There’s No Place like Home: Perceived Powerlessness and Work-Life Balance of Male Residential Construction Workers in Southern Ontario

by

Myra Leyden

A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Myra Leyden, April 2012
THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME:
PERCEIVED POWERLESSNESS AND THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF
MALE RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

Myra Leyden
Advisor:
University of Guelph, 2012
Professor V. Shalla

Little is known about the work life of those employed in the residential
construction sector or the conditions under which they work that might influence
the quality of the house they build. The main goals of this investigation were to
uncover the work-life balance issues faced by male residential construction workers
and how the structural organisation of residential construction work impacted
them. While a growing body of literature exists on work-life balance, most of it has
concentrated on working women and/or those employed in professional occupations.
In semi-standardised interviews conducted with new home construction workers in
Southern Ontario, it was found that these men were, for the most part, content with
their work-life balance. It would seem that a culture of long work hours remains
predominant in home construction, which is problematic for an industry seeking to
recruit young workers and women workers, who may want a better work-life
balance.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend a warm albeit inadequate ‘thank you’ to my advisor, Dr. Vivian Shalla, for her encouragement, insight, and guidance these past years. As well, I would like to thank Dr. Anthony Winson, committee member, and Dr. Linda Hunter, external committee member, for your valuable contributions. I would like to acknowledge my professors who helped shape my academic journey, both as an undergraduate and graduate.

The support I received from family and friends has helped me achieve this goal. Notably (alphabetical, because you all contributed in non-comparable ways): Ashley, Brian and Lorraine, Bryan and Gayle, Melissa. To my daughter, Camille—without your support and example, I could not have succeeded. Thank you all.

Finally, to the men and women who build the homes we live in—your efforts are most appreciated.
# Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
Chapter II: Context and Scope of the Residential Construction Industry in Canada ................. 7  
  Residential Construction Work Structure ................................................................................ 10  
  Long Work Hours as Industry Standard .................................................................................. 12  
Chapter III: Literature Review .................................................................................................. 15  
  Work-life Balance .................................................................................................................... 15  
  Lack of Time and Work-life Balance ...................................................................................... 16  
  Government and Work-life Balance ....................................................................................... 23  
  Construction Workers and Work-life Balance ....................................................................... 26  
  Worker Powerlessness ........................................................................................................... 31  
  Worker Powerlessness in Nursing ......................................................................................... 40  
  Worker Powerlessness and Worker Empowerment ............................................................... 45  
Chapter IV: Methodology ......................................................................................................... 51  
  Participant Interviews ............................................................................................................ 52  
    Sample ................................................................................................................................. 52  
    Participant Profiles ............................................................................................................. 55  
    Coding ................................................................................................................................. 57  
  Limitations ............................................................................................................................. 58  
Chapter V: Findings and Discussion ......................................................................................... 60  
  Resources ............................................................................................................................... 61  
    Resource—Time and Flexibility .......................................................................................... 61  
    Resource—Time and Long Work Hours ............................................................................. 65  
    Resource—Time and Re-structuring Long Work Hours ..................................................... 67  
    Resource—Time and Family ............................................................................................... 71  
    Resource—Time and Personal/Social ................................................................................ 73  
    Resource—Time: Conclusion ............................................................................................. 76  
    Resource—Money ................................................................................................................ 77  
    Resource—Money and Overtime ......................................................................................... 77
Resource—Money and Pensions ................................................................. 79
Resource—Money and the Economics of Construction ................................ 80
Resource—Health ...................................................................................... 82
Support—For Work-Life Balance by Co-Workers ........................................ 83
Support—For Work-Life Balance by Employer ........................................... 84
Support—Family and Social Network .......................................................... 88
Information—Corporate ............................................................................. 89
Chapter VI: Conclusions .............................................................................. 91
References ..................................................................................................... 96
Appendix A .................................................................................................. 106
Appendix B .................................................................................................. 107
Appendix C .................................................................................................. 108
Appendix D .................................................................................................. 111
List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants………………………………………………56
Table 1: Participant Profiles……………………………………………………………………57

List of Figures

Figure 1: Construction industry in Canada, by sector………………………………………….10
Chapter I: Introduction

The single largest expenditure many Canadians will make at some point in their adult life is the purchase of a new home. Although the re-sale market accounts for a significant number of real estate sales in Canada (465,251 units in 2009 (CMHC-SCHL 2010a)), 189,930 new homes were built across the country in 2010 (CMHC-SCHL 2010b) and supported over 229,000 building-related businesses (CMHC-SCHL 2010a), representing thousands of person-work hours. Yet little is known about the work life of those employed in the residential construction sector or the conditions under which they work that might influence the quality of the house they build and ultimately affect a home owner’s greatest investment.

The main goals of this investigation were to uncover the work-life balance issues faced by male residential construction workers, specifically, site personnel, and to better understand how the structural organisation of residential construction work impacted the lives of these workers. While a growing body of literature exists on work-life balance (see Johnson, Lero, and Rooney 2001; Korabik, Lero, and Whitehead 2008; Quick and Tetrick 2003, for example), most of it has concentrated on working women and/or those employed in professional occupations. A few researchers have focused on how workers employed in the Industrial, Commercial, Institutional (ICI) construction sector manage the nexus of paid work, and social, family and personal time (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis and Lingard 2006; Francis, Lingard and Gibson 2006; Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010; Lingard, Townsend, Bradley and Brown 2008; Lingard and Francis 2009; Townsend, Bailey, Brown, Bradley and Lingard 2007). However, a thorough search of the academic literature on the work-life balance of residential construction workers failed
to uncover any published materials. Studying work-life balance of residential construction workers can make significant contributions to the literature in various ways. Because this is a highly traditional sector where men predominate, it is useful to learn how workers view and deal with work-life balance issues. Also, because most of the literature focuses on women, researching a sector dominated by men provides insight into organisational structures and cultures more specific to men’s experience of work and work-life balance. In addition, gaining more knowledge of this environment helps to understand why women continue to be under-represented in the industry, and why both young men and young women tend to be increasingly reluctant to enter the field of construction.

It is equally important to gain knowledge on the work-life balance of those whose employment is non-standard, which is the case for construction workers. While there is a growing body of research on non-standard workers, less attention has been paid to the work-life balance of these workers, despite the dramatic growth in non-standard employment (Doogan 2001; Fuller and Vosko 2008; Krahn 1995; Lewchuk, Clarke, and de Wolff 2008; McKay 2008; Saloniemi and Zeytinoglu 2007). Many jobs in the residential construction sector, for example, can be classified as non-standard, where builders do not guarantee fulltime or permanent work status but prefer to have a flexible workforce to meet their building needs as dictated by the housing market.

The perception that all construction jobs are alike is erroneous—an important factor to consider when studying work-life balance issues in the construction industry. Few understand the difference between, for instance, the work of plumbers who work on an ICI job and that of plumbers working in new home construction. Although the trade
may be viewed as one in the same, the terms and conditions of employment of these different categories of plumbers are quite different. When compared to those employed in the ICI sector, workers employed in the Canadian residential construction industry are less likely to be members of a union (Isojim 2009; Krahn, Lowe, and Hughes 2007) and more likely to have a non-standard employment arrangement (Aronsson 1999; Loosemore, Dainty, and Lingard 2003; Meager 1992; Virtanen et al. 2001; Winch 1994).

Long work hours are normal in residential construction, averaging nine to ten hours a day, typically five or six days a week. The ICI sector has greater union presence (Isojim 2009), where negotiated hours of work adhere to a more standard work week (40-50 hours), and work contracts offer a level of job protection that residential workers do not enjoy (Rabourn 2008). Without significant union representation, residential construction jobs tend toward low rates of pay, and in a climate of declining manufacturing jobs, the labour market holds few employment opportunities for those with less formal education (Winch 1994). Residential construction worker pay scales, although better than pay scales for most in the service sector, hardly compensate workers adequately (Winch 1994). Furthermore, these vulnerable workers are at a distinct disadvantage of being able to negotiate better terms and conditions with residential builders in order to achieve a more reasonable work-life balance.

It will come as no surprise that men comprise approximately 97% of workers on Canadian construction sites (Statistics Canada 2011a), leaving employers with a huge segment of the working population from which to recruit. However, the aging demographic of the construction worker has begun to ring alarm bells in the industry, as fewer young people are choosing construction jobs upon secondary school graduation,
leaving builders without an adequate labour pool from which to choose. There is evidence to support the contention that workers entering the job market today are more concerned about their work-life balance than were previous generations (Johnson, Lero and Rooney 2001; Korobik, Lero and Whitehead 2008). Further, work-life balance issues are among the top ten areas of discussion in the collective bargaining process (Government of Canada 2002). In addition to these factors, if we also take into consideration that a growing number of youth pursue higher education (Marshall 2010), Canada faces a shortage of available workers to fill trade occupations.

The construction industry is interested in accessing women as a source of labour and views them as an untapped resource to help offset the declining rate of young men entering the industry (Dainty, Neale, and Bagilhole 1999; Dainty, Bagilhole, and Neale 2000; Dainty, Bagilhole, and Neale 2001; Dainty, Grugulis, and Langford 2007). Women have begun to respond (HRSDC 2011; Ontario Women’s Directorate 2011), attracted by the potential of higher wages than they have access to in traditionally female jobs. Still, key structural aspects, such as long work hours and little flexible time allowance, may preclude many women from participating in the residential construction industry. Without active lobbying by male residential construction workers to change the current long work hour structure and culture, women considering entering the trades might find the lack of work-life balance a significant barrier (Dainty, Neale, and Bagilhole 1999).

Because of the lack of research information about residential construction workers and their current work-life balance, the industry may fail to understand the nature and scope of the problem as it pertains to the recruitment of young workers or women. The
literature regarding work-life balance and construction workers in the ICI sector is informative, but does not fully speak to the particular circumstances facing residential construction workers, given that the ICI sector offers workers different and better work terms and conditions that are not always available to those employed in the residential sector. In addition, most of the work-life balance literature on the construction industry originates in Australia, and may not address the challenges facing Canadian residential construction workers. To that end, the primary research questions that guide this investigative study were:

1. Do male residential construction workers feel that they lack a work-life balance?
2. How do they describe their work-life balance?
3. How does the nature of their work impact their lives outside of work?
4. What, if anything, do residential construction workers consider could be done to improve work-life balance in their industry?

Participant voices and opinions, and a record of their lived experience are potentially beneficial to both participants and the residential construction industry. This research will add to the body of knowledge on work-life balance as it relates to men in general and to residential construction workers in particular, especially given that the latter is a new area of research interest in Canada. It will also provide insights that could help design policies to attract young workers and women into the industry.

This exploration begins with an overview of the Canadian residential construction industry in Chapter II, to help situate and provide context toward understanding the environment within which participants work. Chapter III examines relevant literature and presents the theoretical framework that will guide the subsequent analysis of research findings. The methodology used to gather the research is presented in Chapter IV, along with participant profiles. Chapter V outlines findings and discussion. Concluding
remarks and recommendations for future research are found in Chapter VI.
Chapter II: Context and Scope of the Residential Construction Industry in Canada

The construction industry as a whole is an important economic driver in the Canadian economy, having contributed $78.6 billion toward Canada’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2011 (Statistics Canada 2011b) and employing over one million workers annually (Statistics Canada 2011). The residential housing market is multi-faceted and includes new construction, renovations and the buying and selling of property. Hundreds of thousands of person-work hours were invested in 2009 by approximately 71,000 residential construction businesses, with an additional 158,000 trade-specific contractors working in Canada’s housing market (CMHC-SCHL 2010a).

Home ownership comprises 40% of the average Canadian family’s assets and is often the single largest purchase most will make in their lifetime. Therefore, the quality of the workforce engaged in building Canadian homes is critical toward protecting such an investment.

The construction industry is clearly important to the Canadian economy and to individuals and families, yet it faces a major obstacle. Indeed, the construction industry must attract more workers to fill vacancies left as the baby-boom generation retires. Federal and provincial governments, in partnership with industry leaders, have developed programs and initiatives to encourage more people to enter the sector (HRSDC 2011; Ontario Women’s Directorate 2011). Despite such programs, the industry remains skill-short and the uptake by Canadian youth to work in construction has not met industry expectations. Employers wish to have a pool of skilled workers from which to draw, rather than accepting workers with limited skill sets who may not want to endure the three-to-five year on-the-job training period necessary to gain competence. Construction
jobs no longer suffer from poor occupational prestige (Goyder and Frank 2007); the perception remains, however, that these jobs can be dangerous with long and physically demanding work days.

The tradition of long work days in residential construction can be found in Canada’s building history, where a harsh winter climate and technological constraints required that workers complete all outside house components when the weather was good. This resulted in long work days during spring, summer and autumn, and shorter work days or lay-off time for a number of weeks during winter months. Over the years, on-site worker hours have decreased and technological advancements now allow house construction to continue year-round.

In the 1940s, an 800 square foot Canadian house required an average of 2,400 site person hours and took approximately 30 weeks to complete (CMHC-SCHL 1993). Post WWII, Canada opened its borders to male skilled trade workers, most of whom hailed from Europe (Jessop 2003), to meet the needs of the construction industry as it entered its expansion phase to accommodate the baby-boom generation’s housing needs (Krahn, Lowe, and Hughes 2007). By the 1950s, site person hours dropped to 1,675 and it took just 20 weeks to finish a 1,100 square foot house (CMHC-SCHL 1993). Canada enjoyed years of steady growth, from which the residential construction sector benefited, until the 1971 recession hit, heralding an era of boom/bust economic cycles (Jessop 2003). The nature of the work also underwent transformations. For example, the pace of work increased with the introduction of pneumatic nail guns and power drills (CMHC-SCHL 1993) and, by the 1980s, an average 1,230 square foot house took 800 site person hours and only 8 weeks to complete (CMHC-SCHL 1993). The need for skilled labour
decreased, as technological advances made many craftsmen redundant. For instance, starting in the 1950s, wall plasterers were gradually replaced by drywall installers who use factory-produced gypsum board for interior walls. Today, differently skilled workers are needed to build houses and worker skill sets have adjusted to accommodate changes in the way houses are currently constructed. Still, residential construction workers are dependent on builders for their livelihood and builders require home buyers to fuel their business.

The construction industry has gone through various cycles in the post-war period, but November 2008 marked a dividing line in Canada’s economy, with construction particularly hard hit: “Sharp decline in construction employment” (Ferrao and Lin 2009) was the headline on Statistics Canada’s February 2009 labour report, noting that the sector lost an estimated 43,000 jobs that month alone. Construction in Canada went from boom to bust in one year—employment growth between January and October 2008 was +4.9% before sharply declining 6.4% between November 2008 and February 2009 (Ferrao and Lin 2009). Residential construction is closely tied with the economy, rising and falling according to people’s ability to obtain credit, and therefore the housing industry reacts quickly to consumer demand or lack of it. When residential builders have to reduce their workforce, site personnel are the first to be made redundant. In such a climate, workers understand that to be employed, they need to accept the terms and conditions of employment without question. Long work days, lack of paid overtime and no sick time provisions are standard in the residential building sector, all of which erode a worker’s opportunity to obtain a reasonable work-life balance.
Residential Construction Work Structure

In Canada, the construction industry is divided into three primary areas (see Figure 1): Industrial, Commercial, Institutional (ICI), Residential, and Heavy construction, each with sub-categories. The focus of this study is the new home residential sector, both production and custom.

Figure 1: Construction industry in Canada, by sector
M. Leyden

Construction sites are organised around a traditional, hierarchal structure (Loosemore, Dainty, and Lingard 2003), with owners at the top, a management level, supervisory positions, and site workers at the bottom\(^1\). Production builders\(^2\), similar to other production-based industries, employ “flexible specialization” practices and adopt “lean production” (Krahn, Lowe, and Hughes 2007) methods. Speed and quantity are the hallmarks of production builders, who are constantly evaluating how to reduce expenses while increasing on-site efficiencies. Given the many fixed costs associated

\(^1\) Trade-specific workers, such as plumbers, electricians and gas fitters, are not usually employed directly by builders. Instead, trade-specific companies bid on work with individual builders and trade-specific workers are employed by the trade company.

\(^2\) There are two types of new home construction builders: production and custom. Production builders offer customers the choice of a few pre-set designs to be built in a new development (subdivision) with limited upgrade options. Custom builders work with individual clients to design and build unique homes, generally on one-off, site specific lots. Production builders focus on quantity while custom builders focus on quality.
with residential construction, including development fees and building lot prices, residential builders view labour costs as an area where economies can be found, and they have thus shifted from a skilled to a predominantly unskilled labour force.

