The Shifting Self: Social Identity in Retirement

Frances Smith, *Murray State University*

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Frances L. M. Smith, Ph.D.

Abstract

Retirement marks an important shift at the end of one’s work life. Social identity theory explains the way individuals associate identity with particular groups, which may include organizational affiliation and age. The purpose of this research is to understand how retirees describe changes in their social identity from the time they were working through retirement. Twenty-three retirees participated in qualitative interviews to discuss their social identity before and after retirement. Two themes were discovered. Role shifters described participants whose social identity had shifted due to the changes they encountered in retirement. New job-same self described retirees who maintained their social identity after retirement. This research has important implications for organizational managers as they discuss retirement with members. Organizations can help retirees transition into their new retired identity through volunteer and mentoring opportunities. Retirees should also prepare for retirement by considering their own identity shift.

Keywords: Social Identity, Retirees, Qualitative Methods, Organizational Communication

Aging in organizations is synonymous with a period of life known as retirement (Desmette & Gillard, 2008). Since the 1980s, more and more individuals have made plans to enter retirement after they reach a certain age, usually their early to mid-sixties (Atchley, 1972, 1982; Marshall & Taylor, 2005; Vierck & Hodges, 2005). Retirement is a unique form of organizational exit because it marks a serious transition from one’s work life to the beginning of a new life phase. While some may continue to work in retirement, this transition results in new possibilities for the type of work and leisure in which aging individuals may participate. Recently, researchers have begun to explore important issues related to retirement such as meaning associated with retirement metaphors (Sargent, Bataille, Vogh, & Lee, 2011), the centrality of work to retirement expectations (Post, Schneer, Reitman, & Ogilvie, 2013), reconsidering the meanings of retirement
(Sargent, Lee, Martin, & Zikic, 2013), threats to self-esteem and personal meaning in late-career transitions (Onyura et al., 2015), and the overall complexity of retirement as a multi-faceted construct (Phillipson, 2013). These researchers and others have acknowledged the important role identity plays in individuals’ adjustment to retirement. Therefore, as more individuals continue to retire and the complexity of retirement as a life construct is made evident, it is imperative that researchers continue to explore the meanings associated with retirement and identity.

Retirement marks the end of a life-phase often characterized by work. The transition out of work and into retirement may impact the way an individual views his or her identity. Studying retirement through the lens of identity theory (Fisher, 1987; Goffman, 1963; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) should help to clarify how individuals cope with the change in their identity post-retirement. Social identity theory (Ellemers, Haslam, Platow, & Knippenberg, 2003; Haslam, 2001; Hogg & Terry, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), specifically, provides valuable insight into the ways individuals gain self-knowledge through particular social categories such as organizational affiliation, age, family, and other groups.

The purpose of this research is to understand how retirees describe changes in their social identity from the time they were working through retirement. Through studying social identity and retirees based on their own communication, we can learn about the details of this important life phase and the way it impacts one’s connection to social categories. Increasing understanding of social identity and retirement will aid organizational leaders in preparing themselves and their employees to participate in this social category associated with aging. Retirement processes impact the lives of employees which, in turn, impacts their organizational performance (Kiefer & Briner, 1998). Therefore, as organizations consider the value of older workers, retirement conversations must include discussions of how to navigate this important phase of life. I will begin by discussing social identity and retirement, followed by the methods that guided this study and results of analysis.

Social Identity and Retirement

Social identity theory demonstrates how individuals identify with certain social categories and how those social categories influence one’s self-concept (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Three foundations of social identity theory include social categorization, social comparison, and social identification. Social categorization refers to the tendency for individuals to view themselves and others in terms of their particular social categories or
groups. Social comparison involves assessing the value of groups and individuals by comparing themselves on dimensions with other groups. Finally, social identification is the idea that an individual’s identity is implicated in perceptions of and responses to social situations (Ellemers et al., 2003). This theory states that individuals define themselves in terms of their group affiliations which may include gender, race, role-specific groups, or age.

Social identity theory includes two dimensions: personal identity and social identity. Personal identity describes an individual’s characteristics such as abilities, physical traits, interests, etc. Social identity refers to group classifications. Social identification, according to Ashforth and Mael (1989), refers to the “perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate” (p. 21). Individuals identify with the various categories they belong to in different degrees. The more an individual identifies with a particular category, the more positively those categories are perceived by that individual. Age is one category in which individuals place themselves (Desmette & Gillard, 2008). Dixon (2012) discussed various stereotypes of age and found that individuals within organizations form social groups based on age. Likewise, Harwood (2004) noted that grandparents who created personal websites often included age-related references due to the age-association between being a grandparent and being older.

