work (Allan et al., 2021; Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Marlea Clarke et al., 2007; De Cuyper et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020), it would be interesting to further explore the potentially mitigating impact these perspectives might have on workers experience of precarious work.

Worker preference or satisfaction with precarious work is sometimes used to justify insecure working conditions.[7] But the qualitative insight into workers' decision-making around employment security preferences, offered in this thesis, highlights the false dilemma inherent in that analysis. When workers have little choice in the matter because precarious work is widespread (as in the case of the participant who was told she would never be offered permanent work in aged care), or normalised (as in the instances of workers who did not believe secure work would be tangibly different), or when wages are so low that workers are dependent on casual loading to meet the cost of living, it is fraught to argue that workers *prefer* precarious work. And this normalisation of precarious work obscures the underlying risk from individuals and on a broader scale.

It is short-sighted to assume that industry closure is the only problem workers are likely to encounter; for transition support programs to achieve overall better outcomes they must focus on finding workers good quality work, not only to help mitigate some of the grief, loneliness, and financial insecurity of the transition process, but also to ensure that they are not unduly buffeted by any subsequent crises.

In the most severe cases a failure to secure work, or enough work, 43 months after the closure left participants isolated, financially stressed, and fearful about the future. Multiple older participants alluded to being glad they were not younger and did not have young families to support.

> ***Andrew:*** *I'm sort of glad my life is half over. I'd hate to be bringing someone into the world at the moment, because it would be a very scary option.*

Put simply, this thesis finds that the negative impacts of precarious work, unemployment, and industry closure can exacerbate one another over time and that the normalisation of precarious employment practices obscures that risk.

As detailed throughout this thesis, the impact of large-scale job loss can be significant and lasting, and thus effective interventions need to be equally robust. Intelligent intervention includes immediate

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[7] For example, the Australian Government's outcomes and best practice report on the closure of the automotive industry emphasised that 85 percent of those surveyed were satisfied with their current salary (Australian Government, 2020, p. 4).

responses to ensure the affected individuals have access to and are supported in the application for suitable employment and medium and long-term strategies for the region (Spoehr, 2014, p. 75). Past closures have demonstrated that these workers' transition programs need to be prepared for workers who delay seeking help or who find their first endeavour into new employment unsuccessful (Nous Group, 2013). This thesis stands alongside existing literature that shows that retrenched workers may experience a 'grieving period' that inhibits their ability to make plans (Nous Group, 2013, p. 15). And that because of this transition, support programs need to run for a longer period of time to allow workers an opportunity to seek out support in their own time (Nous Group, 2013). It is therefore disappointing that this closure appears to have repeated this mistake, as the transition support centres were closed after one year and the funding allocation a following six months after that. This thesis contributes to the best practice literature on industry closures by highlighting some of the ways precarious work can further interrupt workers' transition experiences, including that the first job a worker finds after industry closure may not be the most suitable work.

6.5 RQ 2.A: To what extent, if at all, did participants experience the documented mental ill-health common in retrenched, precarious and unemployed workers?

It is impossible to separate the experience of precarious work wholly form the experience of employment transition, but participants in this thesis experienced a compounding of many of the negative impacts of both large-scale closures and of precarious work. Participants reported feeling stressed, anxious, confused, depressed, and scared about the future.

In the most severe cases, for the participants who experienced long-term unemployment, or very precarious employment, this manifested as severe social isolation, loneliness, and depression. This thesis found that once participants found secure work, they no longer reported any instances of mental ill-health, and that precarious work and poor mental health outcomes were undoubtedly linked. This thesis found a strong relationship between precarious work and uncertainty, stress, frustration, and boredom, many of which were reflected in the qualitative insights into precarious employment depicted throughout Chapter 5.

This thesis contributes to the literature on industry closure by demonstrating that high instances of precarious work following large-scale job loss were undoubtedly bad for participants' welfare. All the

transition support programs included some form of mental health services for transitioning workers. The findings of this thesis also indicate that precarious work inhibited those participants who were struggling with depression and the ability and willingness to access mental health support. Economic insecurity meant that they could not justify the expense of psychologist appointments, work-time insecurity made it difficult to schedule appointments, and some participants did not see the utility in speaking to a mental health professional about a problem (inadequate work) they were unable to assist with.

These findings should also be considered alongside the resilience literature which highlights the dangers of transition programs that tend to measure their success in population averages. In that, a community should not be considered well if most of the affected population has returned to a pre-crisis level, while some have been pushed into acute stress (Norris et al., 2008, p. 127).

In summary, this suggests that the intersection of precarious work and industry closure can be linked to poor mental health outcomes and that, in turn, precarious work can make it difficult for workers to seek the mental health support they need. It implies that the intersection of industry closure and precarious work can compound the negative mental health outcomes for workers in transition. And, in doing so, emphasises the importance of holistic transition support programs that simultaneously provide access to mental health services for any immediate mental health support retrenched workers might need *and* are focused on the long-term benefits of assisting workers to find secure employment.

6.6 RQ 3: Were there any differences in the transition experiences for workers from GM Holden compared to those of the automotive supply-chain?

The existing literature indicates that workers from OEMs tend to have better employment outcomes than those from supply chain companies. This thesis provides valuable qualitative insight into some of the reasons for the differing transition experiences between workers from a single large company, General Motors Holden, as compared to smaller South Australian supply-chain companies. It found that, overall, supply chain workers were less well informed and more confused about support services available to them than their counterparts at Holden. This is concerning, given most workers in the Australian automotive manufacturing industry were employed in the supply chain (Barnes, 2016).

Participant confusion was attributed to the difficulty of sharing detailed information across a large and geographically dispersed group of people, especially when details about transition support and the timing of information sessions was changeable. Where Holden workers were able to access transition support at their worksite, supply chain workers had to travel. This is indicative of the difficulty of large-scale closures that has been well established in the literature (Barbaro, 2014; Barnes, 2016; Beer et al., 2019; Browne-Yung et al., 2020; Cook et al., 2013; Nous Group, 2013; Ranasinghe et al., 2014), and the researcher understands that significant effort was made by the transition programs to tackle some of these issues (Australian Government, 2020), but it speaks to the importance of clear and consistent communication.

6.6.1 Transition funding should have been pooled

A critical finding of this thesis, with regard to the differing experiences of Holden and supply chain workers, was that participants from the supply chain were confused about how much transition support funding was available, who was providing it, and, consequently, how to access it. This was a problem for participants who, as a result of the confusion, did not access all the transition support funding and services that were available to them. As a result, this inhibited their ability to plan their path forward and meant that not all workers received the same amount of retraining support.