Unskilled workers on residential construction sites are known by a number of different labels, such as general labourer, site personnel, construction helper, or construction labourer (HRSDC Canada 2009). The task-focused nature of the construction industry (Loosemore, Dainty, and Lingard 2003:3-4) is evident when reviewing the job duties of workers, as outlined by the National Occupational Classification (NOC) ‘construction trades helpers and labourers’ (NOC 7611) (HRSDC 2009). Job duties may include cleaning up the site, assisting other personnel in their duties, loading and unloading tools and materials, operating tools and machinery or directing traffic, all of which require little skill and training beyond a few basic instructions. (The term “site personnel” denotes the unskilled labourer position within a company and will be the term used throughout when referring to this job category.) Site personnel find themselves working in precarious employment conditions, easily replaced by another worker with a pair of construction boots and hard hat in hand.

Site personnel and contract trades are overseen by site supervisors and general managers (GM), who rise through the ranks to take on these quasi-management positions. Site supervisors are valued for their construction and site management skills; they are likely to be acclimatised to the culture of long work days, having been trained by an older generation that accepted long work days as standard. Further, long work days are institutionalised through the organisational and pay structure of residential construction, whereby site workers are paid an hourly rate, with an expectation that they work 9 ½ to
10 hours day, five days a week. As such, it is unlikely that builders or site supervisors would consider issues related to work-life balance to be important.

**Long Work Hours as Industry Standard**

Construction, unlike many other job sectors, does not lend itself to moving jobs “off-shore”, as construction is site-specific (Lillie and Greer 2007; Loosemore, Dainty, and Lingard 2003:3). Inputs, such as materials and labour, have to be located at the build site and this necessitates that companies find alternative means to reduce costs and maximize profits. Given that the largest expense any company incurs is employment-related, reducing the roster of employees to the minimum number required is one effective measure to do so. As building permits fall (Ferrao and Lin 2009), so do jobs in the residential construction sector. In addition, multi-tasking expectations by employers (Loosemore, Dainty, and Lingard 2003:3) ensure that workers are adding to their daily task list, as builders try to maintain their profit margins in a declining marketplace. The culture of working as long as it takes to complete the job is maintained under such an economic climate, and overtime compensation remains a source of contention between worker and builder, should workers be eligible to receive such remuneration.

For example, construction workers in Ontario are exempt from overtime legislation, unless otherwise covered under collective agreements (Fudge 2006; Ontario Ministry of Labour 2011). Most Ontario workplaces adhere to a standard 8-hour day, 40 hour week, and overtime remuneration is paid to workers once they have worked more than 44 hours in a week. However, construction personnel in Ontario can be required to work as long as stipulated by their employer, thereby providing employers with considerable power over the work and personal lives of their employees. Although a
number of other occupations are also exempt from maximum work time provisions, the
physical demands placed on construction workers and the extreme conditions under
which they work is considerable, which means that long paid work hours can exact a
heavy toll on them physically, emotionally and socially.

Pay rates for unskilled labour, such as site personnel, average between $12 - $15
per hour, with new hires starting just above $10 an hour; site supervisors and service
personnel are compensated at a rate of $16 and up per hour. While these rates are better
than those in many service sector positions, they are low in comparison to wages paid to
skilled trades in general (CHMC 2005:70) and often lower than many of the trades who
contract directly with the builder. Overtime pay, accrued after 44 hours have been
logged, is one and a half times the hourly rate, raising weekly take home pay to $18 -
$22.50 per hour for those hours exceeding 44 in one week. Most builders expect their
workers to adhere to a 10 hour work day, five days a week, and therefore overtime pay
might be a structural component of the job, if it is paid at all. However, residential
builders are not obligated to provide their workers with overtime pay because of their
exemption from overtime legislation. Therefore, construction workers may need to work
long hours to be able to meet their financial responsibilities (Townsend et al. 2007).

It is a popular misconception that construction workers have union representation.
There is certainly a greater union presence on ICI job sites than is found on residential
sites although, according to a 2009 survey conducted by the Ontario Construction
Secretariat, only 28% of ICI contractors held a collective agreement with at least one
union (Isojim 2009). Union presence on ICI sites varies regionally throughout Ontario,
ranging from a low 10% in the Muskoka-Kawartha region to a high 36% in northwestern
Ontario. Toronto and Ottawa have approximately 31% of their ICI workforce under union contract, while the Windsor-Sarnia corridor is slightly higher, at 33% (Isojim 2009). The vast majority of construction personnel on ICI job sites are not protected by a union contract. Unfortunately, Statistics Canada does not segment construction jobs into residential or ICI sectors in their quantitative data collection surveys, so it is difficult to ascertain how many people working in the residential construction sector are covered by a union contract.

From a work-life balance point of view, unionising the workplace is seen as one effective strategy to help workers negotiate more control over their work lives (Shalla 2007). Yet, union presence on residential build sites does not necessarily mean the builder would hold a collective agreement with a union. While residential builders hire carpenters, plumbers, electricians and many other regulated trades, builders enter into contracts with individual companies to provide regulated services, thereby sidestepping the need to employ union personnel altogether. It is easy to see that residential construction workers are left to negotiate their own terms and conditions of employment, where issues related to work-life balance may not be viewed as a priority, particularly by male workers and male owners.
Chapter III: Literature Review

Two key areas are of interest in the literature review: work-life balance and worker powerlessness. Whereas work-life balance literature offers insight as to how workers navigate the competing interests between their work demands and non-work obligations, worker powerlessness literature illuminates whether or not they hold power with their employer to negotiate a better work-life balance. Work-life balance literature, as it pertains to a broad population of workers will be reviewed first, followed by an exploration of the literature regarding construction workers and their work-life balance. Next, worker powerlessness literature will be reviewed. Of particular interest is how worker powerlessness theory has been applied within nursing, which is an occupational context that shares many structural similarities with residential construction. Finally, a summary of the theoretical framework that will be utilised for this research and analysis will be presented.

Work-life Balance

Work-life balance refers to the power and control individuals have over their paid work time and home life, and the balance between the two. Workers’ ability to influence the terms and conditions of their paid work life, in an attempt to meet the obligations in their non-paid work life, lies at the heart of matter. Within a capitalist economy, owners control production and purchase labour power from workers—often, work-life balance is not part of the equation. Workers have the opportunity to sell their labour power—or not—to owners, but remain limited in their ability to negotiate

---

3 Paid work refers to activities where individuals exchange their time and services for money from a separate entity. Non-paid work encompasses activities for which individuals do not receive external payment and might include, for example, cleaning one’s house, caring for children or an elderly parent or doing yard work—essentially, non-paid work can be thought of as caring activities and household chores.
accommodations to meet their personal needs.

**Lack of Time and Work-life Balance**

Work-life balance is a growing area of concern for researchers and workers. Employees report that they find it increasingly difficult to cope with rising work demands while maintaining a satisfactory personal life (Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins 2008; Johnson, Lero and Rooney 2001; Whitehead 2008). Johnson, Lero and Rooney (2001) presented a scan of work-life balance literature within the Canadian workplace, drawing together worker and employer perspectives, along with projections into Canada’s working future. A key consideration that emanated from the compendium was the growing conflict between work life and non-work life.

Simply stated, Canadian workers report that they do not have enough time to do everything they are expected to do in both spheres (Johnson et al. 2001). Demands on working people to spend their time in new or different ways left them feeling as though they were in a time-deficit. The authors point to the fact that workers were spending more time commuting to and from work, had less time available to engage in volunteer activities, spent less time engaged in leisure pursuits, and were less likely to take time for themselves. Working parents were more “time stressed” (Johnson et al. 2001:51) than were single workers, although working single parents were most time deprived. A growing number of workers also reported not having enough time to meet the needs of their aging parents. Approximately 15% of workers who cared for children in the home also provided some level of elder support (Johnson et al. 2001:10). Yet it was the intersection between the time spent in work-related activities and time demands outside of work that left workers in a time deficit.
The Johnson et al. (2001) report clearly demonstrated that the costs associated with work-life conflict were shared by all societal stakeholders, including workers, families, communities and businesses. Rising health care costs associated with increased work-related stress put additional strain on the Canadian health care system. The financial burden placed on families who have to pay for childcare was noted, where fulltime care for pre-school aged children averaged $6,000 (1998) per year per child (Johnson et al. 2001:44). Work-life conflict also exacted a financial toll on business. Twice as many days of absenteeism were logged by workers with significant time conflict as by those who were less conflicted (Johnson et al. 2001:60), resulting in decreased productivity for business. Yet, organisations that offered flexible time arrangements benefited financially. For example, a 15% reduction in time lost was seen when workers had some level of time flexibility in their job (Johnson et al. 2001:62). Overall, lessening the level of work-time conflict was of benefit to all stakeholders.

The Johnson et al. (2001) report did shed light on the multi-faceted work-life balance problem faced by Canadian workers although it had a number of limitations with respect to addressing work-life balance barriers of residential construction workers. First, the report suggested that problems associated with work-life balance were greater for managerial or professional employees, but it did not provide a proportional breakdown of occupations to justify the assertion. As well, the report’s heavy focus on female employees did not offer much insight into understanding men’s situation in general, and more particularly that of the male construction worker, apart from highlighting men’s increased role on the domestic front (Johnson et al. 2001:51-52). Canadian workers employed in working class occupations have not been the focus of work-life balance
literature, and the Johnson et al. (2001) report reinforces this trend in the research. Finally, the authors did not comment on how government might play a role in helping workers achieve a better work-life balance, apart from mentioning the uneven maternity and paternity benefits available to some workers, with the underlying premise being that sanctioned time away from work is predicated on establishing families with children. Therefore, the legitimate needs of non-parental workers or workers engaged in elder care were not included.

Other studies have looked more in-depth at specific groups’ ability to manage the work-family nexus. Becker and Moen (1999) assessed how dual earner middle class couples ($n=117$) from New York State managed to balance their work and family obligations. The authors found three “scaling back” methods employed by couples to help them achieve a more reasonable work-life balance: 1) one partner works in a job while the other is employed in a career; 2) establishing limits around their work commitments to lessen encroachment on family life; and 3) deciding which partner will take a lead role in issues of home life, allowing the other partner freedom to concentrate on their career path (Becker and Moen 1999). Creativity mitigated some of the balancing act challenges, but often failed to accommodate the career goals of both partners. The introduction of children to the partnership increased a couple’s time conflict. Mothers were more likely to scale back their career aspirations to better accommodate time demands on the home front. Overall, most participants wanted the opportunity to have flexibility in their job; however, they were not in agreement that the government should play a role in this respect. One group preferred an informal approach, where flexible workplace policies would allow workers time away from their job as needed, while
formal, government-directed policies were promoted by others as a way of ensuring that all workers had equal access to flexible arrangements under certain circumstances.

However, having workplace policies to enhance employees’ opportunity to find a better work-life balance may not solve the problem. Callan (2007) conducted case studies in two British workplaces to ascertain how best to implement work-life balance practices and measure outcomes. From organisational and cultural standpoints, implementing work-life balance policies or adopting a framework to enhance such balance can be a complicated, multi-layered issue fraught with pitfalls. Both study site workplaces were large corporations with an international profile and had recently introduced family-friendly policies for their workforce. A representative sample of participants from each site was interviewed over the course of 18 months. One organisation implemented its family-friendly policies directly, expecting all managers and workers to embrace the new ethos without reservation, while the other company took a more organic approach that allowed policies to be integrated over time, and within the parameters of work goals. Callan found that competing identities, specifically those of the “ideal worker” and the “integrated worker”, obfuscated either approach (overt or gradual) to implementing family-friendly policies (2007:676-677). Where ideal workers placed work above all other considerations and adopted a male construct of the work world, the integrated worker was allowed to merge home and work spheres toward a more harmonious coexistence. Based on her findings, Callan noted that adopting a more cautious approach, whereby work-life balance practices were slowly introduced over time, would be more likely to succeed. Such an approach would allow workers time to adjust to their new work culture and adapt their work tasks, deadlines and schedules
accordingly (Callan 2007).

Organisational change was, Callan (2007) argued, achieved over time. Either approach, whether policies were implemented quickly or over a period of time, was no guarantee of success. Not all eligible workers were able to take advantage of the new policies for a variety of reasons, some of them were personal and others stemmed from workplace demands that could not accommodate schedule flexibility. The author asserted that simply having family-friendly policies did not necessarily improve workers’ work-life balance (Callan 2007). This study demonstrated that work-life balance policies, however well intentioned, may not solve the systemic problems facing workers, especially those workers who are valued for their traditional ideal worker traits, such as is found in the construction industry. The Callan study did not explore how power—or the lack thereof—might have played a role in employees’ acceptance of and access to family-friendly policies.

Certainly, a ‘one size fits all’ approach to flexibility in the workplace might be unrealistic. Time is finite and when competing interests, such as work demands and domestic obligations clash, workers are left to determine what they can and cannot do. Voydanoff (2008) applied a ‘work-family fit’ concept to describe work-life balance through a combination of attributes under a demands-abilities and needs-supplies construct. On the demands-abilities side, a worker achieved fitness when they were able to meet expectations (demands) of the job with current abilities; conversely, if the demands of the job surpassed their abilities, stress resulted. Within the needs-supplies context, balance was found when a worker’s needs were met (food, shelter, clothing, for example) by the available supplies at hand, which might include wage rates, or available
work hours.

When the supply is unable to meet worker needs, stress can result. Developing a measurement scale for the needs-supplies and demands-abilities model could provide researchers with a quantifiable tool to assess worker stress. Workers could then be compared with one another across occupational categories, and differences between the sexes could be illustrated.

The role gender plays in the workforce is of interest to numerous researchers, who argue that women want flexible work arrangements that meet the needs of home and work life (Dainty, Bagilhole, and Neale 2001; MacDonald, Phipps, and Lethbridge 2005; Warren, Fox, and Pascall 2009), but are usually left to their own devices to design a schedule that accommodates both. Employers have traditionally viewed women’s participation in the paid labour force as a ‘choice’ and therefore did not accept that they had an obligation to help women bridge the home/work gap, where they hold the divide between a worker’s home life and work life as distinct realms, with one having little to do with the other. There is growing evidence to suggest that working men, particularly fathers, would prefer a more flexible work environment if it were offered. At the same time, men tend to sacrifice family time to meet work demands more often than do women.

A study that examined the role gender played in work-family conflict was undertaken by Mennino and Brayfield (2002). Specifically, the authors indicated that men who held a non-traditional male ideology were as likely to forego family obligations to fulfill their employment commitments as were their traditional counterparts. In male-dominated occupations, both genders were more likely to work extra hours, accept
promotions and increase their work commitment, at the expense of family time. In work settings that were more gender integrated, gender differences were less evident, although women were more likely to reduce their work commitments when young children were in the home. Similar findings were found by Martinengo, Jacob and Hill (2010), who surveyed over 41,000 IBM workers to ascertain if male and female workers experienced differences related to work-family conflict and, if so, which stages of family life were most problematic. All respondents were categorised as being in one of six life stages, ranging from no children through to and including families where adult children had left home. For women, their engagement in the paid workforce rose and fell, depending on the age of children. Women spent more time attending to domestic concerns while children were young or in their teen years. Once children had left home, female workers had more time to devote to work. Life stage was less a contributing factor for men than for women, meaning that whether or not a male worker had children in the home, his work-based activities did not significantly change. As well, men were more likely to be absent from family activities and less likely to do household chores (Martinengo, Jacob and Hill 2010). An earlier study by Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie (2006) stated that fathers’ participation on the domestic scene had increased since the mid-1960s, especially in relation to their child care responsibilities. The authors compared American fathers’ domestic participation rates in 1965 with those in 2000, and found that men spent an average of 6.5 hours per week in child care related duties in 2000, which represented a 153% increase (as cited by Whitehead 2008:15). However, similar male participation rates were not found in domestic chores, although overall, the amount of time women spent attending to household jobs, such as cooking and cleaning, had declined since the
In summary, too much time spent attending to work-related activities leaves little free time for workers to meet the needs in other areas of their life. Work-life balance is a problem for both working men and women, although much of the literature focuses on the challenges female workers face. Those who work outside the home in paid employment and who have children at home are generally more time-crunch than are single workers without dependents. Not surprisingly, working mothers face the greater difficulty. Many workers would prefer flexible work schedules, but there is little consensus as to what those provisions might be, for whom and how to best implement them. Employers are similarly unclear about how to provide workers with flexibility while maintaining organisational goals, and it usually falls to governments to provide direction, either through legislation or their own practices.

**Government and Work-life Balance**

In Canada, all levels of government play a role in overseeing and regulating the workplace, to varying degrees. The Federal Ministry of Labour’s work-life balance report (HRSDC 2002) for Ministers of Labour (all jurisdictions) highlighted the complicated interplay between work life and non-work life, suggesting that there are no simple solutions. For instance, negative health outcomes related to the added stress that employees experienced resulting from their inability to satisfy personal needs were significant (HRSDC 2002). Many workers faced challenges as they cared for children and/or ageing parents and did not have access to adequate support systems to meet their needs, either in the workplace or on the home front. As well, the report noted that volunteerism, a key contributor to the economy and social safety net in Canada, was
similarly disadvantaged when people are over-worked and do not have the time to engage in their community.