Social identity theory also includes an element of uncertainty reduction. Times of transition, such as retirement, encourage comparison with other people, groups, or communities in order to facilitate self-definition (Michinov, Fouquereau, & Fernandez, 2008). Individuals are motivated to self-enhancement and a need to reduce uncertainty about their perceptions, attitudes, feelings, behaviors and self-concept within the social world (Hogg & Terry, 2000). In retirement, uncertainty reduction may be seen as individuals realize that they are placed into the “retired” category, but they have little understanding of what that category represents or means for their social identity. This can encourage both role and group membership loss (Michinov et al., 2008). Likewise, being placed in the “retired” category, much like being placed in the “grandparent” category, might thrust someone into the “old age” category (Harwood, 2004). For some, this sudden connection between one social category and the “old age” category might not coincide with their own perceptions of identity. Furthermore, as individuals leave the certainty of their occupation and enter the world of retirement, they are likely to face multiple uncertainties related to finances, family, and self-concept.

If an individual is employed full-time, most of their time each week is likely spent participating in organizational activities revolving around a particular occupation. Building
an identity in work allows individuals to claim their contributions to society and build respect (Holcomb, 2010; Sonnenfeld, 1988). Work identity shapes individuals’ understandings of themselves. Social identity influences individuals to construct a “working” identity of themselves. Upon retirement, those members can no longer identify with that social category of “worker” and must now identify with a new social category. Determining what new social identity in which to identify can create turmoil for some as the connection with the working identity for an extended period of time is a difficult shift to make.

Organizations have an important impact on one’s retirement process (Kiefer & Briner, 1998). Policies and procedures regarding retirement, as well as organizational decisions regarding early retirement as a form of downsizing, shape individual employee’s morale and commitment. The way organizations treat members in pre-retirement phases, as well as those who have retired, communicates to younger members the value of age within the organization. Organizations that help their employees through the process of retirement, from anticipation to post-retirement adjustment, are likely to be viewed more favorably by their employees. Individual employee performance at all levels may be impacted by the way organizational leaders communicate about the retirement process. Those early in their careers may perceive the organization to be more caring about employee’s overall well-being. Employees who are experiencing the later phase of work life may be motivated by the good will created by strong retirement communication. Kalokerinos, von Hippel, & Henry (2015) found that organizations who offered retirement transition programs such as phased retirement or bridge employment to their retirees experienced positive feedback from retirees. Job involvement and affective commitment were also positively associated with bridge employment, suggesting that the more organizations encourage older workers to participate within the organization, the more likely they will want to continue their association with the organization after retirement. Furthermore, if an organization chooses to downsize through early retirement programs, well-established retirement communication may reduce the negative effects and “survivor syndrome” of such a process (Kiefer & Briner, 1998). Furthermore, organizational identity and individual identity are intertwined (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). The identity of the organization is largely dependent on the identity of the individuals belonging to it. Ashforth and Mael (1989) include organizational identification as a specific form of social identification because individuals search for meaning, connectedness, and empowerment within their organizational category.

Since retirement is so closely linked to social identity, experiencing retirement takes some adjustment. In a study of eighty-nine retirees, Weiss (2005) discovered that although each individual’s experience of retirement is unique, all retirees must cope with the same two
challenges: managing the threat of being marginalized and utilizing the freedom expected during retirement. The challenges Weiss (2005) found in his research are impacted by the way an individual conceptualizes his or her social identity and the adjustment to new social categories. Therefore, by learning about the ways retirees construct their social identity, organizations can achieve greater understanding regarding the adjustment to this life phase.

As more individuals participate in retirement, it is necessary to create understanding about this potential change social identity. Organizational members create a social identity at least partially based on their work experience. Retirement creates an important shift in social identity that retirees must reconcile. Social identity is constructed socially and communicatively, therefore it is necessary to determine how retirees construct their social identity post-retirement in order to create understanding about this important life phase.

The following research question will be addressed in this study:
RQ: How do retirees construct their social identity during retirement?