It is an undoubtedly difficult task to communicate with such a disparate group of workers. However, one relatively straightforward way this confusion might have been alleviated was if the resources allocated by Holden, and the State and Federal Governments, for worker's transition support services had been pooled, or consolidated. For example, the Federal Government allowance could have been made available through both Holden and the State government's transition programs such that workers from Holden and the supply chain only had to meet one set of criteria to receive all of their transition allowance. This confusion could also have been alleviated by greater cross-referral between programs to ensure every worker was made thoroughly aware of what was available. It is vital that these programs are as straightforward and transparent as possible given the important role they play during this difficult time in workers' lives.

6.7 Learning from this closure

This thesis provides a significant original contribution to research through analysis of the qualitative experiences of former automotive workers in transition. It clearly shows that precarious work is a present enough issue that future transition programs need to address it as a central concern.

Although this thesis does not claim that the instances of precarious work in this study would be identically replicated across the cohort, by applying the unique qualitative framework, it does show that precarious work is a much more significant concern than research from previous, and contemporary, closures have found.

The closure of Mitsubishi Motors Australia in 2006 and the subsequent large-scale longitudinal investigation that tracked the employment outcomes of the 1,100 retrenched workers produced a wealth of insight into closures in the Australian environment and was incredibly influential in the preparation for the closure of the automotive manufacturing industry (Beer, 2010, 2018; Beer et al., 2006; Beer & Evans, 2010; Beer & Thomas, 2007). A core finding of that research was that, three years after the closure, one-third had found full-time work, one-third were either unemployed or underemployed, and one-third of workers had left the workforce (Beer & Evans, 2010).

This thesis suggests that the true rate of precarious employment after the closure of the Australian automotive industry is likely much higher that what was anticipated based on that research and that it is also higher than what the Australian government's commissioned analysis suggests. The federal government's Outcomes and Best Practice Report found that 53 percent of former automotive workers found 'full-time work' and that 85 percent were satisfied with their current salary (Australian Government, 2020), figures that were heavily disputed by the South Australian branch of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) at the time. In 2019, the AMWU claimed that less than 5% of Holden workers had found work with equal or better pay and conditions (Siebert, 2019). The AMWU's (then) Outreach Officer, Dennis Masters, spoke to the media, saying: '*this is a fact—less than five per cent of our members have entered into a new role that has the same or better working conditions or provides full-time employment with the same or better pay (and) conditions' (*Siebert, 2019*).*

It is worth considering this in the context of Finding 2 of this thesis, that every participant who found work experienced at least one component of precarious work *and* Finding 4, that one of the effects of

high instances of precarious work was that participants struggled to find work of equal or greater quality than the jobs they had lost in the automotive industry.

Taken together these findings suggest that the true rate of precarious work lies somewhere between the Government and Union figures; thus, the strength of this thesis is in the way it shows the range of ways precarious work touched workers over the course of their transition. It highlights the problem of measuring the success of transition programs through the acquisition jobs without investigating the quality of the work. And it puts a human face on a large-scale economic shock.

6.7.1 Just Transitions

Large-scale job losses and the consequent displacement of workers have been, and will continue to be, a significant feature of established and emerging economies whether that is as a result of decarbonisation, automation, structural adjustments or business model innovation, individually or in combination (Armstrong et al., 2008; Bailey et al., 2008; Barber & Hall, 2008; Barnes, 2021; Beer et al., 2019; Goods, 2021). Arguably the most significant catalyst for the future of large-scale job losses and industry closures, in Australia and globally, is climate change. Specifically, changes to the employment landscape that will be brought on by the technological, economic, and social changes required to transition to low-carbon or carbon-neutral economies (Newell, 2013). It is of vital importance that the findings of this thesis are considered in the context of future closures.

That so few workers were able to find work of similar or greater quality than the job they had left is a significant shortfall of the workers' transition support programs put in place for South Australian workers. It is evident from the Australian Government's report on the automotive transition that the program's central approach to precarious work was grounded in the somewhat euphemistic 'expectation management', as is apparent in the following excerpts from that report:

1. *Considerable attention was given to ensuring workers had realistic expectations in terms of the time it would take to find work, training options to support reskilling, the pay rates outside the automotive sector, and the part-time or casualised nature of many of the employment opportunities* (Australian Government, 2020, p. 73).

2. *Automotive workers, especially those in the OEMs, had relatively good employment conditions, with salaries generally above award wages and regular opportunities for overtime. In light of this, significant efforts were made by career counsellors and others to help workers better understand the labour market and realise they may have to accept a lower salary or a sideways career move in order to secure work.* (Australian Government, 2020, p. 40).

3. *Providing realistic expectations in terms of the time taken to find work, salary and future job opportunities was an important element of the career counselling and support* (Australian Government, 2020, p. 77).

4. *The government and OEMs highlighted the nature of the current labour market, particularly those who had been with the OEMs for a significant time. This included the prevalence of casual work, salary expectations and time frames for finding a new job. Casual work can provide opportunities to transition to full-time employment and should be viewed as a 'stepping-stone' to other opportunities as part of the transition for many workers* (Australian Government, 2020, p. 35).

This approach fails to account for the significant risk to workers presented by precarious work and the exacerbating impact it can have on individual health and financial outcomes for transitioning workers, as well as the possible scarring effects of long-term precarious work (Mavromaras et al., 2015). Excerpt four is also reliant on the disputed assumption that precarious work can act as a 'stepping-stone' to secure work, an assumption this thesis casts further doubt on by showing that participants struggled to leverage precarious work into secure work.

The thesis' core finding that precarious work is a common enough a problem, and a serious risk, shows that assisting workers to find secure work needs to be a central concern for future transition support programs. This thesis shows that recalibrating workers' expectations to accept lower-quality work is a dangerous and short-sighted strategy; it leaves workers open to insecure and inadequate work, churning and unemployment.

This thesis highlights the temporal idiosyncrasies of the intersection of precarious employment and industry closure. High instances of multiple job holding also indicate that holistic transition programs require extended support services. This literature has established the importance of longer-term provision of support for some workers, for years after the event (Davies et al., 2017, p. 43). This thesis extends the research by showing that precarious work can further complicate the transition process.

Historically, the environmental threat to job losses has created what has been called a 'jobs versus environment conflict', where workers' interests are seen to be at odds with environmental interests (Goods, 2013, 4). This conflict has been attributed to what Newell and Mulvaney (2013, 132) describe as the 'intimate relationship between energy and development on the one hand, and carbon and growth on the other'. As a result, Goods (2013) argues that environmental interest in slowing or reducing production is seen to be inescapably tied to job losses (p. 15). The contemporary conceptualisation of 'just transition' responds to this tension by seeking to redistribute the burden of climate change such that it does not disproportionately impact workers and their communities by means of job loss (ILO, 2018; Goods, 2013; Goods, 2020).