When the information was collected, it was noted that although some legislation was in place to assist employees with this balancing act, provincial and territorial employment standards and employment legislative differences did not offer equity to all working Canadians (HRSDC 2002). The report noted that no province or territory specifically addressed work-life balance or had legislative provisions that would assist workers in need. Indeed, government sees its role, in relation to workers and employers, as “…ensur[ing] that Canadian workplaces are safe and working conditions are fair” (HRSDC 2002:20), although “safe and fair” could be open to interpretation. For example, if a worker’s stress level reaches a crisis point whereby they are required to take time off from work for treatment, they may have access to income support, such as short-term medical Employment Insurance benefits. However, when taking into consideration the finding that stress is often the result of a worker having poor work-life balance, it can be difficult to determine at what stage government intervention is beneficial.

Still, the report (HRSDC 2002) suggested that work-life balance considerations can be found in existing legislation that benefits many Canadian workers, with a few caveats. Legislation may not cover employees who work for a small business. Workforce legislation is often tied to the number of workers employed by a business; employees who work for small or medium sized businesses may not be entitled to claim certain benefits that are accessible to workers employed by a larger organisation. As well, legislation does not cover those workers who do not meet the definition of an employee—fee for service workers or contract workers, for example. Also, much of the
legislation is focused on assisting parents, which is of little benefit to those workers who do not have children but require time away from work to attend to other obligations, such as elder care. Ontario construction companies, for instance, are not obligated to provide their employees with overtime pay, as the construction sector is exempt from Ontario’s overtime legislation. As such, Ontario construction workers can be required to work as many hours as dictated by their employer, and they have little legal recourse toward achieving a more reasonable work-life balance.

The British government, in an attempt to address growing concerns about work-life balance for British workers, joined the European Union’s 1998 initiative that limited the standard work week to 48 hours (Dex and Bond 2005). However, the UK government included a proviso that allowed employers to opt out of the maximum work week legislation, leaving many workers without protection. Dex and Bond (2005) surveyed approximately 3,000 UK workers to determine measurement covariates influencing British employees’ work-life balance. Respondents worked in a diverse range of fields, including health, finance, telecommunications, business services and social services. Over 80% of those surveyed were women (Dex and Bond 2005:628). Respondents completed a checklist questionnaire that graded, on a scale, how out of balance their work-life was and what steps they could take to ameliorate problems and create a better balance. Among the findings presented, work-life balance problems were of greatest concern for workers between the ages of 26 and 55, peaking in the 36 to 45 age range (Dex and Bond 2005:628), especially for those workers who were responsible for dependents. Women were more likely to have difficulty balancing home and work demands, as did people who worked more than 48 hours a week (Dex and Bond
2005:628-627). Overall, the authors concluded that in order for British workers to strike a better work-life balance, the British government ought to apply the EU’s maximum 48 hour work week to all employers and revoke exemptions. This, they argued, was necessary, given the overwhelming correlation between long work weeks and work-life imbalance, particularly for those between the ages of 36 and 45 years (Dex and Bond 2005:628).

Yet the experience for workers in the Netherlands suggests that simply restricting work hours might not solve the problem. In 2000, the Netherlands enacted Wet Aanpassing Arbeidsduur (Working Hours Adjustment Act), which provided workers with the flexibility to increase or decrease their hours to accommodate personal needs without penalty, as long as it did not adversely affect the employer (van Echtelt, Glebbeek, and Lindenberg 2006). An analysis conducted two years later uncovered a discrepancy between people's preferred working hours and their actual working hours. Employees who wanted to work fewer hours were constrained by the task-based nature of their job and, because the new labour provision was time-focused, workers were oftentimes unable to take advantage of the new legislation.

It would seem, then, that government could play a role in helping workers achieve a more reasonable work-life balance. Legislation that places limits on the number of hours employees can be compelled to work in a week would be beneficial, particularly if it was applied across all workplaces and to all workers.

Construction Workers and Work-life Balance

As mentioned earlier, long work hours are a hallmark of the construction sector. However, as a male-dominated industry, few researchers have considered what work-life
balance construction workers have or the role it might play in attracting new workers, both men and women, to the industry.

The work-life balance of construction employees in the Australian Industrial, Commercial, Institutional (ICI) sector has been an area of interest for a few academic researchers (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard and Gibson 2006; Lingard and Francis 2006; Lingard et al. 2007; Lingard et al. 2008; Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010; Townsend et al. 2007). A number of common themes run through this research, with the most prevalent being the number of hours that construction personnel work.

The Australian government does not impose maximum work week legislation on employers, thereby leaving employees without recourse should they prefer to work fewer hours than the 50 hour weekly standard (van Wanrooy and Wilson 2006). Workers in Australia have a cultural predisposition toward working long hours (van Wanrooy and Wilson 2006) and a structural reinforcement to work long hours, particularly for workers who are paid by the hour. It is not uncommon to find ICI construction personnel average 50-60 hour weeks, working six days a week (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard and Gibson 2006; Lingard et al. 2007; Lingard et al. 2008; Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010), leaving workers with little free time to spend with family or attend to personal matters.

Research indicates, however, that workers in this sector do not agree on how to better their work-life balance. The Construction Industry Institute (Australia) sponsored two studies that focused on work-life issues of Australian ICI construction personnel in the public and private sectors (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard and Gibson 2006).
The first study (Francis and Lingard 2004), which was an internet-based quantitative management employee survey, found significant differences between the public and private sectors in a number of key variables. Specifically, when compared to their private sector counterparts, public sector employees worked less, had greater flexibility in their job design and reported that spending time in leisure activities or with family was less difficult to achieve than their private sector counterparts (Francis and Lingard 2004). In addition, the tension that hourly paid construction workers experienced between the demands of home life and their need to work long hours to receive a higher rate of financial compensation was considerable (Francis and Lingard 2004). Site workers (hourly waged) averaged 62 hours a week, whereas office-based staff (usually salaried) averaged 56 hours per week. Unlike salaried workers, public and private sector hourly workers received less pay when hours were reduced, exacting a negative impact on their financial outcomes and making this option less attractive if they wished to achieve a more reasonable work-life balance.

In the subsequent qualitative study (Francis, Lingard, and Gibson 2006), 24 construction workers—7 from the private sector and 17 from the public sector, along with 7 spouses—participated in semi-standardised interviews regarding work-family strategies employed when both spouses were in the workforce. Results of the qualitative study confirmed that long work days and the number of hours worked each week were crucial determinants of strained domestic relationships—despite couples adopting various strategies to cope with the prolonged absence of one partner (Francis, Lingard, and Gibson 2006). Both studies (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard, and Gibson 2006) offer insights into the work-life balance of the Australian ICI construction worker,
indicating how little non-work time they have available and the impact that this reality has on individuals and families.

Working in collaboration with a large ICI construction company, Lingard et al. (2007) studied work-life balance and the effects of a compressed work week, whereby employees who would normally work a 58 hour week over 6 days (five 10 hour days plus an 8 hour Saturday), worked 11.5 hour days, Monday to Friday. In all, 42 employees completed a questionnaire and participated in semi-standardised interviews; of those 42 participants, 19 workers were salaried and 23 were paid on an hourly basis. Waged and salaried workers were asked to rank their levels of satisfaction (from 1 to 7, with 7 ranked highest) about their work life, their non-work life and their work-life balance. In each of these three satisfaction areas, the mean was above 5, indicating that employees were reasonably satisfied. Of note, the greatest disparity between salaried and waged workers was seen in the work-life balance score: a mean score of 5.86 for hourly waged workers versus 5.00 mean score for those on salary. When asked about working either 5 or 6 days a week, 71% (30 of 42: 14 hourly; 16 salaried) indicated that they “very strongly preferred” working a 5 day week (2007:813-814). Employees enjoyed having more time to spend with family and on leisure pursuits. As well, the two day weekend promoted healing, allowing the body to recover from the effects of arduous physical exertion during the work week. Lastly, the compressed work week evoked feelings of good will by workers toward the company. Productivity was positively correlated with a compressed work week and the company was not adversely affected—the project was completed under budget and six months ahead of time, demonstrating that work hours could be compressed without negative corporate impacts. The case study established that
offering employees an improved work-life balance by re-structuring the work week was of benefit to the construction company and its personnel.

In another study, Lingard, Francis and Turner (2010) examined work-family conflict experienced by construction workers (n=169) who worked for a large Australian ICI construction, as compared with work-family conflict data reported in previously published studies. Specifically, they considered whether time, behaviour and strain conflicts affected workers and, if so, to what degree. Time-based conflicts were those instances when the time required in one area (on the job, for example) meant that a worker could not meet time demands in another area (with the family, for instance). Behaviour-based conflicts were defined as when a worker’s behaviour in one area (care-giving behaviour, as an example) was at odds with behaviour expected in another area (such as ideal worker). Strain-based conflicts (stress) were characterised as when acting in the interests of one area (working overtime to complete a job) did not allow them to meet the needs in another area (attend a child’s soccer game). Further, the authors sought to determine if work-family conflicts were similar across age, gender, job positions and payment types.

Overall, work-family conflict was greater for construction workers in the study when compared to workers in other occupations (Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010). Construction workers paid on an hourly basis and site-based workers (both salaried and hourly waged workers) spent more time at work and had less time available for home and family than construction personnel who were office-based. As with previous research findings, payment type figured prominently in the debate over reducing the number of

---

4 The authors referenced data, representing a variety of non-construction occupations, as published by Carson et al. 2000; Bruck et al. 2002; Carlson et al. 2003; Maden 2006; and van Daalen et al. 2006.
hours worked each week as a way to lessen work-family conflict. Salaried workers favoured such a reduction while hourly waged workers did not. Finally, for construction workers either on salary or paid hourly, having children in the home who were less than 18 years of age was not a strong predictor of work-family conflict; this was thought to reflect the predominantly male sample with most men likely having a female partner at home to attend to domestic concerns.

Work-life balance for construction workers appears to be a matter of time—too much time spent on the job leaving little time for family, friends and other ‘life’ activities. As each of the studies in this section notes, long work hours in the Australian ICI construction industry predispose workers to a work-life imbalance. While many workers supported the idea of working fewer hours, it was not wholly embraced by hourly paid workers who were distinctly economically disadvantaged by such a strategy. However, this body of Australian literature on work-life balance in the construction industry did not consider the power differential between worker and employer. This power dynamic might help explain why construction workers did not advocate getting a pay increase to offset lost wages from a reduced work week, for example.

**Worker Powerlessness**

The power imbalance inherent between owner and worker, according to Marx (1906), is based in the ownership of the means of production by the ruling class who purchase labour power from the working class. Marx predicted that once the working class became the majority, through the shrinking of the ruling and middle classes, conflict between the classes would increase and the stage set to redress the power imbalance. Still, as Conley points out, “…size is not enough for power unless it is organized”
It would not be sufficient for the working class to simply band together—they would also need to rival the ruling class’s access to and control over resources, such as property, industry, and political sway, albeit in a different fashion to what Weber would later propose.

Weber’s (1968) assessment of individual power stems from his or her organisational position, socio-economic status, and/or party affiliation. An individual’s power is not necessarily tied to their job title, but can be influenced by gender, ethnic group, or political membership, for example. Conley comments: “Weber, in contrast [to Marx], presents a more complex and contingent view of class formation…” (2009:47).

This study is concerned with work-life balance and the role worker power (or lack thereof), and in particular, working class power, plays in their ability to achieve a reasonable work-life balance. Michael Zweig’s (2000) interpretation of working class, as it relates to power, is instructive:

On the job, most workers have little control over the pace and content of their work. They show up, a supervisor shows them the job, and they do it. The job may be skilled or unskilled, white collar or blue collar, in any one of thousands of occupations. Whatever the particulars, most jobs share a basic powerlessness in relation to the authority of the owner and the owner’s representatives who are there to supervise and control the workforce. (P. 13)

Worker powerlessness, as Zweig (2000) asserts, results when employees do not have the ability to influence or control the terms and conditions of their job. For Zweig, power is class relational. Zweig’s example of a plumber is useful: “[a] plumber operating as an independent contractor counts in the middle class, but the same plumber working for someone else is in the working class” (2000:28). The contract plumber has the power to set his own hours, to decide his pay rate, to negotiate what jobs he will take, to determine
the pace at which he will work and to establish the circumstances under which he will work\textsuperscript{5}. The plumber as employee will likely not be able to have this same level of control over his work. Capitalists\textsuperscript{6} have the capacity to influence, create, and build—the independent worker is dependent on capitalists to provide him with opportunities.

In his analysis of occupations, Zweig estimated that approximately 62\%\textsuperscript{7} of jobs in the US were working class (2000:29). Included in those figures were labourers, operators and fabricators (100\% working class), administrative support workers (96\%), production, craft and repair personnel (93\%) and service workers (92\%). Essentially, the majority of workers are without power to negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment. However, some theorists attributed worker powerlessness to factors other than class relational, to which we turn next.

According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), workplace organisations adopt a simplistic view of empowerment, describing it as a power-sharing construct. The authors demonstrate that the published literature placed power and empowerment into two separate constructs: relational and motivational. Under a relational construct, power and empowerment is essentially seen as the way actors or units of actors interact with one another. The tension to gain and hold power comes at the expense of others—if one person or business unit has power, another person or unit does not. Power is therefore, finite, as well as person or unit dependent. Those who have power are more likely to reach their organisational goals while those who wield less power (or have no power) will not be successful in their workplace goal attainment. Rather than fostering cohesion, this

\textsuperscript{5} Contracted plumbers who specialise in new home construction rely on builders to provide them with work. Some contract plumbers could be considered small capitalists if they hire workers.

\textsuperscript{6} Capitalists represent approximately 2\% of those engaged in the United States labour market (Zweig 2004:5).

\textsuperscript{7} Based on figures from 1996.
model of power evokes a competitive workplace, with workers occupying the roles of winners and losers; similarly, the organisation's corporate goals might rise and fall depending on who won and who lost. Of course, the problem with this model, from an organisational and management point of view, is that power inevitably shifts. The departure of a key power player might shake the power status quo, as would the re-organisation of the company, where units are dissolved or re-aligned.

The motivational concept of workplace power is rooted in the psychological literature and advances the idea that power is an internal process, under the domain of the individual and the organisation (Conger and Kanungo 1988). Power is a feeling that the individual possesses as a result of their triumphing—or not—over adversity. Workplaces that challenge workers to meet attainable goals are seen as empowering; conversely, organisations that set unrealistic goals for their workers will instill a sense of powerlessness in their employees.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) proposed a five step process toward empowering workers that is framed within a social psychological model, whereby work organisations would "...enhanc[e] feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (1988:474). Both the organisation and the individual are expected to engage in the empowerment process, each playing a role toward that goal. Structural changes, such as locating and removing obstacles that hinder the empowerment process, along with self-efficacy strategies for workers, would be implemented and benchmarks established for each stage. Managers would then be able to measure current performance
outcomes against desired outcomes and, in utilising Conger and Kanungo's (1988) process, move from a powerless organisation to an empowering one.

Conger and Kanungo's (1988) empowerment process would require diligent oversight to ensure that all stakeholders are fully engaged. It is not inconceivable that a poor manager would be unable to recognise that they might be a barrier and in need of removal in order to create an empowering workplace. Subordinate workers may not be the problem, but can be a convenient scapegoat.

The theory (Conger and Kanungo 1988) poses some problems if it were to be applied within the residential construction sector. The aforementioned caution would be of concern. Most managers on a construction site are promoted based on site experience, rather than as a result of management training. Trade-related competencies and tenure on building sites are the primary pre-requisite to become a site supervisor, and not human resource management training. Therefore, most site supervisors would be unable to understand the underlying concepts of the theory, let alone have the necessary insight to comprehend behavioural outcomes. It would be unreasonable to expect site supervisors to have the finesse necessary to roll out a multi-staged, organisational process successfully. Further, the reward system for site workers is a paycheque and the ability to return to work the next day. Lastly, the theory does not address the work-life balance issue under investigation. Rather, it supports the premise that work life is separate from home life and that these two domains do not have an effect on one another. The idea that someone’s life can be easily compartmentalised is simplistic. If work life can intrude into a worker’s personal time, through their having to work overtime, for example, it is not unreasonable to expect that there will be times when their personal life will, on
occasion, leak into work time. It is not clear how the theory would assist workers to strike a better balance between their work time and personal time, given that the theory’s goal is to empower workers while they are at work. That said, it is possible that empowered workers might have more control over their work time and therefore reduce instances of work time leaking into personal time. An alternative theory that may offer additional benefits to understanding work-life balance challenges in residential construction is considered next.