Methods

Qualitative research is particularly important when studying identity. Identity is a personal representation of one’s self therefore this study had to be guided by qualitative methods in order to reach deeper meanings of retirement as communicated by participants. Twenty-three individuals participated in interviews for this study which was part of a larger project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a demographic questionnaire and interview guides (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Participants were recruited using snowball and maximum variation sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). All participants were self-proclaimed “retired.” Some did continue to work in other jobs, however when participants were recruited, they were asked if they considered themselves retired and these participants confirmed that fact. All participants had officially retired from a job or, in the case of one participant who was self-employed, had chosen to take social security and reduced his personal work load. Eleven men and twelve women were interviewed with ages ranging from 56 to 82 with an average age of 65. Two African-Americans, twenty Caucasians, and one participant who did not report ethnicity participated. Retirees represented past job titles of vice-president, secretary, court clerk, physician, teacher, civil engineering technician, title clerk, CEO, assistant superintendent, manager, business unit executive, professor, and others. Participants had worked between 21 and 65 years with an average of 39 years worked. Participants had been retired between 3 weeks and 16 years with an average of 6.5 years. Retirees had worked between 1 and 30 jobs with an average of 6 jobs in their lifetime.
Interviews were conducted at various locations throughout the communities where the participants lived. All participants were offered a copy of the interview questions prior to the meeting and were given details regarding the purpose of the study as well as plans regarding the data. All participants were offered the opportunity to read the results when the study was completed. Participants were not given incentives to participate. Interviews lasted on average 55 minutes each. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder designed for interviewing and transcription. Data was saved as computer files and deleted for the sake of confidentiality after the study was complete. Interviews continued until saturation was achieved and beyond to ensure depth of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data was transcribed word for word by the author and one other trusted, trained transcriber. The hired transcriber signed a written confidentiality notice before he was given any data and discarded the data after completion. Transcriptions produced 268 single-spaced pages of data, using 12 point font, that were used for analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts. Analysis involved a process of data management, reduction, and conceptual development (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). During the interviewing and transcribing process, a separate document was created in which memos were written about possible themes and questions related to the data. After the transcription was complete, data analysis was conducted using NVivo 7 qualitative research analysis software.

Once the transcripts had been added to the program, categorization began in conjunction with coding. Categorization refers to “the analytic process of sorting units of data with respect to properties that they have in common” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 246). Codes were created based on similarity of phrasing, wording, or communication provided by the participant. Once multiple categories were developed, conceptual development was used to deepen the links and elaborate on the concepts most central to answering the research question (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Themes were noted based on their recurrence, strength, and persistence within the group. As categories were examined, notes were taken regarding each theme and an analysis was completed of participants’ comments. This determined any demographic connections between participants within a specified theme. As themes emerged for each group, they were defined and questioned to ensure their accuracy.

Themes were then verified. Verification attests to the credibility and transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2003). This study used both member check and rich, thick description. Four participants responded to the member check. All member checks agreed with the interpretation of their experience. No changes were made as a result of their comments. For the
second form of verification, large sections of the transcripts that describe the themes are included in the analysis so that the readers may verify for themselves the theme being described.

Results

Results of data analysis clearly described the participant’s perception of their social identity since retirement. In some cases, the change in social identity from work to retirement was welcomed, while in others, the change was more difficult. Only when the roles they had filled during their working years remained unchanged in retirement did retirees feel that no change had occurred in their social identity. In this case, their group classifications remained unchanged despite their retirement experience (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Two themes emerged in the social identity of retirees: role shifters and new job-same self.

Role Shifters

The strongest theme emerging from retirees was that of role shifters. Sixteen out of twenty-three participants described some level at which their identity shifted as a result of retiring from work. In this theme, participants described the roles they fulfilled during their work life and how those roles had changed during retirement. As retirees described the change in their self-concept after retirement, they discussed roles they had previously held in work as defining their social identity. Retirees describing this theme participated in social categorization (Ellemers et al., 2003)-- comparing themselves to certain groups when they were younger, pre-retirement, and other groups as they aged, post-retirement. In retirement, their new roles had replaced the old one dictating a change in themselves and their communication. This participant discussed his two roles clearly:

R1: Well, I was a business executive when I worked and uh,… I really decided when I was going to retire that most men are wrapped up in their jobs. They’re associated with their jobs. You think of yourself as an executive, you think of yourself as a milkman if that’s what you are, like my dad was. And um, so I decided if I was going to retire I had to change my self-concept to fit the retirement or otherwise I, I didn’t think the transition would go well. Cause I really like working in general so I decided during the retirement process that I would be you know, a husband and a grandfather and I would you know, no longer—shed the executive image and that’s worked fine. (68-year-old, Caucasian male, retired vice president of a large corporation)
Whereas at one time this participant was a high-level executive, now he saw himself as a husband and grandfather. Participating in identity work by anticipating the change his identity would encounter, he made changes to his own self-described identity ( Alvesson & Willmott, 2002 ). This self-awareness aided the participant in his ability to re-situate himself into a new social category with which he was satisfied. Interestingly enough, although he was married for many years before and during the time he was an executive, it appears he did not place himself in the social category of “husband” until after he retired, at least not as his primary social category. He also described how his role in the home had changed significantly once he retired in that he spent time helping his wife with housework. That demonstrates how encompassing the social category of “executive” was to him. When he was an executive, it seems, he was nothing else. Once he left the organization, his primary social category is now family.

Another participant described her shifting role as one that went from a clearly work-oriented social identity, to one that was more socially-driven.

R17: I’m not a boss. Uh. I’m a friend. I watch with my children, you know, they’re beginning now to tell me what to do [laugh]. They haven’t gotten very far with that yet. [both laugh] You know, you’re not in command of people. Telling them, working to get everything done, and trying to keep the politics, on an even keel. (74-year-old, Caucasian female, Retired interim director)

In her organization, this participant viewed herself as the boss who had to participate in politics and tell people what to do. Her communication centered around command and control. In retirement, she has seen her role as one that has shifted into one that is more centered on friendship. Like the first participant, this is not to say that she was not a friend when she was working, but it seems that her primary social identity was constructed around her being the boss. She was consumed by the role of leading people and needing to navigate the politics. Retirement freed her from that and allowed her to construct her identity around friendship.

The final example is from a participant who was a school system secretary prior to retirement. In this quote, she describes her last day at work before she retired.

R2: I just went around and kinda touched base with everybody in the building, cause everybody else is still having to work. I really didn’t do any work that day. Probably answered the phone a few times. And then um, packed up my last few little things and
when I went to the door to go home that afternoon…. Standing on one side of the door I was still the secretary to the Assistant Superintendent. And on the other side of the door I was gonna start a new life. So walking through the door was very strange. In fact, it makes me wanna cry. Isn’t that silly? But I knew you know, from that point on that step across my life was gonna be totally different…. [My identity] has changed. Um, I’ve had to learn to be retired. And you know, I have lost that you know, with my job I did have some power. (58-year-old, Caucasian female, Retired secretary)

This participant described a pivotal moment in her social identity shift. For her, the role shift was not as much of a slow process—it was a literal step from one side of the door to the other. As she moved from being the secretary to the Assistant Superintendent to a retiree, she lost the power she felt she had and her identity changed. In her words, she had to learn to be retired. She had to learn a new identity. This was an emotional shift she had to make. Even during the interview, which occurred two years after her retirement, thinking of that day brought back the emotions she experienced.

Participants who described this theme of the role shifers saw how they had either attached themselves to their job, were able to construct their identity in other ways after retirement, or described specific moments in which they knew their identity had to be reconstructed. Once they aged and retired, they were able to shed those previous role-based social identities for something different. The reconstruction of their identity was made evident by their communication of the recognition of their previously held role and identity within their occupations and the shift that they recognized that had occurred post-retirement.

New Job- Same Self

Seven out of the twenty-three retirees expressed that their social identity categories had not changed from the time they were working through retirement. The reason for this was that although they had retired, they had joined organizations or taken on other jobs after retirement that maintained their social identity. The new job-same self theme is defined as an unchanging social identity from work to retirement due to the maintenance of work-related organizational memberships. These retirees maintained their social identity through similar job-related opportunities. In this way, the social identity they had maintained during their work life continued through their retirement. The following are a few examples:

**Interviewer:** Do you feel like your identity changed from the time you were working until you retired?
R12: Not a whole lot, because it’s, even though my title with the … church static clerk, it’s it’s kind of, it’s kind of a buck stops here position too. But I mean it’s, you know, it pays $5000 a year instead of $125,000. So it’s a little. It’s not a high paying job, but the respect that you get from being in that position is similar to being like in charge of an agency or an office. …

Interviewer: So you feel like you have sort of a similar job now in your church that you kind of had there in terms of being in charge of stuff.