The concept of 'just transition' has evolved from the trade union demands of the 1970s across North America and the United Kingdom to a contemporary mainstream policy tool and research focus (Newell, 2013; Goods, 2020). It is now widely accepted that the global transition to a carbon-neutral economy, necessary to halt climate catastrophe, will impact every aspect of manufacturing, consumption, and service provision, and the contemporary understanding of just transition reflects that (Newell, 2013; ILO, 2018 + UN Paris Agreement). The Paris Agreement, a landmark, legally binding international commitment made by 193 Nations to limit global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius (compared to pre-industrial levels), exemplifies the seriousness of the threat. Its implementation requires economic and social transformation on a global scale from all signatories, including Australia. In 2013, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the Just Transition Framework and formally endorsed a set of guidelines two years later (ILO, 2018, 3). The framework calls for a coherent country-specific combination of 'macroeconomic, industrial, sectoral and labour policies' with 'the aim to generate *decent* jobs along the *entire* supply chain' (researcher's emphasis) (ILO, 2018, p. 3). Accordingly, the conceptualisation of just transition has expanded to include this broader understanding of both risk and justice for those who will be affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy (Goods, 2020, 118).

Academic interest in 'just transitions' is comparatively recent and mirrors this contemporary interest in worker and community displacement and disadvantage as a result of decarbonisation.[8] One of the most highly cited papers of the last decade, on the topic of just transition, is Newell and Mulvaney's (2013) examination of the political economy of just transitions. In it, they outline a conceptualisation that recognises that a truly just transition needs to balance the problems of energy justice with the need to rapidly reduce greenhouse emissions (Newell, 2013). Although it is difficult to separate the broader temporal and socio-economic context of just transition literature, this thesis is primarily concerned with the 'just transition' concept as it relates to job losses through industry responses to decarbonisation (Newell, 2013, 134). Specifically, the principle that the burden of economic redistribution, necessary to mitigate catastrophic global warming, should not fall disproportionally on workers and their communities (Newell, 2013; Goods, 2020). According to the International Labour Organisation, there are two core dimensions of just transition, the 'outcome', which should be *decent* work for all and the eradication of poverty and the 'process', which should be based on a managed transition with meaningful social dialogue at all levels to make sure the burden is shared in a just manner (ILO, 2018, 2).

Stevis and Felli (2015) outlined three core principles of this conceptualisation of just transition: redistribution, recognition, and participation. Where redistribution seeks to guarantee, the burden of transition is borne evenly by society, recognition ensures that the workers and communities most directly affected are explicitly accounted for in transition efforts and participation means guaranteeing that all sections of society, including unions, and representatives from industry, participate in the planning and undertaking of transitions (Goods, 2020, 128). It requires just transition policy be an integral and embedded component of sustainable development policy frameworks rather than a 'add on' to existing climate policy (Goods, 2020).

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[8] For illustrative purposes, the Web of Science database contains no academic literature on the concept of 'just transitions' prior to the year 2000, and only four articles in the decade to 2010 - none of which were from Australia. Since the mid-2010's there has been a gradual growth in academic research on the subject, increasing sharply over the last three years.

These conceptualisations seek to protect jobs in vulnerable industries from simply being moved to less-regulated countries and by ensuring holistic and adequate support is provided where job losses are necessary (Newell, 2013, 134). In his recent chapter on the uptake and implementation of the just transition in Australia, Goods argues that there is a lack of clarity around exactly what 'justice' might 'actually mean' for Australian workers (2020, 122). This thesis confirms the importance of holistically and actively addressing job quality as a central component of that justice.

Although it is outside the scope of this thesis, given the high rates of precarious work in Australia, the only way this is going to be possible is through the *creation* of new, good quality work. Past industry closures have shown the important of fast-tracking investment in projects including civic, transport, communications, health and education infrastructure, in scenarios where there is not enough existing work to provide the necessary short-term employment opportunities (Spoehr, 2014, p. 75). Some of the shock of this closure was absorbed by infrastructure projects fast-tracked by the South Australian government (Browne-Yung et al., 2020, p. 83). These 'shovel ready projects' can mitigate the impact of shocks, but they are unlikely to wholly absorb them and so in the medium-term governments need to look to the targeted expansion of alternate industries (Spoehr, 2014). Undoubtedly, future transition programs need to prioritise the creation of good quality work as a matter of urgency.

A reoccurring problem of just transition rhetoric, research, and policies is often a failure to define and agree upon exactly what is meant by 'just' and who is factored into the calculations (Goods, 2013; Newell, 2013; ILO, 2018). Past closures have shown that the impacts of industry closure are not distributed evenly, what Chapain and Murie refer to as 'unequal impacts on an uneven surface' (2008, p. 311). Existing research on precarious work indicated that, demographically, former automotive workers sat at an intersection of vulnerability to precarious work and cyclical unemployment that included their status as first generation migrants, their gender, age, and locality (Australian Government, 2020; Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, 2018; Chapain & Murie, 2008, p. 315; Davies et al., 2017; Mavromaras et al., 2015; Mavromaras & Zhu, 2015; Spoehr et al., 2009; Watson, 2013). This thesis responds to calls for longitudinal and qualitative research to better understand these vulnerabilities (Barbaro, 2014; Barnes, 2016). The findings indicate that these workers were indeed vulnerable to precarious work and cyclical unemployment. Future research should be conducted into the experiences of people who sit at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities and those exiting less secure industries. Participants in this thesis were shielded from some of the negative

components of precarious work by the wealth they had accumulated in long-term secure employment in the automotive industry; the existing high rates of precarious employment are likely to make that experience increasingly rare.