In *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), Rosabeth Moss Kanter defined power as a worker's "ability to mobilize information, resources and support to get things done in an organization" (p. 2). She developed this definition after having spent a number of years as a consultant for a large industrial firm where she was able to observe and collect qualitative data. Her work in power and powerlessness is useful when considering work-life balance. A worker who is able to complete job tasks in a timely and effective manner will be less likely to work overtime and thereby enjoy a more reasonable work-life balance. Kanter’s theory is multi-layered\(^8\) and offers a number of dimensions through which to examine worker power and worker powerlessness, specifically, hierarchal power, formal and informal power and worker access to resources, information and support.

Kanter does not see power as emanating from a hierarchal structure in the workplace, but rather, power is a worker’s “ability to get things done” (p. 166) that transcends position or title. In this aspect, power is not necessarily tied to a position of authority but can be thought of in terms of an action. If power is simply the result of a

---

\(^8\) Kanter’s opportunity structure is not considered for the purposes of this limited investigation (1977:129-163).
title or position held in a business, then all positions of power would command action. That is not, however, always the case. For instance, Kanter describes an occasion where manager “A” wished to change a particularly cumbersome billing process for a key supplier. “A” had the authoritative power to do so but was thwarted in his efforts by a junior manager, “B”, who had instituted a special billing system for that supplier at the request of a senior executive who disliked the supplier’s president (p. 164-65). Power, according to Kanter, ought to be widely distributed to all employees, and not be the privilege of only a few—power in too few hands translates into workers having little or no power. Certainly, most traditional workplaces assign power to workers based on their title or position within the company. Curtailing worker power constrains an organisation’s potential and, therefore, Kanter suggests that employers seek opportunities to empower the majority of their workforce. Kanter argues that powerlessness in an organisation “…wast[es] a large measure of their human talent” (p. 266), limiting a worker’s effectiveness and is in opposition to realising corporate goals. Powerless workers are less likely to be innovative, are less attached to their employer and experience more work-related stress—exacting a negative toll on a business’s efficiency and profitability. It would seem reasonable, then, that employers seek opportunities to empower the majority of their workforce rather than adhere to a hierarchal power structure and to foster formal and informal power throughout their organisation.

Both formal and informal powers also play a significant role in the workplace (Kanter 1977). Formal power is power sanctioned by the organisation, such as position-based authority (p. 165). Informal power describes that which is derived from the social capital a worker has accrued over their tenure in their job, including alliances with co-
workers, supervisors and external affiliates who are connected to the company (p. 181).

Kanter suggests that an individual with formal power but without informal power is powerless (p. 186). Emblematic of this state, Kanter offers the example of middle-managers, who, by virtue of their position (formal power), are expected to fulfill corporate objectives; yet, should they lack the ability to influence others (informal power) to assist them toward achieving those goals, they are rendered impotent (p. 186-187).

Both formal and informal powers are important considerations when assessing organisational structure. Further, formal and informal powers delineate who has access to resources, information and support that help achieve organisational goals.

Finally, Kanter (1977; 1979) proposes that empowered employees have access to the tools of information, resources, and support, and those who do not have such access, are powerless in the workplace. Information, resources and support will vary, according to the organisation, type of work being done and who is tasked with doing what. Still, most workers require these tools in order to do their job in a timely and effective manner and should they be unable to access pertinent information, appropriate resources or garner support from co-workers or supervisors in the course of their task completion, they may be powerless to “get things done” (1977:166).

The consequences of worker powerlessness are dire, according to Kanter (1977; 1979). Kanter posits that large, bureaucratic organisations in particular, are rife with powerless workers, noting that “[p]owerlessness corrupts. Absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely”9 (1977:164). As well, Kanter suggests that large organisations are less likely to allow their workers to take risks, to innovate, or to use discretion on the job

---

9 Lord Acton, in a letter to Bishop Mandel Creighton in 1887, wrote: “All power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely” (see http://www.acton.org/research/lord-acton-quote-archive).
than are small or medium sized businesses (1977; 1979). Size does matter. Larger organisations are faced with the dilemma of how to best control output. Additionally, Kanter (1977) proposed that:

People held accountable for the results produced by others, whose formal role gives the right to command but who lack...access to resources...are rendered powerless in the organization. (P. 186)

Essentially, a worker with pseudo power serves no one, neither their superiors nor those they supervise.

General powerlessness in the workplace poses various problems for individual employees (Kanter 1977; 1979; 2010). Powerless managers, for example, “breed bossiness”, and the workplace shows signs of “ineffective, desultory management and petty, dictatorial, rules-minded managerial styles” (1979:65). Kanter notes that coalitions begin to form in an effort to lessen the effects of a degrading work environment, but also to amass resources that grouped workers can use to accomplish their tasks (1977; 2010). Often, workers will retreat when berated by supervisors or exact their own form of retribution, such as deliberately decreasing the pace of their work (2010). Decidedly, powerlessness in the workplace is costly. It would seem to be in everyone’s best interests—the employer, workers and the economy—to foster a workplace that values worker empowerment. Kanter’s (1977) theory can serve as a roadmap to empowerment. For example, if a lack of information prevented a worker from being able to complete their assigned task in a timely manner, identifying the sources of information to which they needed access and providing them with that capacity would move the worker from powerless status to empowered worker. On the whole, Kanter’s empowerment theory (1977) can highlight workplace structural inadequacies and prescribe structural solutions
and is particularly useful when exploring working class occupations.

**Worker Powerlessness in Nursing**

Working class jobs, returning to Zweig’s definition (2001; 2004), render workers powerless. Working class jobs are not usually structured to allow employees to negotiate the terms and conditions under which they work. Jobs in the residential construction sector are decidedly working class (Zweig 2000) and adhere to a traditional hierarchal organisational structure of owner at the top and workers below. Researchers have not (yet) examined worker powerlessness within the residential construction sector. Therefore, to gain insight into worker powerlessness within a working class career, another occupation needed to be considered. The nursing profession and worker powerlessness is of interest to a number of Canadian researchers and nurses share some attributes with residential construction workers, including a working class status, that are instructive.

Zweig suggested that half of those employed in the nursing profession were working class (2000:29) and therefore had little power in their job. Many nurses work in a hospital setting that has a traditional hierarchal organisational structure\(^\text{10}\) where nurses are often outside the sphere of influence to better negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment. Further, nurses and residential construction workers need to respond to unique circumstances. Every house is unique. Where a house sits on a building lot, its elevation in the lot, the design elements and chosen finishes result in a house that requires construction workers adapt their skills to the needs of the building process. Similarly, each patient is unique and presents special challenges to the nurses who provide them

\(^{10}\) Ontario hospitals are regulated by the Public Hospitals Act, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Most Ontario hospitals are incorporated and have a Board of Directors to oversee their operation. See [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/hosp/hosp_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/hosp/hosp_mn.html)
with care. Finally, construction workers and nurses must go to where the work is located—building site or patient location—and are therefore constrained in their ability to create flexible terms and conditions in their job.

There are differences between nurses and residential construction workers. If half of those employed as nurses could be classified as working class (Zweig 2000), what about the other half? It is reasonable that many nurses could be classified as middle class and therefore not share a working class identity. As well, many hospital-based nurses in Canada are part of a union or covered under a collective agreement whereas this is not the case for residential construction workers.

A scan of the nursing literature supports the premise that many nurses are powerless and reveals that empowerment is a topic of interest to researchers examining the nursing profession. Kuokkanen and Leino-Kilpi (2000) reviewed nursing literature that utilised an empowerment framework. The literature was categorised into one of three frameworks through which empowerment was viewed: social psychological; organisational; or critical social. Organisational theory chronicled processes that enhanced worker empowerment and, which would, in turn, likely result in an improved and efficient workplace. Organisational theory located empowerment as a workplace process, seeking to identify and provide workers with the tools necessary to meet organisational goals. The premise advanced was that empowered workers would be able to successfully complete assigned tasks, and thereby give them a sense of personal fulfillment, job satisfaction and job attachment. Such organisational processes would, within the nursing field, be directed by the human resource department. Critical social theory assumed that the nursing profession was disadvantaged, relative to other
occupations within the work environment and, through empowerment, the profession could rise out of oppression. Lastly, social psychological theories centred on the individual worker and offered strategies to improve and better themselves. For nurses, this would encompass their ability to exercise decision-making discretion and exert control over their job tasks and patient care. While the critical social literature included all constituents in the analysis—nurses and patients, for example—social psychological theory preferred to focus solely on the individual nurse worker. The authors concluded that each theoretical paradigm offered researchers a valuable platform from which to understand empowerment in nursing, albeit from divergent points of view.

The Kuokkanen and Leino-Kilpi (2000) review stopped short of recommending one theoretical framework over another. That said, they did outline how each theory informs nursing empowerment and showed the types of outcomes each could offer. In this respect, the review was useful when considering which theoretical stream would be most advantageous for the current investigation of male residential construction workers and their work-life balance. An organisation-based theory, such as Kanter’s (1977) empowerment theory, would serve the needs of both the construction worker and the workplace, as it would illuminate the structural problems that inhibit work-life balance and offer solutions of benefit to both, if a more reasonable work-life balance were introduced.

Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian and Wilk (2004) employed Kanter's empowerment theory in a study on Ontario nurses (n=185) to ascertain their rate of job satisfaction in relation to their level of job-based empowerment across two spans of time (1998 and 2001). The authors clearly delineated between structural empowerment from
psychological empowerment: “...structural empowerment is the perception of the presence or absence of empowering conditions in the workplace, psychological empowerment is the employees’ psychological interpretation or reaction to these conditions” (2004:529). Results found that there was not a significant relationship between improved psychological conditions (worker perceptions of their autonomy and competency or making a difference in people's lives, for example) and improved job satisfaction; rather, the results strongly supported the contention that when nurses perceived that they had better access to information, resources and support, they reported greater levels of job satisfaction and felt empowered, thereby affirming Kanter's structural approach.

Following on the research by Laschinger et al. (2004), authors Sarmiento, Laschinger and Iwasiw (2004) identified a gap in the nursing literature with respect to nurse educators and burnout. A correlational questionnaire surveyed 89 nurse educators across Ontario, to ascertain whether their access to resources, information, support and opportunities would, as Kanter theorised, mitigate worker burnout and increase job satisfaction. Indeed, their findings strongly supported Kanter's theory. For example, emotional exhaustion was a significant predictor of burnout and job dissatisfaction, yet workplace support, either by the institution or supervisor, had the effect of empowering the worker or led to a more satisfactory work outcome.

Kanter's empowerment theory was a useful and valid framework that measured outcomes and predicted change based on the introduction of structural modifications (Sarmiento, Laschinger and Iwasiw 2004). Work-life balance was not directly addressed in the study, but reference was made to nurse educators’ lack of time (interpreted as a
resource), as cutbacks and declining enrolments led to fewer instructors but increasing class sizes. Less time to meet with students outside the classroom or to take part in professional development activities left nurse educators feeling disengaged from aspects of their work that they considered important. Although these results might be predictable, Kanter's empowerment thesis was supported.

Finally, Gilbert, Laschinger and Leiter (2010) utilised Kanter's empowerment framework to identify how empowerment affects organisational citizenship behaviours and worker burnout. Health care professionals (n=897) from five hospitals across Canada were surveyed, cataloguing their perceptions of empowerment, burnout and organisational citizenship behaviours (such as courtesy on the job and being a conscientious worker). Results supported the link between burnout and empowerment, and empowerment and organisational citizenship behaviours. Hospitals that created a positive working atmosphere were more likely to have employees who reciprocated positively, by adopting altruistic attributes or civic-mindedness at the worksite. In addition, employee burnout was mitigated when workers perceived they were empowered. Again, Kanter's empowerment theory was supported.

Upon reviewing the literature, it is clear that Kanter’s empowerment theory is useful to help explain worker powerlessness and to illuminate workplace structures that can create and support an empowering work environment. Still, it is a micro-level theory and has limitations. Kanter’s theory does not purport to address the larger structural issues facing workers within capitalist societies. It does not offer solutions that can be applicable to all workplaces, regardless of the type of work being conducted or size of the organisation. As well, it is not apparent how Kanter’s theory could be applied to labour-
Worker Powerlessness and Worker Empowerment

Kanter’s (1977) theory on worker empowerment provides a useful framework when attempting to understand the work-life balance of residential construction workers. As outlined by the work-life balance literature that focused on Australian construction workers (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard and Gibson 2006; Lingard and Francis 2006; Lingard et al. 2007; Lingard et al. 2008; Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010; Townsend et al. 2007), the workplace structure of long work hours leaves little spare time for workers to attend to other areas in their life. Construction work is not portable—a worker cannot take unfinished work home with him. Work has to be done on site, within certain timeframes, and where schedules are less flexible than might be found in other occupations. Kanter’s theory can provide workers with insight as to why they might feel powerless and also information that might ameliorate the problem of their being powerless. For employers, Kanter’s theory can provide them with structural parameters of duty, whereby they could re-structure components of the work environment that would empower their employees, rather than dis-empower them. Empowered workers are more likely to engage in quality work and feel an attachment to the company, thereby reducing rates of employee turnover and enhance productivity. More importantly, and germane to this study, is the relationship between worker empowerment and work-life balance.

Kanter did reference work-life balance in *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), although she did not use that specific terminology. Kanter determined that workers could benefit from employers offering flexible work schedules that would allow workers to “…meet outside family responsibilities while still receiving equal treatment
inside the organization” (p. 274). For example, employees could arrange their work day according to their non-work time responsibilities and the needs of the organisation. Kanter considered flex-time policies to be most advantageous for women, particularly married women with children; however, this does not preclude men from enjoying flexible work scheduling benefits. Flexible work schedules could be of interest to those employed in the construction sector. As previously noted, construction workers generally work long days and they may prefer to have an opportunity to strike a more reasonable work-life balance through flexible work time arrangements. Still, a more reasonable work-life balance may not be achieved through simply providing flexible work schedules. Employees need the appropriate tools to shift from being powerless to being empowered. To that end, Kanter proposed that employee power was the result of their being able to access and use information, resources and support. Each component will be described in terms of how it pertains to residential construction workers.

Information pertains to what the employee knows or has access to knowing about the company for whom they work. A worker may benefit from knowing more about the future direction of the builder because it might allow them to forecast what role in the company they might play in that future. A builder who plans to reduce their number of building lots, for example, will be less likely to keep the current number of site employees; conversely, a builder who forecasts their expansion of building lots, or are entering new markets or cities, will likely need more employees to meet increased demand. Armed with such information, an employee wishing to negotiate for a more reasonable work-life balance can decide when it would be most opportune to discuss alternate work schedules with their employer.
Additionally, training information assists workers to remain relevant and can impact their ability to obtain a more reasonable work-life balance. Safety information is critical to maintaining worker health and in reducing lost time and wages as a result of improper safety measures on site. Safety standards change, and remaining current can be a problem if an employer does not provide the worker with access to up-to-date information or off-site training courses. Training in the use of new materials, such as insulated concrete forms, ensures that workers can use new materials efficiently and limit waste, as well as complete all tasks related to the use and troubleshooting of that new material. New technology on-site, such as laser site measurement tools (that measure depth, height, and width when grading dirt, for example), require workers to be trained in their use; poorly trained workers might damage expensive equipment and result in time lost and extra costs for the builder. Training in new methods of building is similarly important. If a builder changes from a stick frame construction to straw bale construction, for instance, without first providing proper training, workers may not be able to build a sound house worthy of inhabiting. Finally, training on the latest standards set out by the Ontario Building Code (OBC) is necessary. Homes not built to minimum code requirements, as set by the OBC, will not be eligible for Ontario’s new home warranty program, Tarion, or pass inspection by city building inspectors. Access to information resources directly affects site workers’ ability to complete their assigned tasks in a timely manner, as well as their tenure or promotion opportunities.

As Kanter (1977) argued, an employee’s work-life balance can also be impacted by their access to vital resources. Time, money, tools and materials, along with the ability to contact sub-trades, can be categorised as resources. To complete their daily
Task lists, site workers must have all necessary resources at their disposal. Delays can be costly, both for the owner and the site worker. Not having access to the right tool or needed materials can result in time delays, particularly if workers have to spend time in an attempt to locate needed items, thereby increasing the length of the work day. Often, sub-trades are required in order to complete a task, but site workers may not be able to contact them directly, again resulting in time delays. Time is the penultimate resource on a build site. Houses must be move-in ready by the scheduled closing date or hefty financial penalties will be levied against the builder. Each stage of the building process has a time allotment assigned and adhering to the timetable is critical. There are a number of factors outside the direct control of construction that impede progress. Weather, for instance, can have a significant impact on completion schedules, as can permit issues or when materials are on back-order—factors such as these are outside the direct control of site workers, yet their performance is measured against task completion. Time delays might mean workers are required to work overtime in order to complete assigned tasks before the next phase of construction can begin.