R12: Well, having the respect for your position, not necessarily being in charge. In other words, I felt, I felt respected for, almost all the jobs I had, because you have a certain responsibility. It’s, it’s not that you get more respect, because you have a higher job. It’s the fact that people look to you to contribute what you can to serve, and I believe very much in service. Serving leadership. And I always felt like I worked for them, they didn’t work for me. (71-year-old, Caucasian male, retired statistician)

This participant felt that although there were differences between the work he did during his career and his position with the church, it was still a role that commanded respect. He described it as a “buck stops here” position, meaning his identity was still that of an individual with power. His occupation before retirement was a position of high power in the United States government, so his social identity went unchanged when in retirement he acquired a similarly powerful position in his church.

The next participant discussed how his social identity went unchanged in retirement because he continued to communicate with former coworkers and participate in organizations within his industry.

Interviewer: … How has your identity changed since you’ve retired?

R16: My identity? Not much. I still, I’m still in contact with a lot of my old cronies, and uh, my cell phone hours utilization’s pretty high. I still have a lot of contacts, I still get calls, I’m on the board of directors … still. Yeah. It was a competitor at the time I retired. They convinced me that they could use me on their board. So, I did that just to kind of stay in touch, you know, the industry, is kinda like professional sports, to keep people in the industry, or moving through the system, you know a bunch of em. You know who’s bad and who’s good. Who you don’t want to mess with, and who you’d like to see somebody hire and that sort of thing. (73-year-old, Caucasian male, retired chief executive officer)
While participant R12 described his identity as unchanged because he was in a similar kind of position within a new organization, this participant (R16) remained involved in industry organizations and communicated regularly with former coworkers. The new responsibilities of being on the board of directors for the steel company allowed him to maintain his work identity, and social category, even in retirement.

The final participant in this section discussed that although he changed jobs and responsibilities frequently in life, it was all work to him and therefore his social identity remained the same even after retirement.

**R22**: Kinda, well my identity didn’t change much at all. Just instead of working for [computer corporation], I’m working for the school system. Instead of working for the school system, I’m working for the family. Well, the fact that I was the houseman, of the house, that was old news. And that was a little bit a mystery, cause I was at home when the kids were young. But it was fun! Being with the kids. (68-year-old, Caucasian male, Retired business executive)

For this participant, working itself provided an identity for him and left his social identity unchanged. This participant retired early from a computer corporation and became a stay-at-home dad for his children. He also worked in community ventures, such as working with his children’s school system. No matter what role he was pursuing, for him “worker” was a social category. He could frame whatever he was doing to allow him to embrace a social identity as a “worker”.

The experiences of these participants is consistent with prior research which shows that for some retirees, the professional identity was not lost upon retirement (Teuscher, 2010). Each of these participants described how during retirement they shifted into some other role that was either in the same industry as their previous role or reminded them of their other role in some way. Communication from one role in their work-life to another in their retirement allowed them to make a smooth transition. Having officially retired from a job, they sought out opportunities to stay connected within their industry or community which maintained their original social identity.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The research question for this study asked how retirees construct social identity
during retirement. Retirees from a variety of work experiences and retirement experiences were interviewed which resulted in two overarching themes. Analysis revealed that identity in retirement may be impacted by the role shift, or it may not change as in the new job-same self theme. For those who perceived a role shift, participants described how their roles during their work life and roles during retirement had shifted. Generally, this produced a positive view of social identity regarding the changes in life after retirement. Participants who described the new job-same self theme described themselves as being the same as they were during work life. Through maintenance of organizational memberships, new jobs or volunteer positions that reminded them of their previous employment, or just an overall conception of self as worker, these participants did not perceive a shift in social identity in retirement due to the maintenance of similar work roles. Identity work occurred for these retirees as they experienced uncertainty during their transition (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and worked to reinforce, change, maintain, or contradict their self-identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This identity work was purposeful and reflexive for many of the retirees who claimed that they either thought about the changes their identity would undergo and prepared for it, or made adjustments to their identity after they experienced retirement (Carroll & Levy, 2010).