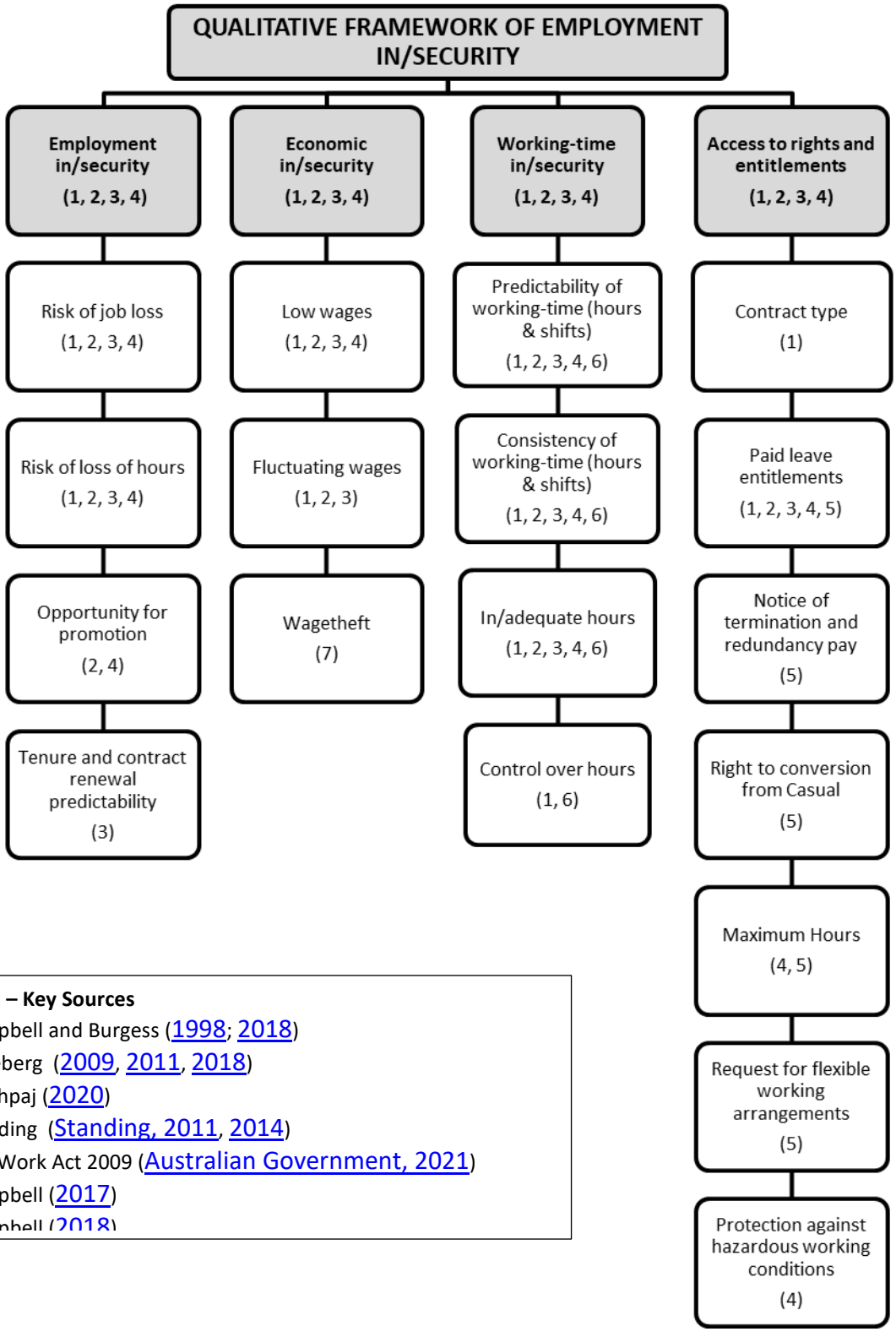
6.8 Designing an experimental conceptual model for employment in/security

This thesis contributes to the methodological literature on precarious work through the construction of an operational, qualitative framework for identifying the presence of precarious work. The framework was developed, in part, in acknowledgement of findings from the longitudinal study conducted into the closure of the Mitsubishi plant in South Australian in 2006 that found the complexity of retrenched workers employment arrangements, after that closure, required 'considerable attention needs to be exercised in interpreting the overall status of workers in paid employment' (Beer et al., 2006, p. 17).

A central difficulty of the analysis of precarious work is determining what is a defining or 'objective' feature of precarious work and what is a subjective experience that may be associated with precarious work but is not *necessarily* definitional. The qualitative Framework of Employment In/security draws on the extant literature to gather as accurate a representation of precariousness in work, and precarious work, as possible.

Through iterative grounded theory processes, the researcher was able to both test and refine the Framework, developed during the preliminary literature review, over the course of this thesis. The core components, Employment In/Security, Economic In/Security, Work-Time In/Security, and Access to Rights and Entitlements have remained consistent. For ease, the Framework, presented in Chapter Three, is replicated on the next page.

Figure 20: Qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security (replicated)



Legend – Key Sources

1) Campbell and Burgess (1998; 2018)
2) Kalleberg (2009, 2011, 2018)
3) Kreshpaj (2020)
4) Standing (Standing, 2011, 2014)
5) Fair Work Act 2009 (Australian Government, 2021)
6) Campbell (2017)
7) Campbell (2018)

Although the framework was initially devised to gauge an accurate understanding of the precariousness in work, it can also be used to gauge secure employment. This Framework could plausibly be used, in the future, to identify—or help define—modern secure work arrangements that, for example, fall outside the standard Fordist 9-5 work structure. A clear problem with the current dichotomy between secure work and precarious work is that employment flexibility has been tied to insecure work. This need not be the case, and it is possible that this Framework could assist in devising secure, flexible work arrangements.

Further iterative analysis in the context of this thesis' findings has allowed the researcher to develop the Framework into an experimental Conceptual Model for Employment In/Security. The conceptual model incorporates and expands upon the framework in order to identify and measure the impact *and value* of employment security. It draws on the significant work of Pierre Bourdieu and Guy Standing.

The conceptual model takes as its basic assumption that work is one of the core building blocks of society (Beck, 1992; Kalleberg, 2018) and that, consequently, significant shifts in the categorisation, duration, location, and quality of work impact workers' lives beyond 'the workplace'. Work-time necessarily shapes non-work time (Banks & Bowman, 2020). At its most extreme, precarious work leads to ontological precarity affecting workers' lives, inhibiting workers' ability to plan, and impacting identity formation and self-worth (Bourdieu, 1998; Campbell & Price, 2016; Lain et al., 2019; Standing, 2011, p. 16). As such, large-scale changes to employment practices ripple beyond the individual worker.

The conceptual model, depicted in Figure 21, is broken into three strata. This model is designed with the understanding that, because of the creep of precariousness in work, most employment falls on a spectrum from the very precarious to the very secure. Each stratum is divided in two to represent either side of the spectrum. It takes the Qualitative Framework for Employment In/Security as its first definitional component. The first stratum is concerned with determining the extent of employment insecurity and is defined by the four components of employment in/security that readers of this thesis are now familiar with.

Figure 21: An Experimental Conceptual Model for Employment In/Security

A Conceptual Model for Employment In/Security		
	Precarious Work	**Secure Work**
Definition	Economic Insecurity	Economic Security
	Employment Insecurity	Employment Security
	Work-time Insecurity	Work-time Security
	Limited Rights and Entitlements	Full Rights and Entitlements
Symptoms	Anger (Standing, 2011)	Contentment
	Anomie (Standing, 2011)	Camaraderie
	Anxiety (Standing, 2011)	Stability
	Alienation (Standing, 2011)	Autonomy
Effect	Fear (Bourdieu, 1998)	Love/Fraternity

The second strata, the symptoms, is concerned with the impact of employment in/security on the individual. It draws on what Standing (2011, p. 19) called the 'the four A's of precarity': anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation. Standing posits that precarious workers experience anger at exclusion from meaningful work, trusting work relationships, and real opportunities to progress; anomie caused by a sense of persistent defeat and social and political stigmatisation; anxiety fed by income insecurity and the fear of unemployment; and alienation that they should be grateful for work that does not sustain or support them (Standing, 2011, pp. 20-21). Participants in this thesis undoubtedly experienced anger and anxiety as a result of the loss of secure work, and the early stages of anomie and alienation were identifiable in those participants who were struggling the most by the final round of interviews. The second half of this stratum, the symptoms of secure work, stand in contrast to these components and draw on the findings of this thesis. Contentment stands in opposition to anger; camaraderie to anomie; stability to anxiety; and autonomy to alienation. Each of these four components is drawn from the codes and explanations participants used to describe what they had liked, and sometimes loved, about working in the automotive industry, which, as the researcher established in Section 6.3 of this chapter and 5.5.1 of the Analysis and Findings chapter, is more accurately attributed to employment security than to the specifics of car-making.