Money, also a resource, is often tied to time and, as a consequence, factors heavily into an employee’s ability to balance work and non-work life. For hourly paid site workers in particular, the need to make money prompts them to work long hours; a lack of overtime compensation coupled with inadequate pay rates further exacerbates the problem and keeps them working long hours. Additionally, without sick pay provisions, workers may not have a financial cushion, should they fall ill or become injured and have to take time off work. Costs associated with having a job, such as transportation (most residential construction sites are located outside current public transportation routes, so
having access to a reliable car is critical) and child care expenses (for those with small
children), add to their financial burden.

Lastly, Kanter's support category plays a large part in a site worker's ability to
work toward finding a reasonable work-life balance. At work, support from co-workers,
supervisors, and the corporation is needed before change can occur. Just as important is
support from a worker’s family and social networks. The ability for a husband to work
long hours is predicated on his wife’s support that he do so. Similarly, if a worker wants
to advocate for a more reasonable work-life balance by reducing the number of hours
they work, support from family and their social network would be beneficial. That said,
whether or not a worker receives support from any source is largely outside their control.
In essence, structural change is less likely to take place should any one of these groups
not be supportive of that change.

It is evident that access to information, resources and support are important tools
to assess worker powerlessness and prescribe methods to their becoming empowered.
However, there are a number of concerns with Kanter’s theory that merit examination.
The theory was developed as a result of Kanter’s consultant work at a large American
corporation, spanning a five year time frame. Certainly five years is a long period of time
with which to gather information and become familiar with the structural and cultural
aspects of an organisation, but given that the scope of the research was a single entity, the
theoretical development may not be as full as it might have been if other research sites
had been included. As well, it is ambitious in attempting to provide deep and broad
analysis, which, at times, leaves Kanter to pick and choose areas to focus upon and those
to receive less attention. For example, she did not expand on how education, a key socio-
economic factor, might influence powerlessness and empowerment in the organisation. Kanter adopts an optimistic view of organisational change, particularly when she advances the idea that all employees will be content to share power, gain power or relinquish power. Also, she does not provide concrete measurement indicators to describe how much information is needed, or the appropriate number and type of resources or supports that are necessary, in order for a worker to move from powerless to empowered. In addition, empowerment measurement tools are not specified. Finally, the theory does not account for an individual’s agency with respect to empowerment. For instance, employees may have access to empowerment tools but choose to restrict their use or to not to use them at all. Establishing an assessment mechanism to determine what empowerment opportunities are available and whether or not they were utilised would be of benefit. Despite these challenges, Kanter’s theory will be useful in determining worker powerlessness in the residential construction sector and how worker empowerment might assist them in advocating for a more reasonable work-life balance.
Chapter IV: Methodology

A descriptive and interpretive framework within a qualitative design was used for this study. Berg described an interpretative approach as one that “…allow[s] researchers to treat social action and human activity as text” (2004:266, emphasis in original), thereby permitting participants to provide the researcher with a depth and breadth of knowledge about their work and personal life experiences. While Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey (GSS) Cycle 20 does give researchers a snapshot of work and family challenges faced by people employed in construction, its pre-determined lines of inquiry did not provide respondents with the ability to augment their answers. The GSS is, therefore, limited in its scope and application. Instead, this research sought participant perceptions of their work and home life, actively soliciting information about their experiences and their solutions. The relationship between work life and home life, and how residential construction site personnel balance the two, was of interest for this study. An interpretive, qualitative analysis met these research goals, which were achieved more specifically through semi-standardised interviews that were transcribed and analysed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006a:11; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006b:18).

Interviews are, as Berg notes, a method to gather information from participants (2004:75). Semi-standardised interviews, which were employed for this investigation, offer researchers the flexibility to elicit additional information from participants. In particular, the researcher was able to ask follow-up questions to expand on a theme or issue raised by a participant but that were not part of the interview schedule (Berg 2004:80-82). Also, the researcher adopted a dramaturgical approach to the interview process, whereby she reacted to participant answers and shared her own personal
construction site experiences as part of the interview process and exchange (Berg 2004:76-77).

**Participant Interviews**

**Sample**

Participants were sought through cold call solicitation and snowball sampling. Over the span of 9 months, approximately 40 distinct residential construction sites were visited, augmented by telephone and email inquiries. New home publications, website searches and billboard notices were the primary information sources as to where new home developments were located. Contact information was prepared in advance and included the researcher’s name, telephone number and email address. A script of key messages was written (see Appendix A) to ensure that relevant information was conveyed at each site visited. A log mapping each target area was developed and supplemental information added once out in the field.

Development sites with site trailers or site offices were preferred, as residential construction sites are closed to the public and access into houses under construction is restricted by law. This proved to be an impediment when attempting to speak directly with site construction workers; however, when workers were outside a house and close to the roadway, the researcher was able to speak with them and leave contact information. Offices or site trailers were often unoccupied, requiring multiple visits before being able to speak with someone. Generally, offices or trailers were staffed by senior construction personnel or administrative workers. Depending on the size of the construction company, site trailers may also serve as a lunch room for site workers, although it was not always possible to visit trailers during lunch hours. When able to speak with a representative of
the construction company, the researcher left contact information cards, after providing a verbal overview of the research project. The researcher visited approximately 20 sites more than once over the course of 9 months; in addition, telephone follow-up calls were made to a limited number of builders but proved to be ineffective.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to be interviewed and because they fit the research criteria: male, working for or previously worked for a residential builder, either full-time or part-time (not on contract or as a sub-contractor) in the southern Ontario region. Participants self-selected by agreeing to be interviewed.

A total of nine workers agreed to be interviewed\textsuperscript{11}; they represented four production builders and one custom builder. All workers were employed by builders in three communities in southern Ontario. The researcher met with participants at a date, time and location of their choosing. Most interviews were conducted at the build site (five of eight). An audio recorder was used to record each interview.

Of note, four participants were interviewed individually and two interviews were conducted with two participants (co-workers) present. Interviewing two participants at the same time was done at their request, as both interviews were held during their work day and at the job site. The participants in one interview were brothers, were only a couple of years apart in age and each held a similar position in the company for whom they worked—both were entry level apprentices, albeit in different trades. This was not the case with the other double interview. One participant was a site supervisor and the other was a site finisher who was directly supervised by the former. As well, there was a

\textsuperscript{11} Only 8 interviews are included in the study. A ninth interview was conducted but the interview location had a lot of ambient noise, which turned out to be insurmountable for transcribing and therefore could not be included.
thirty year age difference between the participants in this second interview. It is not known what impact interviewing co-workers together had as to how participants answered questions, if any. That said, participants who were interviewed alone might have felt less inhibited and potentially disclosed revealing information than those who were interviewed with a co-worker present.

Each interview began with the researcher describing the study’s purpose and objective, and explaining how the interview process would unfold. Next, participants were asked to review the informed consent (Appendix C), with the researcher highlighting their right to discontinue the interview at any point and withdraw from the study. Once participants signed their informed consent, the interview commenced. All participants completed a basic demographic information sheet (Appendix B). Interviews ranged in length between 15 minutes and 60 minutes, with the average taking approximately 30 minutes. The interview schedule (Appendix D) provided the basis for questions posed; however, it became clear that using the interview schedule as written was problematic. The interview schedule, if followed in its entirety, took 60 to 90 minutes to complete, and this proved to be a barrier for many participants who preferred to be interviewed during work hours and at the work site. Therefore, the interviewer determined which questions were most salient to the research objectives, accommodating the time constraints participants faced, which was, in part, facilitated by the researcher’s work history as site personnel for a new home builder.

The researcher’s background as a former residential construction worker was also useful when recruiting and interviewing participants. For example, the researcher and participants shared a common understanding of the terminology used in construction and
the terms of reference and activities that take place on a construction site. That said, most participants were initially a bit apprehensive but this quickly dissipated once the researcher’s construction work history was shared. As well, when participants discussed work processes, the researcher was able to comprehend what those processes entailed and could ask related follow-up questions to draw out what impact it might have had on the participant’s work and home life. Given that there is little published information regarding this population, the researcher’s insider knowledge was beneficial to the study’s objectives.

**Participant Profiles**

A total of eight male participants are included in the study. All were currently working full-time or had recently worked full-time for a residential builder. Most (n=5) were in the 16-29 years of age range, most were not married (n=5) and did not have children or dependents at home (n=6). The majority of interviewees had worked for their current employer between one and five years (n=6) and most (n=5) had worked in construction for that same amount of time. The majority of participants traveled between 30 and 60 minutes a day between home and work (n=5). Most worked an average 10 hour day (n=6), averaging a 50 hour work week (n=5) and were paid hourly without overtime pay (n=5). They worked for four different builders—one custom builder and three production builders—in three communities in southern Ontario.
Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children at home</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children not at home</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years with Current Builder</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in Construction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Time to Work</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 minutes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 hour</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 hour</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average # of Hours/Day Worked</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average # of Hours/Week Worked</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Payment Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly without overtime pay</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Builder Type</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Years in Construction</th>
<th>Dependents in Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Custom</td>
<td>mid-20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>early-20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>early-20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>early-20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>mid-50s</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Custom</td>
<td>early-20s</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>mid-50s</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>early-20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding

Each interview was recorded using a digital tape recorder and subsequently transcribed into word processing software. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and all identifying information was removed. Interview transcripts were then assigned codes, based on the codes developed and utilising NVivo 9 software.

Information, resources and support were coded as main headings, based on Kanter’s worker powerlessness and empowerment categories. Under each heading, specific words and themes were identified:

- Information
  - Corporate direction
  - Training
    - Safety
    - New materials
    - New technology
    - New methods
- Resources
  - Time
  - Money
  - Health
  - Tools/materials
  - Trades
- Support
  - Co-workers
Codes were based on Kanter’s definitions and the researcher’s personal experiences working in the residential construction field. For instance, Kanter defined time as a resource; however, having access to contracted trades on site was categorized as a resource, based on the researcher’s site experience. In all, three main code headings were assigned with sub-headings that provide the necessary detail to describe heading events.

**Limitations**

A number of limitations were encountered. Time and geography presented significant limitations when soliciting participants, as did the nature of construction sites and the physical location of workers within those sites. New home development sites are generally located on the outskirts of cities and not included on printed or internet-based maps, leaving the researcher to discover them in a less-than-efficient manner. Additionally, locating and driving to sites and between sites in each community was time-consuming. Once on a site, discovering the whereabouts of the site trailer took time, especially on those sites without site trailer signage. Often, the researcher would need to return multiple times to a site location before being able to speak with someone, as site workers would be out of the site trailer upon the researcher’s arrival. As well, the researcher traveled throughout southern Ontario and south-western Ontario in order to ensure a representative sampling of communities, spanning a distance of over 200 kilometers between the most distant cities visited.

The fact that construction sites are not open to the public proved to be a barrier at

---

12 Some tasks assigned to site workers require the skill or expertise of a contracted trade.
times. Those sites without a site trailer, for instance, were essentially inaccessible to the researcher, as there was no particular point of contact to meet potential participants. Unless workers were outside houses and visible from the street, the researcher could not know where workers were located. As well, had the researcher entered the interior of a house under construction and found someone working inside it, it would not be readily apparent if that person worked for the builder or was a contractor or sub-contractor.

It is not known if the participants who were interviewed for this study are representative of the majority of residential construction workers in the region, as participants were equally split between a convenience sample (four) and a snowball sample (four). Further, the sample is small. Despite visiting approximately 40 sites over the course of 9 months, few people were interested in being interviewed. One can only speculate as to why. Also, construction sites are not open to the public and therefore gaining direct access to workers on some sites proved to be difficult. The researcher was frequently unable to speak directly to workers—instead she was met by a builder’s representative, such as an office administrator or supervisor, and then had to rely on them to convey (or not) the information to appropriate personnel. Not one participant was interviewed as a result of this form of contact.

Finally, not one residential construction worker the researcher spoke with (who either declined to participate or agreed to be interviewed) had had previous contact with a researcher. This may have contributed to their reluctance to participate in the study.
Chapter V: Findings and Discussion

Kanter’s theoretical framework provides an interesting way to understand worker power and powerlessness, and will inform the analysis of the research findings. Under the resource theme, worker time, money and health concerns will be discussed in order to ascertain worker power. This will be followed by an examination of the role of support as a factor in worker power, with a focus on co-workers, employers, family and friends. The final section will examine the role corporate information played in determining worker power.

Of course, whether or not a worker has power has an impact on their ability to negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment. As previously established, long work days and an average 50 hour work week are common in residential construction. Workers who would like to have a more reasonable work-life balance but lack sufficient power may not be successful if they attempt to revise their employment contract with their employer. Drawing on Kanter’s themes, the ability to finish tasks in a timely manner is predicated on workers’ having access to needed resources. Not having timely access to needed resources could lengthen a worker’s day and result in extending the number of hours they have to spend at work, thereby reducing the amount of time they have available for non-paid work activities and obligations. Similarly, without support from co-workers, supervisors and builders, it is less likely that a worker who wishes to have a more reasonable work-life balance would be able to reduce their work hours. Lastly, a worker wishing for a better work-life balance and who is informed about the corporate direction of the builder will be more likely to anticipate if and when it is appropriate to re-negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment. A builder who
forecasts expansion by increasing the number of houses they plan to build in the near future may be more amenable to workers re-structuring their work hours. Worker power, then, can influence work-life balance.

**Resources**

Time, money and health fall under the resource theme. The time resource revealed a number of sub-themes, specifically, workers’ desire for time flexibility, the long work hours expected, time available for family and time to attend to personal and/or social pursuits. Finally, a few participants spoke about how builders might re-structure work time to accommodate a more reasonable work-life balance. Participants did not refer to the resources of tools, materials and access to trades.

**Resource—Time and Flexibility**

Most workers liked the idea of having time flexibility in the workplace and most were able to garner some flexibility from their workplace, albeit on an informal basis. Steve, for example, offered conflicting perceptions as to his employer’s attitude toward time flexibility. When speaking about work-life balance, Steve thought that his employer was becoming more open to the idea that “a little bit of flexibility is a good thing”. However, later in the interview, Steve presented an opposite viewpoint about his employer, saying “[he] is a bit of a workaholic and doesn’t necessarily understand the work-life balance stuff as much and definitely pushes to have longer hours”. The message from the builder was clear to Steve—long work days are standard and expected. Yet the builder was, in Steve’s mind, willing to offer limited time flexibility to his workers. The builder, it seemed, had not made work time flexibility a standard practice, but would allow it on an ad hoc basis to individual workers. When asked how he dealt with
conflicts between his personal time and work time, Steve replied:

And sometimes you sort of say ‘well, I’d like to go home at this time’, you know, and kind of put my foot down a bit. And even though my employer isn’t completely understanding, I think also because, you know, he’s a small custom builder, I’m not having to deal with that kind of a structure that is more corporate in nature, where they lay down the law and that’s it.

Alden’s attempts to take time off work were different from Steve’s, which might, in part, be attributed to Alden working for a production builder. Alden spoke about his struggle to deal with certain appointments that required him to miss work:

...if I had any problems with the bank, I wasn't receiving some cheques and whatnot, even if it was about work, I couldn't take work off to go and clear up issues. Or just making dentist appointments or any type of other appointments, it was just impossible. It was really hard to get time off work and then, of course, you can't go in looking like a mess, eh? So you have to take at least two or four hours off work and then come back, correct? So that day's pretty much shot anyways because of that one appointment. I found it difficult as far as making appointments and I guess time management that way, because everything's closed by the time you get off work.

Alden did not have other time resources that might have allowed him to take time off for appointments, such as paid sick days or a flexible work schedule. The structure imposed by his employer required Alden to decide when it was critical that he take time off work versus attending to personal tasks outside of work hours. That said, there were times when Alden wished to leave work early and his supervisor deemed it unnecessary:
Alden’s supervisor granted or disallowed Alden taking time off, based on his own interpretation of when Alden should be able to attend to his appointments.

At the same time, Alden experienced conflicting messages with respect to time flexibility. He worked from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, and was entitled to one paid 15 minute break in the morning and half an hour unpaid lunch. He was not entitled to overtime pay. If he worked until 3 p.m., he was paid up until 3 p.m.; yet if Alden worked past 5 p.m., he was not paid for that extra time worked. Similarly, there were many instances where work tasks and scheduling items were discussed during his unpaid lunch time:

> There were only three guys on a site at one time so, and it was a pretty big site as well too, so you really had to communicate. If you didn’t, you’d be completely lost. We’d sit down at lunch and talk about what we’d got done and what needs to get done.