This study begins to reveal the ways individuals communicate about social identity during retirement. Through learning about their aging and retirement experience, we can learn what impacts adjustment to retirement and varying social categories. For most of these individuals, their post-retirement experiences had lead them to conceptualize and communicate about themselves differently than they would have when working. This study adds to existing literature showing that identity is not stagnant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Various life changes contribute to changes in social identity. The retirement identity-shift is one individuals must learn to cope with on their own. At a time when age is impacting social identity, so is the loss of an occupation, career, and organizational membership. Whether an individual moved through several different occupations in their lifetime or worked for one organization for over 30 years, work is fundamentally a part of most people’s social identity and that lack of work can create a chasm which one must carefully cross.

Individuals facing retirement should prepare themselves for their new life phase through more than financial planning. These discussions of social identity reveal the importance of recognizing the value of work identity in our lives and the important changes that can take place when that work identity shifts. Research has revealed the importance of self-diversification (Onyura et al., 2015) which encourages retirees to identify with multiple social categories so that
their identity is not so deeply changed once they retire. As individuals preparing for retirement participate in identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), participants in this study reveal the methods through which retirees may reconstruct social identity categories. These participants reveal the important changes that take place whether retirees made a significant shift, or found new work-like ventures with which to attach their identity.

Aging and retirement processes affect individual employees which, in turn, affects their organizations (Kiefer & Briner, 1998). Retirement is a type of exit organizations have tried to control through specific practices, policies, and ceremonies (Sargent et al., 2013). Therefore, organizational leaders should consider how to manage communication effectively as they participate in the control of this exit process. Managers and others who talk about retirement with individuals who are still working should be aware of the important changes that take place in retirement other than financial differences. Granted, one’s financial status during retirement can have an important impact on one’s daily retirement experience. However, adjusting to new social identities apart from previous organizational and age-related social groups will also affect one’s daily life. Issues of shifting roles may be shocking to those who have never given retirement much consideration, thereby creating difficulty in adjustment. Clearer discussion of post-retirement planning as well as the role organizations have in shaping one’s identity may increase understanding among both the organization and individuals retiring from the organization. As Holcomb (2010) suggested, learning all one can about retirement before and during retirement can aid in empowering the mind to adjust to retirement effectively.

Discovering the aspects of one’s job that helped impact their social identity may help the retiree to create new or different opportunities in retirement. Participating in volunteering or other work that is reminiscent of one’s previous occupation may help with adjustment. Furthermore, organizational leaders may consider using retirees’ expertise in part-time or volunteer areas. This arrangement would help the organization by making use of an experienced worker’s knowledge while also easing the retiree into a different organizational role, making the transition away from work easier to manage. Research indicates that many older workers are interested in participating in their organizations through assignments such as coaching or mentoring (Sargent et al., 2013). By creating opportunities for retired employees to share their expertise, the retiree benefits by continuing to feel connected to work and the organization is able to take advantage of the expertise and historical knowledge of organizational practices. This kind of arrangement also places value on age within the organization. When organizations are eager to push older individuals into retirement, it communicates a message that age is not a valuable social identity category. By creating special opportunities for aging workers, organizations reflect a positive image of aging to members and society.
Organizational managers can greatly aid individuals in creating a retirement life phase that will be beneficial for their employees as well as themselves through specific retirement-related communication and programs. Many individuals are unaware of the differences retirement will bring to their social identity until they are in the process of adjusting to retirement. By understanding more about the communication of social identity from retirees, we can aid individuals in creating a post-retirement social identity for themselves that is positive which will likely make adjusting to retirement easier.

Future research should consider more ways that retirees use communication to understand the retirement phase of life. The connection between organizational communication and retirement should also be further explored. Differentiating between individuals who were employed by organizations with extensive retirement communication and those whose organizations lacked retirement preparation communication may provide insight into the value of age in organizations and subsequent retirement adjustment. Gender differences may also be further explored. In this study, participants in the new job-same self theme were all male. Research has already demonstrated differences in how men and women experience their careers and retirement (Duberley, Carmichael, & Szmigin, 2014). Future research should determine if gender differences exist in the methods used to cope with changing identity in retirement. Learning about the ways retirees conceptualize and communicate about retirement may encourage better planning for this important life phase.
The Shifting Self

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References


Kentucky Journal of Communication 18