The third stratum is grounded in the sociological work of Bourdieu and relates to the impact high rates of in/secure work have on the socio-economic environment. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Bourdieu argues that the threat of insufficient employment and unemployment breeds cynicism, undermines collectively, and arouses fear (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 82). The central concern of precarious work is undoubtedly the fear of joblessness, or the loss of hours at work. Outside of sociology, it has

been linked to anxiety; depression; burnout; emotional exhaustion; elevated heart rate; and increased catecholamine secretion (C. Lee et al., 2018; Olding et al., 2021, p. 33; Wu et al., 2020). And that fear was also evident in the interviews with participants in this thesis; Andrew was *'…sort of glad my life is half over. I'd hate to be bringing someone into the world at the moment. Because it would be a very scary option',* and Frank was '*…really, really scared of being able to survive'.* The relationship between widespread precarious work and fear is clear. The final stratum of the conceptual model draws on qualitative evidence, presented in response to Research Question 1, to build on the literature and posit that, in contrast, employment security is valuable because it fosters an environment of fraternity and love. Half a century ago, Beck was arguing that, in industrialised societies, the meaning of work in people's lives was not *fundamentally* [researcher's emphasis] based on the work itself (Beck, 1992, p. 139). And this thesis finds that to be true; a key finding of this thesis is that the love participants used to describe their stable work in the automotive industry was not particularly tied to car-making. Through the application of the Framework for Employment In/Security, it became evident that permanency and working-time stability fostered a sense of trust, camaraderie, and friendship that enabled workers to live and plan their lives around their work with relative certainty. The value of secure work is not necessarily in the specifics of the task at hand, though that is also desirable, but in the stability and security that allows individuals to build friendships, families, and communities, and it is that which fosters the environment of love and fraternity that the participants of this thesis described.

This experimental conceptual model is intended to be used as a way of interpreting and understanding the impact and value of secure and precarious work. It draws on the qualitative findings of this thesis, captured at an important moment of change in the Australian employment landscape, to advocate for a big-picture understanding of employment security that is directly informed by workers' experiences.

6.9 Summary

The literature shows us that the best plans for recovery strike a delicate balance between immediate support for individuals seeking work and medium- and long-term planning for the region and must be 'acutely tuned' to regional labour market conditions—what Spoehr calls 'intelligent intervention' (Cook et al., 2013; Spoehr, 2014, p. 75). These findings clearly establish that intelligent intervention must focus on secure employment as a matter of urgency.

Through qualitative longitudinal analysis, this chapter has demonstrated that precarious work posed a significant underlying risk for participants in this thesis and that it can exacerbate the poor mental health impacts associated with industry closure. It also speaks to the importance of a holistic conception of the value of secure employment.

Significant changes to the employment landscape are on the horizon as a response to technological, economic, and social changes. Australia will need to transition to a low-carbon economy. The significant original contribution to the literature of this thesis is that unchecked precarious work poses a substantial risk to a genuinely just transition of the workers who will be affected by those changes. It is of vital importance that the findings of this thesis are considered in the context of future closures.

The next and final chapter of this thesis summarises this thesis' findings, acknowledges its limitations, and makes recommendations for future research.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Objective

This chapter provides an overview of the findings and establishes the original contributions to the existing literature presented in this thesis. It makes recommendations for future research and acknowledges limitations.

7.2 Significant Findings

Through the design and application of a unique longitudinal, qualitative framework, this thesis' original contribution to knowledge is the confirmation that precarious work is now prevalent enough in Australia that it poses a significant risk to workers' transition experiences following large-scale job loss. The central finding of this thesis is that, in the almost three years following the closure of the automotive manufacturing industry, every participant who found work experienced at least one component of precarious work and that the only participants who did not experience precarious work were the three participants who were unable to secure *any* work during this time.

The high instance of precarious work meant participants struggled to find work of equal or greater quality than the jobs they had lost in the automotive industry and that there was a high instance of multiple job holding. The longitudinal insight presented in this thesis shows participant employment outcomes were not static or linear.

The findings in this thesis provide important context for the duration and type of support future transition programs need to consider. The data shows that without greater support, it is ill-advised to assume that the first job a worker finds after their industry closes will be the right job and that precarious work poses a significant underlying risk, even for those workers who are comparatively financially secure.

The longitudinal data captured a high incidence of poor mental health in the participant group, and although it is important to avoid 'quantifying the qualitative', the highest instances of poor mental

health were attributed to depression, social isolation, stress, and frustration. Participants who found secure work did not report any poor mental health outcomes.

The thesis showed that the poor mental health outcomes fell within a spectrum of severity, across several components of participants' working and personal lives. For some, the impacts were severe and, in the worst cases, led to stress from acute financial hardship, social isolation and alienation, fear and uncertainty, and depression, including suicidal ideation. In general, negative mental health outcomes were more severe for those participants experiencing unemployment compared to precarious employment. This thesis also found that participant engagement with mental health support services was inhibited by their precarious employment.

It found that although the individual financial security and the normalisation of precarious work sheltered some participants from the negative impacts of precarity, the risks of precarious employment can be obscured for workers who are earning or working 'enough' at any given time. By following workers for an extended period of time, this thesis was able to reveal some of the ways precarious work becomes a more severe problem when 'things go wrong', whether those 'things' occur at an individual or economy-wide scale is, to some extent, irrelevant. Without employment security to support workers during times of stress and crisis, the impacts become unpredictable and inconsistent.

This thesis also highlights the danger of relying on the private financial security of transitioning workers, and the combination of nearing retirement age and a long tenure in the automotive industry did not *guarantee* that workers would be financially secure after closure.

A crucial finding of this study is that participants from the supply-chain were more likely to be confused about how much transition support funding was available, who was providing it, and, consequently, how to access it. Further contributing to the literature on the importance of clear and transparent communication, the data also showed that changing transition support regulations compounded participant confusion. It highlighted the difficulty and importance of clear and transparent communication for large scale, long-running, adaptive support programs.