Wage theft, in terms of talking about work duties during unpaid lunch time, seemed to be a regular occurrence, benefiting the employer but robbing Alden of his labour value.

The message that work needed to be a priority was not lost on Alden, although he readily admitted that workers needed to be flexible on a job site, because problems would arise that required immediate attention:

> Sometimes you worked through break because things just happen on the construction site. Things that you just can’t, like I mean, one time we had a problem with one of the water shut offs, right? You couldn’t just call it quits at 10 and, you know, go for coffee.

However, there were times when Alden’s supervisor would tell site workers that they could not take a break, as the volume of work was too great to complete in the course of a typical day. Alden had no recourse as to how he might recoup his lost time or lost pay. Alden expressed his disappointment at the employer’s lack of reciprocity, as Alden
viewed his willingness to be time-flexible as a positive attribute and a sign of his commitment to his employer. As Kanter suggested, if employee commitment to their employer is not rewarded appropriately, job satisfaction will decline (1977). Alden eventually left his position with the new home builder and took a job with a sub-trade.

Justin held similar views as Steve did about his employer's time flexibility, yet had different expectations around work-life balance. Before being hired by the custom builder, Justin worked 12 hour midnight shifts at a local warehouse on a 4 day on/3 day off continental schedule. The warehouse had informed Justin that he could put in for a transfer to day shift after seven years. Justin was a recent hire by a custom builder where working an average 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. day in construction was a welcome change. He considered that his construction job has given him a more reasonable work-life balance than his former job at the warehouse. In terms of time flexibility, Justin shared Steve's views that his boss was lenient:

On certain things where certain things come up, you know, I gotta say 'hey, I gotta take off'...He [boss] is a lot more flexible which is a lot different from other people that I work with. Certain people say no, use that as a personal day. He's very flexible. I love the company I work for.

Justin had also been successful at negotiating extra unpaid time off, despite his being a newer employee. Justin's wife was a travel agent, able to travel at reduced rates and they wanted to do some traveling before starting a family: "And [boss] was 'good for you', you know, and his son, I don't know exactly where he is right now, but he's been gone [traveling] for a year now, so he's a good boss". Such time flexibility might be emblematic of Justin's worth and potential as a long-term employee to the company that swayed his boss. No mention was made that indicated that Justin would continue to
garner extra time away from work, but it was clear that he was able to solicit some support from his boss, which allowed Justin to spend time with his wife.

Overall, the amount of time flexibility available to most of the men interviewed was satisfactory. The ad hoc, informal nature for requesting and being granted (or not) time off from work, for the most part, had met their needs. Still, for Alden, he was left feeling rushed and struggled to find time to take care of things outside the workplace. As Johnson et al. (2001) pointed out, the majority of Canadian workers report feeling time-crunch on all fronts. Whether instituting formal workplace policies would offer better time flexibility for participants is not clear and, as Callan (2007) found, formal policies were best implemented slowly and over time, thereby allowing the workplace culture and structures time to adjust. Presumably, maintaining an informal approach toward giving workers the occasional time off met workplace needs. Supervisors had the ability to allow a worker to take time off, depending on the level of activity on the job site and completion deadlines.

Resource—Time and Long Work Hours

Long work hours were, for Steve, something to which he was accustomed, having previously worked on an organic farm for a few years. Whereas Steve understood the need to work long days in agriculture, he was less clear as to the reasons behind working long days in residential construction, although he posited one theory as to why his employer may push workers to put in long work days:

And I think that sometimes, with employers, it could be that they actually work that hard and so, why wouldn’t you work that hard? You, what I mean, so I don’t think it’s always necessarily them pushing the obligation onto you. Or asking you to stay, but I know that if it was my business, I’d be willing to put that work into it.
Steve’s point is well taken; it is in the owner’s best financial interests to have employees work full-out, thereby maximizing productivity. Yet, Steve internalised the message that his employer expected employees to work long hours. Steve understood that by working long hours, he was helping his boss gain profits. While Steve was paid for all the hours he worked on site, he did not receive overtime pay rates. The builder structured work days to exceed the standard 40 hour week, thereby sending the message to his employees that a long work day was normal.

Lewis and Chad, on the other hand, held divergent views about work-life balance and work time. Lewis did not think he worked long days: "In construction, it's always been at the break of dawn, you know?" adding "for me, it starts at 6:30-7:00 on site". Lewis was surprised that most people do not work 10 hour days, as his frame of work reference has only been in construction, and where he sees contractors and tradesmen arriving on site before he does: "when I get here in the morning, in the summer, I get here at 7 [a.m.], the concrete guys, they've been here since 5:30/6 [a.m.]". By these standards, Lewis considered himself to have a better work-life balance than the sub-trades on site.

Chad, in contrast to his supervisor Lewis, expressed his displeasure with long work hours: "I hate the hours I have to work for this job". Chad went on to explain: “I’m tired always after work. I’m a young fellow and go to parties. Sometimes I have to take a nap after work, which leaves me little time”. At this point in the interview, Lewis reached for a box of tissues on the table, picked it up and handed it to Chad, saying: “You want to cry about it?”, reflecting Lewis’ stand on their work hours as normal. But for Chad, the issue was clear and, based on his prior experience working in British Columbia, he considered that an alternative structure was possible: “I lived in Vancouver
for a couple of months, they didn’t work like this. Three o’clock, 3:30, that’s it, everybody shut down. Everyone went to the beach, had time to relax. That’s important. Spend time with your friends and family”.

Wayne and Parker were the exception to the long work day rule—they worked a standard eight hour day, five days a week. Their experience was dramatically different from the other participants, as they worked for a production builder that operated on a 40 hour work week schedule. Overtime was rare but voluntary. Neither Wayne nor Parker thought their work time interfered with personal, family or social activities. Both said that they planned to work for their current employer for many years. Indeed, the development site where they worked was in the second phase of a five phase building project that would span five years. The work structure implemented by their employer clearly demonstrated that long work hours are not essential to being a profitable production builder.

For the most part, participants accepted that long work hours were standard in residential construction. Indeed, as the Australian construction work-life balance literature reinforces (Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard and Gibson 2006; Lingard and Francis 2006; Lingard et al. 2007; Lingard et al. 2008; Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010), long hours are structured into the fabric of the workplace and, for hourly paid workers, offer a level of financial compensation they require. That said, the example Wayne’s and Parker’s employer provides is startling—production that is profitable and gives workers a reasonable work-life balance.

**Resource—Time and Re-structuring Long Work Hours**

Participants were asked how they might re-structure their job to reduce the
number of hours they worked in order to obtain a better work-life balance. As Lingard et al. (2007) proposed, shortening the work week can provide employers and workers with a number of benefits while reducing the stress of long work hours.

Cameron entertained the idea of reducing his work hours in favour of having more personal time. "Well, to be honest with you, at the age and stage I am, if we got the volume down, which it seems may happen but I don't know, I’ve said to the boss I'd consider working a four day week". Cameron went on to say that a reduction in pay would be agreeable, if he was able to have every Friday off. He had broached the topic with the builder, but they stopped short of entering into formal discussions. Cameron's time resource included his site management skills, and he anticipated that, should his boss agree, his ability to take every Friday off would depend on his being able to maintain target completion dates: "I guess the point is that if I can properly manage the site and not be here every Friday, that's fine".

From a work structure point of view, the employer left it up to Cameron to figure out how to re-design his work tasks in order to reduce his work week. Whether or not the builder would institute a four day work week across all sites and for all site employees was not discussed, nor did Cameron speculate as to whether others might benefit from such a re-structuring, but it was a topic that his boss was willing to explore. The work-life balance issue, for Cameron, had recently become more important, and, as he said: "...maybe I’ll do some of the things that I've always wanted to do that I just don't have time to do".

At the same time, Cameron thought that his boss might be planning to eliminate the fulltime service worker position and have Cameron and his site crew take over service
calls:

I can see, well, what I know that our boss will want to push at us next, reading between the lines. We have one full-time service guy who deals with everyone's emergencies and everyone's year-end lists. And, actually, administering him is one lady in the office, who meets people at those various times, deals with the calls, and administers a lot of stuff that he doesn't have to see...Well, I'm sure that the next thing that the boss would be happy to do, because way back when I first started, this is the way that it was, is supers and the guys, the site staff, which is two guys, will go and do all the service.

On the surface, adding a few additional tasks to a site worker's daily list may not seem problematic, until the logistics and nuances of doing so are exposed. Service calls require the worker to be neat and clean and to meet with the homeowner in the home. It is often difficult to predict how long a particular task might take to complete or whether other trades will need to be called to assist. Clean up, once the task is completed to everyone's satisfaction, is more detailed than clean up done in an unoccupied house and takes more time. The structure of service work is far different from site work—site workers are usually able to work through their task list in whichever order that makes most sense, given the day, the weather, other trades on site, and available materials at hand. Service is more rigid as to time and place, and order of task completion. As well, depending on the service task, multiple visits might be required to complete the task. Cameron continued, predicting the likely fallout, should his boss proceed in that direction:

So no more service guy. Just hang on to the administrator 'cause she will still [co-ordinate] all that stuff...but anything that needs to be done physically at someone’s house on site, 'you're out there, go do it'. So that is okay, except that it tends to be, that job [service calls] works a lot better if the fellow schedules himself he's at someone's house for half a day or all day or whatever. You know, we work okay doing 30 day lists and we pull in for a couple hours this day for another hour, another day to maybe finish it off, that's it. And that can still work reasonably on an
active site. But you start trying to do the other type of things and yep, something's going to suffer on site because of that.

Cameron's assertion that site work would suffer if site personnel were expected to attend to service work hints at his frustration at having little control over the way that he can structure work under his supervision. Cameron would have to co-ordinate with the office-based service administrator in order to determine who could be available to work on site and for how long each day. The addition of service work would make it difficult for Cameron to negotiate a better work-life balance. Perhaps Cameron would have to forego the idea of his not working on Fridays.

Justin held similar views to Cameron about working on Fridays. When asked about his thoughts on re-structuring work hours to provide him with a more reasonable work-life balance, Justin offered: "I would actually really prefer to get out early on Fridays to begin a weekend and have some time off. I mean, that's really not too much to ask". At the same time, Justin was happy with his working hours overall and his boss’ flexibility with respect to unpaid time off.

An alternate schedule scenario was presented to Wayne and Parker. Rather than work five eight hour days, they were asked what they thought about working four ten hour days in order to have a long weekend during the summer months. Both Wayne and Parker thought they would enjoy the extra day off, especially as the summer is a busy time for construction workers and not generally conducive to their taking some vacation time. Parker believed that his boss would consider shifting work hours around to accommodate a summer schedule; however, Wayne did not think that his boss would entertain the idea, making the point that his boss may not favour it because it “depends on how much work you’d get out of somebody in 10 hours compared to 8 [hours]”. For
these two site workers, the attractiveness of having a three day weekend during the summer would have to be weighed against the productivity of a worker putting in a ten hour day. It is clear that Wayne believed that a ten hour day might result in less productivity.

It is evident that the prospect of reducing work hours to allow workers to have a better work-life balance would not be an easy task, given how ingrained long work hours are in the industry. Builders profit from their employees working long hours and government legislation (Government of Canada 2002) provides them with the legitimate means to structure the workplace in such a manner. As Lingard et al. (2008) noted, hourly workers are not as interested in reducing their hours as are those who are paid a salary. However, the Lingard et al. (2007) article shows that there are clear advantages to reducing the number of hours worked in construction that would benefit both builders and workers, including less family-work conflict, better employee retention rates and improved health outcomes. As Wayne observed, ten hours of time at work does not necessarily translate into ten hours of productive work.

**Resource—Time and Family**

Most of the men interviewed did not think that their work demands interfered with their family obligations. Those who were married and had children also had spouses to navigate home issues. Single workers did not perceive there to be any family-related dilemmas that were impacted by their long work days. However, a few commented on the tension between family and work.

Cameron spoke about making a conscious effort to spend time with his family. He recognised that taking winter vacations was more convenient for his employer, as
there were generally fewer house closings during winter months. “As a family, we took up skiing...and made a point of going away for three or four days, so we might have done that two or three years”. Cameron allowed the timing of his family vacation to be determined by his work demands.

Lewis, on the other hand, did not consider that his work time interfered with family time, even when he was required to work a half day on Saturdays: "my whole life, every Saturday, get up, go to work, I'd be back home by lunch, 1 o'clock on Saturdays. And they're [children] just waking up".

Lewis and Cameron were the only men interviewed who had children; however, the majority of the other participants who worked more than 40 hours a week shared Lewis’ and Cameron’s sentiment that work did not generally interfere with family time. Wayne and Parker stated that they did not have any work-family conflicts. Chad, who was the most critical about the impact of long work hours on his social life, thought that once he was married, his work-life conflict would not be a problem: "One thing, when I have kids, I don't think it will bother me then. Because I won't be going out partying each night. I’ll slow down and sleep more". Justin saw that adding children to his marriage would be a juggling act:

Between me and my wife, she usually works 12-9 shifts, so it is a different shift. It would vary but we’d still have that gap between noon to 5 [p.m.]. But my parent, her parents. Where we're moving actually, her aunt and uncle live there and are retired, you know. We'd work it out for sure, you know, daycare.

Alden, however, felt that his work schedule did intrude on family time. Further, there were instances when he worked excessive hours (75+ a week) that he found it difficult to maintain a healthy relationship with his girlfriend or visit with his family.
It would seem that working long hours would interfere with the opportunity to spend time with family and, indeed, research supports that contention (Becker and Moen 1999; Francis and Lingard 2004; Francis, Lingard, and Gibson 2006; Johnson, Lero and Rooney 2001; Lingard and Francis 2006; Mennino and Brayfield 2002; Whitehead 2008). However, most of the participants in this study were generally satisfied with the amount of time that they had available with their family. None of the men interviewed were single parents or had the primary responsibility for elder care and therefore were not faced with making time choices. Certainly this group of men mirrored Mennino and Brayfield’s (2002) findings where men in male-dominated occupations were more likely to work long hours and sacrifice family time to do so.

**Resource—Time and Personal/Social**

The amount of leisure time available was an issue for most of the men interviewed who worked long days. A common thread was not having the energy necessary to enjoy leisure activities, given the physical nature of their work combined with their long work days. Wayne and Parker, who worked a standard eight hour day, were the exception and did not voice any complaints about a lack of personal or social time. For those for whom leisure activities were important, various strategies were developed that allowed them to incorporate personal and social time into their lives.

Cameron accommodated his job’s scheduling preferences by restricting his vacation time and leisure activities to the winter months, but stated:

> And of course, that bugs me to some extent now, because there are a lot of things I’d like to do around here in this country in the summer and I haven’t had time to. I can’t. Now I’ve always had a little beach catamaran, so that’s my side hobby, and I make a little time for that, but not near as much as I’d like. You know, eventually I’d like to ramp that up to even a real boat. But that
still could happen.

Cameron was able to fit in his hobby around work demands. However, Cameron looked forward to the time when he could increase the amount of personal time by decreasing his work time and, as previously noted, had had some discussions with his boss about the possibility of having Fridays off. Yet, the likelihood of his being able to reduce his work hours, with the prospect that his boss will add service duties to the site crew, was not clear. Alden found it difficult to strike a balance between work and personal or social time. As noted in the previous section regarding long work hours, Alden's supervisor often determined what activities merited him missing work. As for his social life, Alden recounted one particularly busy period:

I was working about 75 hours a week at one point. So for me to have any time with my girlfriend or anything, there was just none, right? She was finding it really difficult. Like if, you know, to spend time with me and keep that connection there, right, just 'cause you're always gone all the time.

Alden was similarly unhappy about his inability to take part in social activities: "but just like to hang out with friends or do anything else, there wasn't any time for it. It was just all work and no play, as they say". Alden had attempted to negotiate time off from work to help him balance his various demands, but found that his supervisor was not always willing to be flexible.

Chad was the most vocal in his displeasure with his lack of social time:

By the time I get home from work it's already 6 o'clock. I have to take a shower and then it's 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock before I want to go out. I stay out late, maybe 12, 1a.m. and get 4 hours of sleep.

Chad went on to say that when they have to work on Saturdays, his social time is impacted even more:
So now I won't be catching up on sleep on Saturdays. Friday night I’ll still want to go out, so Saturday will be hard. Saturday night I won't want to go out because I’ll be tired from the weekend and to me, I hate it.

Chad's social lifestyle was out of sync with his work structure. Lewis, Chad’s supervisor considered their hours of work as being reasonable and therefore dismissed Chad’s complaints.

Justin's commitment to leisure activities was noteworthy, as he stated:

Yeah, people think I’m pretty crazy at work. Work ‘til 5 or 6 [p.m.] and I've got hockey tonight at 10:30 tonight in [another city]. So technically I get home around 12:30-1 o'clock in the morning, and I go to work for, I’m on the road for 7 [a.m.]. But I pay those dues because I love the game. I’m not going to stop something that I love to do. I've played hockey my whole life. So for that reason, I suck it up on Thursdays.