By focusing explicitly on the presence and impact of precarious work on workers' experiences of employment transition after industry closure, it is evident that precarious work was a serious problem for workers transitioning out of the South Australian automotive manufacturing industry and that job quality needs to become a central consideration for future worker transition support programs.

In addition to the findings related to precarious work and worker transitions after industry closure, this thesis also provided a holistic insight into the value of secure work and found that employment security bred a love of work. Grounded in qualitative insight into workers' love for the time they spent working in the automotive industry, this thesis argues that the love participants described was not particularly tied to the mechanics of car making. This finding supports research from past closures, but it also alludes to how significant a change this was for many of the workers who lost their jobs in this closure. What is unique about this thesis, and this closure, is that this already difficult change extended beyond the difficulties of retraining in a new career and finding a new job. This thesis found that for the majority of participants, it marked the complete loss of employment security and the lifestyle that security affords.

7.3 Methodological and Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contributes to the methodological and theoretical literature through the design and application of a unique longitudinal, qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security. The researcher developed the qualitative Framework of Employment In/Security in response to a lack of consensus around the definition of precarious work, and as a way to operationalise existing research on the topic. The intention being to capture as accurate a picture of workers' employment stability, in a real-world setting, as possible. The framework is grounded in the four objective components of precarious employment: employment insecurity, economic insecurity, work-time insecurity, and access to rights and entitlements.

Further iterative analysis in the context of this thesis' findings allowed the researcher to develop the Framework into an experimental Conceptual Model for Employment In/Security. The conceptual model incorporates and expands upon the framework in order to identify and measure the impact *and value* of employment security.

7.4 Policy and Practical implications

Substantial changes to the Australian employment landscape are on the horizon. At the time of writing, the Australian Labor Party has won the 2022 Federal Election. They ran an election campaign on the importance of job security and job quality, including a $30 billion National Reconstruction Plan intended as the first step in rebuilding the nation's industrial base by 'supporting new and emerging industries' and 'transitioning existing industries to net-zero emissions' (Australian Labor Party, 2022).

Supporting emerging industries and transitioning existing industries to net-zero emissions will require a substantial number of Australian workers to transition into new employment as a result of the technological, economic, and social changes demanded of a low-carbon economy.

The significant contribution to policy and best practice initiatives around industry closure of this thesis is that unchecked precarious work poses a substantial risk to a just and effective transition. Participants in this thesis were shielded from some of the more severe ramifications of insecure work by the financial security they had accumulated in the automotive industry. That is unlikely to be true for many of the workers who will lose work, or need to retrain, as part of Australia's transition to a low-carbon economy.

Through the analysis of supply chain workers, this thesis has also contributed to the literature by highlighting some of the difficulties of communicating large-scale, adaptive policies to disparate workforces. A clear finding of this thesis is that State and Federal governments should work together to make a single point of entry for workers' transition support.

This thesis has also shown the importance of long-running worker transition support services. The support offered to workers following the closure of the Australian automotive manufacturing industry was unique in that support initiatives were implemented shortly after the closure announcements in 2013. As such, workers were given a considerable amount of time before the industry closed to access transition support. This was undoubtedly positive. However, the transition support available to this cohort ended 18 months after closure, and this was insufficient. High instances of multiple job holding and 'churning' in this thesis, and the difficulty some participants had retraining at the same time as working, show that transition support needs to continue long after 'closure'.

It is critical that job quality be considered a central component of Australia's just transition process' to ensure better overall outcomes.

7.5 Limitations

This thesis was restricted to the perspectives of the workers who had left the automotive industry following its closure. This poses two key limitations. One, none of the participants from the supply chain companies stayed at their workplace after the industry closed. This is a limitation given reports that only twenty of the seventy-five supply chain companies in South Australia closed as a result of the automotive closure (Australian Government, 2020, p. 48). It is likely that this is a result of project participants being recruited through the state government's transition program. Second, it was outside the scope of this thesis to interview other key stakeholders in the transition process, especially the State and Federal governments, and so the understanding and analysis of policy initiatives is limited to the materials produced for public consumption including information for the workers and affected companies and the Australian Governments Outcomes and Best Practice Report (Australian Government, 2020).

Additionally, one limitation of this type of qualitative research is a concern about the findings not being generalisable across large population groups. The purpose of this thesis was, however, to identify a problem (precarious work) and to develop a theory around how it affected workers following the closure of an industry. This thesis does not propose that the findings directly mirror the employment outcomes in the cohort but, rather, that they show precarious work to be a significant enough problem that future transition programs address it as a matter of centrality. And the longitudinal design of this thesis overcomes many of the limitations of qualitative research.

7.6 Future Research Directions

The findings indicate that these workers were indeed vulnerable to precarious work and cyclical unemployment. More research needs to be conducted into the experiences of workers who sit at the intersection of multiple marginalised identities and those exiting less secure industries. Many of the participants in this thesis were protected from some of the negative components of precarious work by the financial security they had been able to establish in long-term secure employment. The existing rates of precarious employment are likely to make that experience increasingly rare in the future.

There are many possible applications for the Framework for Employment In/Security. Further research needs to be conducted to work out how to apply the Framework on a larger scale. Qualitative research of this nature is often restricted to smaller-scale projects, but it need not be. The researcher is also interested in using it as a method to help identify and define contemporary secure work arrangements that, for example, fall outside traditional definitions of secure employment. The current discourse has tied employment flexibility to insecure work; this need not be the case, and it is possible that this Framework could assist in devising secure and flexible work arrangements.

This thesis identified the dangers of normalising precarious work, and the researcher hopes that the experimental Conceptual Model, devised for this thesis, might be used as a means of exploring and interrogating precarity in Australia.

7.7 Summary

Literature addressing the impact of high rates of precarious work on industry closure is still in its infancy; at the outset of this thesis, there was very little scholarship on industry closure and job loss that engaged with precarity at all outside a few key pieces of work (Bailey & de Ruyter, 2015; Barnes, 2016; Barnes et al., 2016). In the intervening four years, it has, rightfully, gained more attention (Barnes, 2018, 2021; Barnes & Weller, 2020; Beer et al., 2019).

The literature shows research into precarious work is particular to its country of research (Broom et al., 2006; Dooley, 2004; Landsbergis et al., 2014; OECD, 2015; Wu et al., 2020), and this thesis is no different. This thesis contributes to the growing body of research by building a holistic picture of the presence and impact of precarious work on Australian workers following industry closure.

The central finding of this thesis is that, in the almost three years (29 months) following the closure of the automotive manufacturing industry, the only participants not to experience at least one component of precarious work were those who were unable to secure *any* work.

Precarious work and industry closure have been independently linked to poor mental health outcomes, high instances of stress and anxiety, financial stress, and social isolation. The qualitative longitudinal analysis at the core of this thesis has demonstrated that precarious work poses a significant underlying

risk for workers in transition. It exacerbated the poor mental health impacts associated with industry closure and inhibited participants' seeking out mental health support services.

The longitudinal design also enabled this thesis to capture the dangers of precarious work and industry closure over time. It found that, in the short term, high rates of precarious work meant very few participants found work of equal or greater quality than the jobs they had left in the automotive industry. In the short-term, work-time insecurity and the resultant income insecurity, both of which were present in this cohort, effected all aspects of workers' non-work lives, including their social time and caring responsibilities.

However, a crucial finding of this thesis is the demonstration that the risks of precarious employment can be obscured for precarious workers who are earning or working 'enough' at any given time. This thesis found that precarious work becomes a more severe problem when 'things go wrong'. Although the risks of precarious employment were less apparent during times of individual or economic stability, it is ever-present. In this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic provides an example of some of the ways precarious workers are more vulnerable than their securely employed colleagues during a crisis.

Historic changes to the employment landscape are on the horizon as Australia transitions to a low-carbon economy. The significant original contribution to the literature of this thesis is that unchecked precarious work poses a substantial risk to a genuinely just transition of the workers who will be affected by those changes. It speaks to the importance of a holistic conception of the value of secure employment and clearly establishes that future transition programs must focus on secure employment as a matter of urgency.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Employee entitlements as regulated by the Fair Work Act 2009

Entitlement	Description	Eligibility
Maximum weekly hours	An employer must not request or require an employee to work more than the following hours of work in a week, unless the additional hours are reasonable.	38 hours for a full-time employee or, for an employee other than a full-time employee, the lesser of 38 hours or the employee's ordinary hours of work in a week.
Requests for flexible working arrangements	Employees (other than a casual employee) who have worked with the same employer for at least 12 months can request flexible working arrangements.	Employees can make the request if they: - are the parent, or have responsibility for the care, of a child who is school aged or younger are a carer (under the Carer Recognition Act 2010) - have a disability - are 55 or older - are experiencing family or domestic violence, or - provide care or support to a member of their household or immediate family who requires care and support because of family or domestic violence. Casual employees are not eligible for this entitlement.
Offers and requests to convert from casual to permanent employment	Casual employees who have worked for their employer for 12 months need to be offered the option to convert to full-time or part-time (permanent) employment by their employer.	Small business employers (fewer than 15 employees at any given time) are not required to offer casual conversion to their casual employees. Other employers need to make a written offer to convert their casual employee to permanent employment within 21 days of their employee's 12-month anniversary, if the employee: - has been employed by the employer for 12 months - has worked a regular pattern of hours on an ongoing basis for at least the last 6 months - could continue working these hours as a full-time or part-time employee without significant changes.
Parental leave and related entitlements	Parental leave entitlements include: maternity leave; paternity and partner leave; adoption leave; special maternity leave; a safe job and no safe job leave. Parental leave is leave that can be taken after an employee or an employee's spouse gives birth or an employee adopts a child	Employees are able to take parental leave if they have worked for their employer for at least 12 months.

	under 16 years of age. Employees are entitled to up to 12 months of unpaid parental leave. They can also request up to an additional 12 months of leave.	
Annual leave	Full-time and part-time employees get minimum of 4 weeks of annual leave, based on their ordinary hours of work. Awards, enterprise agreements and other registered agreements cannot offer less than the National Employment Standards 4 weeks but they can offer more.	All employees (except for casual employees) are entitled to paid annual leave.
Personal/carer's leave	Sick and carer's leave (also known as personal leave or personal / carer's leave) lets an employee take time off to help them deal with personal illness, caring responsibilities and family emergencies for immediate family members. The yearly entitlement is based on an employee's ordinary hours of work and is 10 days for full-time employees, and pro-rata for part-time employees. This can be calculated as 1/26 of an employee's ordinary hours of work in a year. all employees, including casuals, with an entitlement to compassionate leave (also known as bereavement leave).	All employees except casuals are entitled to paid sick and carer's leave. Employees may have to give notice or provide evidence in order to be paid for sick and carer's leave. In addition, all employees, including casual employees are entitled to 2 days unpaid carer's leave.
Compassionate leave	Employees are entitled to 2 days compassionate leave each time they meet the criteria.	Full-time and part-time employees receive paid compassionate leave. Casual employees receive unpaid compassionate leave.
Unpaid family and domestic violence leave	Family and domestic violence means violent, threatening or other abusive behaviour by an employee's close relative that seeks to coerce or control the employee or causes them harm or fear.	All employees (including part-time and casual employees) are entitled to 5 days unpaid family and domestic violence leave each year.
Community service leave	Community service leave is leave for activities such as voluntary emergency management activities or jury duty. With the exception of jury duty, community service leave is unpaid.	An employee, including casual employees, is entitled to take community service leave while they are engaged in the activity and for reasonable travel and rest time. There is no limit on the amount of community service leave an employee can take.
Long service leave	Most long service leave entitlements are regulated by the States and Territories. These laws set out how long an employee has to be working to receive long service leave (often between 7 and 10 years) and how much long service leave the employee gets.	In some states and territories long serving casuals are eligible for long service leave.
Public holidays	Employees who normally work on the day a public holiday falls will be paid their base pay rate for the ordinary hours they would	Casual employees are not eligible for public holiday pay but they are often eligible for penalty rates on public holidays.

	have worked if they had not been away because of the public holiday.	
Notice of termination	Employers and employees may need to provide notice when they end the employment relationship. Minimum periods range from one week for someone who has worked less than a year to four weeks for someone who has worked more than 5 years with the same company. An awards, contracts and registered agreements can set out longer minimum notice periods.	Employees over 45 years old who have worked for the same employer for at least 2 years are eligible for an additional week of notice. Casual, fixed-term and seasonal employees are not eligible.
Redundancy pay	Redundancy happens when an employer either: no longer needs an employee's job to be done by anyone or becomes insolvent/bankrupt. Employees receive redundancy pay based on their continuous period of service with their employer. This amount is paid at the employee's base pay rate for ordinary hours worked. Minimum redundancy pay ranges from 4 weeks pay for employees who have worked more than one year up to 12 weeks for those who have worked with the same employer for 10 years.	The following employees are ineligible for redundancy pay: - Employees whose period of continuous service with the employer is less than 12 months - Employees employed for: a stated period of time; an identified task or project; a particular season - Employees fired because of serious misconduct - Casual employees - Trainees engaged only for the length of the training agreement - Apprentices - Employees of a small business.
Fair Work or Casual Employment Information Statement	The Fair Work and/or Casual Information Statement provides new employees with information about their conditions of employment.	Employers must give every new employee a copy before, or as soon as possible after, they begin their new job.