Justin did admit that once he and his wife start a family, he might have to temporarily curtail his leisure activities, but sees that as the only reason to do so. He has not, though, asked his employer for a reduced work schedule in order to participate in leisure activities. It would be reasonable to assume that on Friday mornings, after a late night playing hockey, Justin might prefer to start work a bit later, thereby allowing him some extra sleep time. Instead, his co-workers laud his commitment to the game and his ability to be at work the next morning. It is significant that Justin views his leisure activities as being separate from his work time, not recognising that his long work hours do have a negative impact on his personal life—an inadequate amount of sleep, which might eventually impact his physical stamina.

Not having enough time to attend to personal concerns or social activities was, on occasion, a problem for most of the men interviewed. Still, for those participants for whom leisure pastimes were important, they found a way to fit it into their lives. At the
same time, less available time meant choices had to be made as to where free time would be spent and with whom.

**Resource—Time: Conclusion**

The most frequently cited problem area, in terms of themes, was time; specifically, the number of hours worked in a day and over the course of a week. Indeed, most of the men interviewed who worked a standard 9.5-10 hour day reported that there were times when work interfered with their ability to take part in a family activity or deal with personal issues. Apart from Wayne and Parker, the men interviewed were time-poor. This was not unexpected. Work-life balance literature (see Becker and Moen 1999; Lingard, Francis and Turner 2010; Mennino and Brayfield 2002; Whitehead 2008) and nursing literature (Sarmiento, Laschinger and Iwasiw 2004) established that long work hours left little time for employees to attend to concerns outside the workplace. Time, as a resource (Kanter 1977), is finite, and balancing work time demands with non-paid work obligations can be problematic for those workers whose usual work hours are above normal work hours (i.e. 8 hour days, 40 hour work weeks).

Of course, there were a couple of exceptions among the men who were interviewed. Lewis considered his 10 hour work days to be normal. Further, he thought his family did not have any problems with the amount of time that he spent at work; it would be interesting to know what his wife and children thought about the hours he worked. Justin did not view his hours of work to be long and he was able to fit in weekly hockey games as well as take advantage of travel opportunities with his wife.

Participants agreed that they worked long hours and had less time to do other things or spend with family, but there was little they could do about it. Basically, they
agreed with the idea that working in construction meant working long hours and it was outside their control to change it. Even Cameron’s attempt to reduce his work hours had not been realised, despite his boss making positive overtures. They accepted the limited time flexibility that they were able to get when needed as the best that they could achieve. They did not have time as a resource to obtain a more reasonable work-life balance.

**Resource—Money**

Monetary compensation for work was a contributing factor in the work-life balance issue for the residential construction workers interviewed and, in particular, for hourly workers. None of those interviewed received overtime pay or paid sick leave, although they were paid for statutory holidays. Other job sectors pay employees time and a half for any time worked in excess of their usual week, but Ontario construction workers are not covered by the Employment Standards overtime provision (Ontario Ministry of Labour 2011) and, depending on how their employment contract is structured, may not be paid for hours worked above their standard weekly minimum.

**Resource—Money and Overtime**

Alden’s lack of overtime pay was a source of frustration. If Alden worked his usual day, he was paid for all hours worked. If he left work early, he was not paid for the hours he was absent; however, if he worked past his usual hours, he was not able to record those extra hours on his time sheet and, therefore, was not paid for them: "Where I lost money was those days that I worked overtime, right?...if I worked for two extra hours, there's roughly around $26 I just lost, and couldn’t claim it any other way". Alden questioned his supervisor as to why he could not get his usual hourly rate for the overtime he worked, and provided an account of how this was dealt with:
...I'd ask my boss and he'd be like 'well, that's something maybe you'd like to take up with [builder]' which would be like the head boss guy, right? So it was just one of those things that you'd bring up a question and like, well, I'd have to ask this person, have to ask that person, but never get back to you on it.

Alden did not receive support for his overtime inquiry from his supervisor nor, it seems, resolution to the issue from office personnel. When pressed further, Alden indicated that the accounting software used in payroll did not allow his job classification to submit overtime hours. In essence, Alden's overtime problem was credited to his job position and a software glitch, for which no one was willing or able to troubleshoot.

Justin’s employer did not pay overtime. When asked what he thought about his not getting overtime pay, Justin stated that this was the first time he had not received overtime compensation—all his previous jobs had paid overtime rates upon working more than 44 hours a week. As well, Justin was unaware that construction jobs were exempt from overtime pay legislation and he was confused as to the difference between union and non-union jobs:

So in the carpentry world [union] you're supposed to get overtime after 44 hours. ..See I was always going to talk to [boss] about this but as a new-comer I don't want to open my mouth and risk a good opportunity. It is kind of dumb to say that but I don't need to get fired for saying 'hey, you need to pay me overtime'.

As a new employee, Justin felt that he was not in a position where he could discuss the issue with his employer and, therefore, had not broached the issue. In addition, Justin was recently married, carried two mortgages (he and his wife had recently bought a rental property) and wished to start a family in the next year or two. Justin did not want to jeopardise his future employment with his builder and chose to accept the terms as offered.
Justin, Steve, Wayne, and Parker were not paid overtime rates. Unlike Alden, however, if they worked more than their usual number of hours in a day, they could record those additional hours and were compensated for them at their usual hourly rate. It is noteworthy that Wayne and Parker did not usually work overtime: "we're strictly hourly. There's no overtime really, we just work our 40 hours a week". Wage rates were not included in this investigation, so it is not known if Wayne’s and Parker's pay rate was different from the other hourly workers.

Cameron worked on salary and, therefore, fluctuations in his work time did not impact his paycheque. Moreover, Cameron had begun to entertain the idea of reducing his work week by one day and was willing to see his pay reduced accordingly:
"...financially, we should be able to get along with a few less dollars". In addition, as a site supervisor, Cameron was able to scale his working hours up or down, depending on what needed to be done and by when, thereby giving him the flexibility to trade off extra hours worked when the site was less demanding. As well, Cameron thought that he had the financial resources to reduce his working time: "...we've made it to the point now that, I'll be 55 next year, and no children [at home] whatever, that financially we should be able to get along with a few less dollars".

Resource—Money and Pensions

Alden was the only interviewee to speak directly about pensions. Work-based pensions were not part of the investigation, so the researcher does not know what these builders offer to their employees. That said, pensions were a concern for Alden:

No pension, right? What are you going to do after you retire?
And I don't want to be working. I know guys who are working in their late 60s and they say 'well, I'm going to have to do this until I die basically because I can't survive any other way'.
Taken in conjunction with Alden's other concerns, including his access to limited benefits, no paid sick days or overtime provisions, a lack of financial security reinforced his goal to become a teacher and leave construction work behind.

**Resource—Money and the Economics of Construction**

House construction, although sensitive to economic shifts, does not stop during times of economic hardship, but rather adjusts by changing profit margins for those working in the industry. Cameron made reference to this phenomenon:

> Well, in this industry there's never 'no work', there's just lower and lower price work. And then as a tradesperson, it just drives you nuts, but I mean, you have to accept that the crunch is happening everywhere. The builder's taking a hit, so everyone's getting leaner and leaner and some of them are falling off the wayside, either bankruptcy or just changing careers or builders walk away from lots or whatever else happens.

The sector is accustomed to adjusting according to consumer demands and those employed in the industry are subject to shifting wage rates. The result leaves workers with little negotiating power.

For example, Alden did not get a raise during his third year of employment with the builder which coincided with a downturn in the housing market:

> I didn't get a raise after my second year, right? And I started covering three different sites, you know, so they were making a killing off me, because I know I was working, like they should have had two other people on those other sites, whereas I was working all three for the same amount of money. But they still were not willing to give me a raise.

In Alden’s eyes, the builder’s failure to reward his hard work and loyalty was significant.

In terms of being able to support a family, Alden did not think that the pay he received was sufficient to do so:
I can't fathom supporting a family off a construction salary. You know, like when I was working, actually, when I was just working and my girlfriend wasn’t working at all and it's just the two of us, I mean, to live off my salary, just the two of us right? And to have money to do extra things, there was barely anything. To live paycheque to paycheque.

The perception that all construction jobs are well paid is inaccurate. Alden's financial need to work long hours was structured into his job, and given that he was not entitled to overtime pay, had he only worked a 40 hour week, he might not have been able to meet his financial obligations.

According to Steve, over the past five years "wages have increased significantly across the board for workers. And I think that is, in part, because he realised that if he pays people better, he's more likely to retain them". The implication for workers, however, was that better pay was tied to working long hours. The more workers work, the greater their paycheque. But the opposite was also true: if they do not work, they do not get paid. It was outside the scope of this investigation to examine wage rates, so it is not known if Steve’s employer was offering below average wage rates in the past or if his wage rates were above average at the time of the interview.

The problem that residential construction workers face, in terms of attaining a more reasonable work-life balance is, in part, related to their lack of financial wherewithal. The needs of hourly paid workers were different from those paid a salary and similar to those found in the Australian literature (see Lingard et al. 2007; Lingard et al. 2008; Lingard and Francis 2006)—hourly workers depend on working long hours to meet their monetary needs. Unless hourly workers could get an increase in their rate of pay, reducing their work week hours to gain a better work-life balance will not be feasible.
Resource—Health

A healthy body is critical to be able to complete tasks on a daily basis when working in residential construction. Yet, there were no sick time provisions available to any of the workers interviewed. If someone was off sick, they were not paid. In structuring the workplace in such a manner, the employer held all the resources (remuneration), leaving workers to determine if and when they should take time off from work to recuperate. Three participants spoke about the toll long work days took on the body.

Alden recognised the potential negative physical side effects of working in construction:

> Just the amount of strain it does put on your body and it's not like I'm out of shape. I was a varsity athlete wrestler and in good physical condition and you know, like working concrete, your body would be sore the next day. I couldn’t imagine someone in their late 50s still doing that job. Honestly, I told myself working in construction is just not like a life. The long hours, the harsh conditions and also the environmental conditions as well. It's just, I can see myself doing at a young age for temporary but for long term, there's just no way, right?

Steve, who was a few years older than Alden, held similar views:

> I also am a bit younger so I think my energy levels are still up a bit but I noticed even in my work in construction in the past 5 years, on and off, even that it takes a little longer to recover after work and I want to go to bed earlier than I used to…And one other thing I’m conscious of physically, again, to the long work hours leading to more injury work stress on the body. Which doesn't necessarily come immediately or directly in your work-life balance but I’m starting to guess that this might start to affect that in the long term.

Cameron acknowledged that he had health concerns related to his years in construction:

> It's hard on your body. Especially when you've already done it and been hard on your body for 20, 30 years already. [It is] hard,
nasty work that only I don't care who you are, the human body can only take so much of it.

The dominant work structure on residential construction sites of long work days coupled with unpaid sick leave fails to recognise the damaging effects of hard, physical labour on the human body. By not paying sick leave, employers implicitly convey the message that health issues fall outside the job site: you are responsible for your health and if you are sick or injured, it falls to you to get better and return to work quickly. Workers are simply machines and the work that their bodies carry out to get the work done is not considered an employer cost, but rather a worker cost without remuneration. Lingard et al. (2007) noted that by reducing the work week, workers’ ability to physically recover from the effects of their labour was enhanced and would likely result in fewer injuries over the long run. Although the Ontario Ministry of Labour promotes health and safety strategies on the job site\footnote{See “A Guide to Occupational Health and Safety Act”, Ontario Ministry of Labour: \url{http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/ohsa/index.php}}, the legislation places the burden of deciding what constitutes an unsafe work environment onto individual workers\footnote{See the “Right to Refuse Work” section of the Act \url{http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/ohsa/ohsag_7.php}}.

**Support—For Work-Life Balance by Co-Workers**

Justin speculated that his co-workers would likely support the idea of an improved work-life balance: “I don’t think anybody at work has ever got really fed up with 9 hour days that we pretty much work…But I’m sure if they did they’re welcome to take the time off.” Lewis, on the other hand, made it clear he did not support Chad’s\footnote{Lewis and Chad worked together and were interviewed together.} desire to work fewer hours. As previously noted, Chad did not like working long days, whereas Lewis considered the hours he worked to be reasonable and questioned Chad’s preference\footnote{See Resource—Time and Long Work Hours section.}.
to work a shorter day: “working extra hours—is it that severe?” Apart from these two instances, the men interviewed did not address the idea of co-worker support for a more reasonable work-life balance directly.

**Support—For Work-Life Balance by Employer**

Participants differed in their opinions as to whether or not their employer would support their having a more reasonable work-life balance. Employers will either, formally or informally, support work-life balance for their employees or they will not (Callan 2007). Of course, without such support, employees are not likely to gain a more reasonable work-life balance. The workplace structure that Wayne’s and Parker’s employer provided—a standard 40 hour work week—was unusual in the construction sector, but demonstrated that workers can have a reasonable work-life balance without jeopardising the employer’s ability to be profitable. Apart from Wayne’s and Parker’s employer, all other builders for whom interviewees worked accommodated worker requests for time flexibility in an informal, ad hoc manner.

Steve chalked up his occasional work time flexibility to the fact that his employer was not a large production builder, but a small custom builder who was, in Steve’s opinion, more flexible because there were fewer bureaucratic restrictions. Justin similarly worked for a small custom builder and had been successful in negotiating flexible work schedules and extra time away from the job. Yet Justin also exhibited a willingness to put in his time in return: "You got to bite the bullet. But for people, you need to earn your time. There's no doubt about that, you need to earn your time". When asked whether he thought that his boss might be open to re-structuring work days to offer workers a more reasonable work-life balance, Justin thought that his boss would be
willing to reduce someone's work hours, if they found the schedule to be onerous:

Yeah, he'd consider reducing the hours. I don't think anybody at work has ever got really fed up with nine hour days that we pretty much work. Nine to ten hour days. I don't think anybody has a problem with it. But I'm sure if they did, they're welcome to take the time off.

As mentioned in previous sections, Alden was not always successful at getting time flexibility from his supervisor. Alden did not speculate as to why his supervisor was sometimes accommodating and other times not. However, Alden was aware of the thin line between agitating for change and being expendable:

Yeah, like if I push the issue, see, there's always, like, the threat of them being able to find someone else. You are easily replaced, right? So if you're threatening them, keep in mind that there's always someone else out there that's going to be willing to work for less.

Alden felt that he had little power in terms of support (Kanter 1977) from his supervisor when it came to negotiating time away from work. At the same time, Alden knew that he was a valuable asset to the builder:

And the thing is that I knew, with this particular company, that they weren't necessarily going to do that [fire him] in the sense that I was actually covering three people's jobs. See, that's what I always found so interesting, that 'cause I was working at three different sites. Actually I was doing the one here in [A], one in [B] and one in [C], right? And I was a labourer for all three of those. And plus doing some of the service work.

Cameron attributed his time flexibility to his rapport with and support from his employer. He considered that their relationship was well enough developed that he could discuss his desire to reduce his work week hours. Still, without his employer's formal support, it would not be possible for Cameron to drop down to a four day work week.

Yet his goal was to reduce his number of hours worked in order to enjoy leisure
activities. Cameron presented his boss with a compelling argument to have the number of closings per development site decreased, and anticipated that his boss might move in that direction. Cameron saw the potential for him to work a four day week, if his boss were to follow through. Further, Cameron thought it would be possible for him to adjust how site work was structured to accommodate his reduced work schedule and thereby meet his work-life balance goal. However, Cameron feared that his boss would instead allocate the extra time toward his doing service calls. From a business point of view, reducing production (sales) requires that expenses be reduced—in this case, labour expenses would be cut (the elimination of the fulltime service position) by having service tasks added to site worker job descriptions. Cameron’s desire to work a four day week and enjoy a better work-life balance might be thwarted by the inherent profit advantages offered as a result of his house closing reduction proposal.

Chad’s assertion that he did not like the long hours that he had to work was made in the presence of his supervisor, Lewis, who was less than empathetic toward Chad after the statement was spoken. Prior to making the statement, Chad said that he wanted to move up through the ranks with the builder. It was therefore risky for Chad to be so candid about his feelings regarding long work days in front of his supervisor. Without Lewis’ support, Chad might not realise his promotion ambition with the builder. Further, as Lewis did not consider the hours they work to be excessive, he would likely not be supportive toward changing the hourly structure. The status quo will likely remain should a senior worker, like Lewis, be unwilling to advocate for a more reasonable work-life balance on behalf of all site workers.