Source: Collated by the researcher from the Fair Work Ombudsman and the Fair Work Act 2009

Appendix B – Information Sheet

Ms Gemma Beale
College of Business Government and Law

Australian Industrial Transformation Institute
Flinders at Tonsley
Sturt Road, Bedford Park SA 5042
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: 0420 737 324
Gemma.beale@flinders.edu.au
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

Did you work at Holden's Elizabeth Plant or in any of the companies that made upHolden's supply chain?
Whether you took the opportunity to retire, found new work, stayed at the supply- chain employer, are still looking for work - or any other combination of experiences - a researcher from Flinders University would like to talk to you.

Description and purpose of the study
This study is part of the project titled 'A longitudinal, qualitative investigation into the experiences of South Australian automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workersfollowing Industry Closure'. This project is interested in tracking workers experiences following Holden's closure in South Australia.

Purpose of the study
This project aims to investigate the transition experiences of (former) automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers following General-Motors Holden's ElizabethPlant closure.

What will I be asked to do?
You are invited to attend three one-on-one interviews, at 6 month intervals, with a researcher (Gemma) who will ask you a few questions regarding your experiences leaving Holden or any of the South Australian supply-chain companies affected by Holden's closure. Workers who stayed at supply-chain companies that did not close are also invited to participate. Participation is entirely voluntary. Each interview will take about45 minutes and will be held in an office in Playford, the Adelaide CBD or Tonsley. Interviews can also be conducted over skype if in person proves too difficult. Theinterviews will be audio recorded.

In the first interview you will be asked about your work at Holden or in the supply-chain,your expectations before Holden closed and your experiences since. In the second andthird interview you will be asked if anything has changed in the 6 months between interviews.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?
Participation in this study will help contribute to a fuller understanding of the individual and

community impacts of Holden's closure with an aim to find out what does and doesn'twork, to inform policy decisions in the future.

Everything you say will be anonymous. Any identifying information will beremoved, and your comments will not be linked directly to you.
I'm interested how do I participate?

If you are interested in participating or would like to find out more about the project please contact
Gemma Beale
M: 0420 737 324
E: gemma.beale@flinders.edu.au

Recognition of contribution / time / travel costs
If you would like to participate, in recognition of your contribution and participation time,you will be provided with two $25.00 vouchers. One will be given to at your second interview and one at your third and final interview.

How will I receive feedback?
On project completion, outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via email.

Thank you for taking the time to read this we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

Researcher
Ms Gemma Beale
College of Business, Government and LawFlinders University
P: 0420 737 324
E: gemma.beale@flinders.edu.au

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 8230). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project only, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on (08) 8201 3116, by fax on
(08) 8201 2035, or by email to human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix C – Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) Ethics Approval

From: Human Research Ethics
To: Gemma Beale; John Spoehr; Ashokkumar Manoharan
Subject: 8230 ETHICS approval notice (7 January 2019)
Date: Monday, 7 January 2019 11:40:00 AM
Importance: High

Dear Gemma,

Your conditional approval response for project 8230 was reviewed by the Chairperson of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) and was **approved.** The ethics approval notice can be found below.

APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:	**8230**
Project Title:	A longitudinal, qualitative investigation into the experiences of South Australian automotive manufacturing and supply-chain workers following Industry Closure
Principal Researcher:	Ms Gemma Beale
Email:	Gemma.beale@flinders.edu.au
Approval Date:	7 January 2019
Ethics Approval Expiry Date:	**31 March 2022**

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided with the addition of the following comment:

PLEASE NOTE:

The Information Sheet (provided with the conditional approval response) lists the Flinders University Counselling Service for potential participants (if required) for this research study. Using the Flinders University Counselling Service for external participants is not appropriate (this service is for student and staff of Flinders University only).
Please revise the Information Sheet by including contact information for Lifeline and/or Beyond Blue.

Please submit a revised version of the Information Sheet.

Appendix D - Semi-structured interview questions

Interview One - Questions

Demographic Data

Name?
Age?
What's your cultural background?
Highest education level?
What suburb do you live in?
Do you support a family?
Holden or Supply Chain?

When did you start working at Holden/Supply Chain, and what did you do there?
Job title - did you always have the same position?
How did you get that job?
Did you have friends or family who worked there before you started?
Did you enjoy the work? And were you happy working there?
What was a typical day like?

LEAVING

HOLDEN: When did you leave? (voluntary or forced redundancy)
SUPPLY CHAIN: Did you leave? Has work changed since the closure. how or how not?

How did you prepare to leave?
Did you talk to friends or family about when to leave and what to do?
Did you visit a Transition Centre? What was that like?
Did you access the Holden/State/Federal government funding for retraining? Why or why not? Which funding did you access? What did you use it for? Do you think it helped?
Have you found work since?

If not: how are you/your family coping?
If yes: how have you found it?

IF THEY HAVE FOUND WORK:

How and what kind of work and how do you get it? Are you trained in this area?
Do you enjoy the work?
What sort of contract/s are you on?
Are you earning a similar amount to what you were before the closure?
Is your income consistent week to week?
If you're doing any shift work, do you have any say over what shifts you work? Is it consistent week to week?
Have you made new friends?

Do you still catch up with old workmates?
Have you sought or used any formal support networks along this journey? Why/Why not? If yes: how have you found it?
What are your plans/hopes for the next 6 months?
What's been the biggest change for you since the closure? Is there anything else you would like to add?
Do you know anyone else who might be interested in participating in this project?

Interview Two - Questions

Check all the demographic data matches / is the same.
Are you working at the moment?

IF WORKING WITH SAME EMPLOYER

Are you still working in the same position?
Are you still on the same contract type?
Are you earning a similar amount to what you were last time we spoke? Is your income consistent week?
Are you working a similar amount of hours to what you were when we last spoke Is it consistent week to week?
If you're doing any shift work, do you have any say over what shifts you work? Is it consistent week to week?
Are you happy with the work? Are you looking for other work? How and how is it going?

IF WORKING FOR NEW EMPLOYER

What work and how do you get it? Are you trained in this area?
How and when did you get it? Had you applied for much beforehand?
What sort of contract/s are you on?
Are you earning a similar amount to what you were before the closure? Is your income consistent week to week?
Are you working a similar amount of hour to what you were before the closure? Is it consistent week to week?
If you're doing any shift work, do you have any say over what shifts you work? Is it consistent week to week?
Do you enjoy the work?

IF NOT WORKING

How are you going?
How are you supporting yourself?
Have you been looking for work? Have you used employment agencies?
Have you had any interviews?

Have you sought or used any mental health Why/Why not? If yes: how have you found it?
Do you still catch up with old workmates?
What has been the biggest change in the last 6 months for you?
Any hopes for the next 6 months?
Is there anything you would like to add?
Have your expectations about changed since leaving the auto industry, and if so, how? Are you happy?

Interview 3 - Questions

Interview 3 was the same as Interview 2 with the following additions:

Has COVID-19 impacted your work?
How do you feel about the future? Is there anything you're looking forward to or worried about?