As previously mentioned, Steve's employer, in his view, "pushes us to have longer
[work] hours", although his boss was willing to provide time flexibility to individual workers on request. However, Steve asserted that his boss was "more concerned with wages" than hours of work. Whether or not Steve’s employer considered structural changes to enhance work-life balance for employees is not known. Still, Steve thought that his employer might benefit from having his employees work long days: "...I think the more his employees work, the more he does make. Because the more jobs he's able to do, and therefore his consulting fee and managerial fee goes up...So I think there is an incentive for him to have his employees working all the time". The juxtaposition between long work days being profitable for the builder and not work-life balance friendly for workers illustrates the power problem—workers have little negotiating power to redress the situation, should they wish to change their work structure. Perhaps the builder, if he were aware that a more reasonable work-life balance was of value to employees, would consider moving in that direction.

Alden found that his employer's expectations of site personnel were, at times, unreasonable. According to Alden, his supervisor was given conflicting messages by the builder in terms of forecasting workload, as he recounted:

...he got a lot of stress put on him [his supervisor] because the people that were selling the house, showing the house, would just say 'oh yeah, sure, we can have it done by this time'. They'd just throw it in. So we'd, technically, our main boss [builder], he wanted to complete about four houses a month, right? And he says 'don't worry about doing any more' yet honestly, that pretty much only happened maybe once out of the whole I was working there....often times we were closing seven houses in a month. They really treated him [his supervisor] unfairly with the timeframe to get things done. Then of course, everything's his fault because things are, you know, the deadlines getting closer and closer yet he's not quite there yet and it's not his fault.

The builder's lack of follow-through on his commitment to help workers obtain a more
reasonable workload demonstrated how little power site workers held over the pace of their work. The builder's message is evident—increased production is better. In order to commit to the four house closings a month, the builder would have needed to communicate his expectations to the sales staff. Further, site workers had evidence that the builder agreed to one standard, but allowed an alternate threshold in practice.

It was not within the scope of this investigation to meet with residential construction companies to uncover their attitudes about work-life balance for their employees, and what business concerns would need to be addressed before implementing structural changes. That said, the builder for whom Wayne and Parker worked did offer an alternative vision of what residential construction companies could do, which demonstrates that structures and policies can be put in place to ensure work-life balance for workers without business profit suffering.

Support—Family and Social Network

Support from family and friends might play a significant role in the residential construction worker’s longevity in the business. Steve suggested that his friends did not always understand why he could not attend as many social functions as he would like: "sometimes I don't think there's an understanding about with my friends but it's never gotten to the point of complaints". Steve did make the connection that spending time with friends is an investment and recognised that "...it definitely means I have to kind of, I’m not as flexible on when I work on those relationships". Steve also mentioned that his lack of energy prevented him from partaking in social and leisure activities:

I definitely don't feel like I can participate in as many things as I would. I’m quite an active and motivated person so I still tend to be quite social during those periods. But I would say that what really cuts in is, I’m generally quite tired during the week in those
situations. So my social times are usually immediately following my shower and eating and before my early bedtime during the week. So that's something I think with long hours and hard physical work, it's hard to work that in.

Steve does have some support from his boss to leave early, but the physical nature of his work took a toll on his ability to engage in social activities.

Some of Chad’s friends work in construction and therefore faced the same time challenges as Chad. Others were in school or unemployed and had more free time to enjoy social activities. Chad commented that his friends who worked in construction did not like the long hours, “the ones that work say the same thing” [referring to long work hours]. Yet Chad chose to socialise with his friends as often as he could, giving up sleep in favour of partying.

Workers are more likely to leave a job when it puts undue pressure on their home life and relationships (Yates 2003). Family, and to a lesser degree, social networks, can either accept a worker’s work-life imbalance or support them to seek other employment where the hours might be less demanding.

**Information—Corporate**

Land available for housing development dictates where and when a builder can build new homes, as does the strength of the local economy. This type of business information can be empowering to construction workers in helping them to understand what opportunities there might be in the future. Cameron was the only participant to speak directly with the builder about the possibility of reducing his weekly hours. They had discussed reducing the number of house closings each month in order to accommodate working at a less frenetic pace. As Cameron said:

But right now, he is somewhat committed, and it's partially due to
the amount of land we have available to bring on, that we will restrict it to two closings a month. And if he does that and sticks to that, like we're just getting into that and get through this other, so by Christmas and on into this winter, if it stays that way, then the workload would drop to a point where you could do that [work fewer hours each week].

Despite Cameron's optimism that the builder would institute a new closing schedule, he acknowledged that the builder had financial obligations and could only decrease house sales to a certain point and remain profitable:

You gear up with sales staff, models [home], whatever, then building staff and service staff, then administrative staff for the office, you know, architect and all that. So they're all and you know, you can only go down so small and still have that infrastructure.

Cameron’s attempt to negotiate a more reasonable work-life balance was, to some extent, dependent on how lean an operation his boss could run. At the same time, Cameron forecasted a downward shift in personnel—the likelihood of eliminating the one fulltime service position—that would result in an increased workload for all site personnel.

Still, Cameron’s inside information affords him a level of control over his work life. Based on what he knows about the company’s direction and outcomes implemented, he can determine his next move on the road to finding a more reasonable work-life balance. If the builder decides to add service work to site tasks, Cameron can either choose to stay or seek employment elsewhere, should he remain committed to obtaining a better work-life balance.
Chapter VI: Conclusions

Overall, the men interviewed were content with their work-life balance, although those who generally worked long hours acknowledged that they would enjoy working fewer hours. They accepted long work hours as being normal in residential construction and most did not see the need to change the current 9-10 hour work day structure. Most had the ability to get time flexibility when they needed it. Hourly paid workers would like to see their hours reduced, as long as they are not financially penalised. Most participants did not think that their long work hours were a problem for their family and, if conflicts arose, most accepted it.

For the most part, the men who were interviewed do not think they lack work-life balance. Most agree that they work long hours but thought that they had the ability to speak with their supervisor to arrange time off work on an ad hoc basis. All the men interviewed, except for Wayne and Parker, agreed that they work long hours, leaving them with less time to attend to family and personal matters. That said, those who do work long hours thought that these hours were standard in the industry and therefore accepted this situation. Certainly these findings mirror the work-life balance literature regarding construction workers in the ICI sector coming from Australia (see Lingard, Francis, and Turner 2010, for instance).

Most of the participants thought that their work life had little negative impact on their personal life. Whether or not this could be attributed, in part, to the fact that six of the eight interviewed did not have children or that five of the eight were single, is not known, though it is a plausible explanation. Lewis and Cameron, both of whom were married with children, did not complain that they had been unable to participate in family
activities, although Cameron did acknowledge that he might not have been as available to his children as he would have liked. Chad was more definitive—for him, his long work hours interfered with his social life significantly. Justin, on the other hand, was still able to fit his sports activities into his weekly schedule despite working nine to ten hour days, though he did concede that this might change once he and his wife started having children. Overall, most of the men thought that their work life did not significantly interfere with their lives outside of work. Again, similar results were demonstrated through the research done by Lingard, Francis and Turner (2010), where male respondents did not report significant work-family conflict, even among those who were married and had children at home.

The example set by Wayne’s and Parker’s employer—a standard eight hour work day, Monday to Friday—demonstrated that builders can be profitable and meet deadlines while offering their employees a more reasonable work-life balance. Their builder successfully co-ordinated the work schedules of employees, sub-trades, material deliveries, permit acquisitions and inspections to fit into an eight hour work day, while meeting closing deadlines and breaking new ground for subsequent developments. When asked if they thought it would be possible to reduce the number of working hours to a more reasonable number, most of the men interviewed agreed that it could be done but were skeptical that their employer would adopt such a strategy. As well, most thought that sub-trades would be less likely to adhere to a reduced work schedule. Still, participants were hopeful that change was possible but that it was contingent upon a builder’s commitment to re-structure. Yet the most significant aspect of Wayne’s and Parker’s employment is their satisfaction in their job and with their employer. Both men
stated that they were very happy with their working conditions and intended to stay with their employer for many years. Unfortunately for the majority of construction workers, Wayne’s and Parker’s work structure is not the norm.

The culture of construction work evinces the ideal worker quality (Callan 2007), where employees place work above all other considerations. The demanding physical nature of construction work reinforces the male breadwinner ideology. Given that approximately 97% of construction workforce is male (Statistics Canada 2011a), this culture will likely continue.

It seems that the dominant structure of long work days will remain, unless male residential construction workers advocate improving their work-life balance. This may have profound implications for women who wish to work in this sector and who often require job flexibility to meet the needs of their domestic obligations. If builders want to recruit women as a way to increase their labour pool, offering a more reasonable work-life balance to all workers would be prudent and of benefit to their financial bottom line.

There are a number of research areas of interest that could follow from this study. Examining the prevalence and acceptance of women in construction would be informative. Interviewing women who are currently working in construction, as well as women who left the construction industry, would aid our understanding about the obstacles and challenges they faced and how they overcame them. Gathering how male construction workers perceive women working in construction would similarly be enlightening. Understanding the role women can and do play in the construction industry can inform decisions made by employers, policy makers, and governments, as women seek out career opportunities in the skilled trades.
It would be instructive to poll residential builders about the available workforce and the constraints they face in finding suitable site worker candidates. Asking them what they think could be done at a policy level would help identify gaps and propose possible solutions.

Including spouses and adult children of residential construction workers could offer valuable insights into work-life balance and long work hours. For instance, it might unearth contradictory perceptions about the amount of time construction workers spend at work versus their available time at home. Revealing these possible discrepancies might be an important step towards workers confronting the ideal worker model.

The reluctant nature of the residential construction population to be interviewed was problematic. Perhaps issues of class identity and socio-economic status, such as educational attainment, might be related to the population’s reluctance, as would their not being familiar with the research process.

The construction industry recognises that there is a skill shortage but efforts to recruit more young people to work in the trades have not been highly successful. A focus of research could therefore be on post-secondary employment choices made by young people, with a specific emphasis on skilled trade occupations.

The majority of workers on a residential construction site are not employed directly by the builder; instead, they are individuals who work for a contracted company to provide a specific service. For example, a builder will contract with a siding company to supply and install all the siding, eave troughs, flashing, and other aluminum-based materials. The siding company hires workers to do the installation, usually on a piece-price basis (pay based on the linear foot installed, for instance). Contract workers have
little job security and many may not qualify for employment protection programs, such as employment insurance or workers compensation benefits. The precarious nature of their job merits further investigation.

The type of new immigrants working in residential construction may have changed over the past few decades. Determining if newcomers work in construction out of choice or necessity is worthy of scrutiny and may help to inform policy makers as to the qualifications needed by employers from an immigrant population. The role that the temporary foreign worker program has on residential construction sites in Canada has not previously been explored and could provide policy makers with valuable information.

In summary, male residential construction workers who participated in this study did, for the most part, accept that long work hours were standard, although they said they would enjoy working fewer hours. Most did not see the need to change the current 9-10 hour workday structure and most had the ability to get time flexibility on an individual basis when they needed it. All the men interviewed, except the two who worked for the builder who had a standard 8 hour workday, agreed that they worked long hours, leaving them with less time to attend to family and personal matters. Most did not think that their long work hours were a problem for their family or friends. Finally, when asked if they thought it would be possible to reduce the number of working hours to a more reasonable number, most of them said it could be done but were skeptical that their employer would adopt such a structure. It seems that the dominant structure of long work days will remain, unless male residential construction workers advocate improving their work-life balance with their employer. Certainly, most perceived they were powerless to do so.
References


(http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/english).


Gender, Work & Organization 16(1):126-150.


Amsterdam; Boston; London: Academic.


Appendix A

Script of key messages on site to get participants

- Researcher from University of Guelph
- Interview site workers that work for the builder
- Ask questions about how they balance long work days with home and personal life
- 30 minutes of their time
- Able to meet them at a time and place of their choosing
Appendix B

General Demographics

Please circle your answer:

1. Age Group
   • 16-29
   • 30-39
   • 40-49
   • 50-59
   • 60+

2. Marital Status
   • Single
   • Married
   • Previously Married (separated/divorced/widowed)

3. Dependent Status
   • Children at home
   • Children not at home
   • Pre-school age
   • School aged
   • Primary
   • Secondary
   • College/university
   • Adult/out of house

4. Work Status
   • Fulltime
   • Part-time
   • Contract
   • Permanent
   • Temporary

5. Tenure with current builder
   • Less than 1 year
   • 1-5 years
   • 5-10 years
   • 10+ years

6. How many years working in construction overall?
   • Less than 1 year
   • 1-5 years
   • 5-10 years
   • 10-20 years
   • 20+ years

7. Travel time to/from work
   • Less than 30 min
   • Less than 1 hour
   • More than 1 hour

8. Hours of work
   • Usual daily
   • Usual weekly

9. Payment type
   • Hourly with overtime
   • Hourly without overtime
   • Salaried

10. Job Title
Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Work/Life Balance of Male Residential Construction Workers in South-western Ontario

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Myra Leyden under the supervision of Dr. Vivian Shalla, from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. This research is being conducted in aid of Myra Leyden’s MA thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:
Myra Leyden, Student Researcher, Sociology/Anthropology, University of Guelph
(519) 835-6048
Dr. Vivian Shalla, Faculty Supervisor, Sociology/Anthropology, University of Guelph
(519) 824-4120 x52195

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to help understand how residential construction workers balance the demands of their work life and their personal/family life.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Participate in an interview that will take between 1 and 1.5 hours. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded for the sole use of the researcher to ensure accuracy of data.

You will be asked questions about: a) how you balance your work with your family/private life; b) how the organization of your work in the construction industry impacts your ability to balance your paid work with your life outside of paid work. You may choose to answer only those questions you feel comfortable answering. Your participation is completely voluntary.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study will add to the body of knowledge on work/family balance in the construction industry, which is a new area of research interest in Canada. Participants’ voices, opinions and a record of their lived experience are potentially beneficial to participants and the residential construction industry. This study will be of benefit to the student researcher, who will gain insight, experience and understanding of the research process. Further, this research will highlight issues construction workers consider important that impact their quality of work and home life.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

Your name will be changed, as will the name of your employer and other business about which you speak. The name of the city may also be changed or withheld, to provide an additional layer of participant confidentiality. No one else will know your true identity apart from the student researcher.

Information shared with the researcher will be kept confidential. Once written transcripts of your interview are completed, the audio recording will be erased. All written files will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the student researcher’s home office. Computer data will be password protected. The researcher will keep interview transcripts and notes for five years for possible future studies on this topic. If quotes from interviews are used in reports, pseudonyms will be adopted.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
University of Guelph E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
437 University Centre Fax: (519) 821-5236
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “Work/life balance of residential construction workers” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

__________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)  

______________________________________

______________________________________  Date  

Signature of Participant

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness (please print)  

______________________________________

______________________________________  Date  

Signature of Witness
Appendix D

Work-Life Balance of Residential Construction Workers in Southern Ontario

Interview Schedule

Work/life choices
1. Describe a typical work day, beginning with the time you get up in the morning to the time you head to bed for the night.
2. Why did you choose this type of work?
3. What was your family situation when you began working in this field? How has that changed over time?
4. Do you consider you work long hours? [Follow-up question]: What would you say are the reasons you work long hours?
5. Do you like working these hours? Why or why not?

How do they describe their work/life balance?
1. What “work/life balance” mean to you?
2. What do you think is a good balance between work and non-work life? [Follow-up question] Is this what you currently have?
3. How would you describe the demands of your work on your time?
4. How would you describe the expectations your family has of your time with them?
5. What other factors influence your ability to balance work and non-work needs?

Do residential construction workers feel that they lack a work/life balance?
1. Do you think the amount of time you spend at your job causes problems for you or your family? If so, how, in what way?
2. Do you think the amount of time you spend at your job stops you from joining family activities? If so, how, in what way? Can you describe a situation for me?

How does the nature of their work impact their lives outside of work?
1. Do you have enough free time outside of work to meet your personal and family needs? If not, why not?
2. Are there times of the year when work demands are more of a time problem than other times? If so, why?
3. Are you able to meet your work demands and your family/personal needs in your present job? [Follow-up question]: If not, why not? In what way are you not able to meet the needs of both work and non-work life?
4. Can you think of an example when you were not able to meet a family/personal need because of your job? If so, what happened?
5. Can you think of an example when you were not able to meet a work obligation because of a family or personal matter? If so, what happened?

What could be done to improve the work/life balance for workers in the residential construction industry?
1. How has your job changed over time? Why do you think it has it changed?
2. Would you like to make changes to your job that would give you more time with your family or meet your personal needs? If so, what changes would you make?
3. Do you think the amount of time you work is the right amount of time to do your job? Can you describe why you think it is/is not?
4. Do you think government should help you get a better balance between work and non-work life? If so, in what way?
5. What should your employer/construction industry do to improve your work/life balance?

Concluding questions

1. What would you like me to know about your work and/or your family life that you think/feel I do not know?
2. What question/s should I include in future interviews?