Preretirement Influences on Postretirement Self-Esteem

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Data derived from in-depth telephone interviews with 300 retired workers from the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, North Carolina, metropolitan area are used to investigate whether preretirement self-investments in the roles of worker and spouse have positive or negative consequences for postretirement self-esteem. We find evidence that suggests that: (a) self-esteem does not decline in the transition into retirement; (b) commitment to the role of worker and worker identity meanings have a positive influence on postretirement self-esteem; but it may be indirect, operating through preretirement self-esteem; (c) commitment to the role of spouse has a positive impact on self-esteem in retirement; and (d) preretirement self-esteem continues to exert a positive effect on postretirement self-esteem. Thus, the findings suggest that preretirement self and identity factors continue to influence postretirement self-esteem.

Retirement as an ongoing process provides an opportunity to explore how previously established roles and identities can continue to influence the ways that individuals evaluate and assess themselves. Our goal is to explicitly link symbolic interaction-inspired identity theory (Stryker, 1980) with Atchley’s (1971, 1976, 1989, 1993) continuity theory. Among Atchley’s insights into retirement, three are especially important for this research. First, retirement entails more than just the loss of the worker role. Retirement also means culturally transmitted rights, such as the rights of a retired person to economic support and the right to autonomy concerning the management of one’s time, as well as duties, such as assuming responsibility for the management of one’s own life (Atchley, 1976). Second, retirement covers a temporal span that begins in preretirement and continues into postretirement. Atchley’s (1976) seven stages clearly present retirement as a process that links a set of roles before and after the actual end of full-time employment and/or the beginning of a pension. Third, retirement is variable in form and consequences. Atchley (1982) argues that the retirement outcomes are influenced, in part, by social background characteristics, such as a person’s health and the adequacy of retirement income, as well as the circumstances surrounding the retirement event, such as whether retirement was voluntary and expected.

This study explores the impact of preretirement worker and spouse identities on postretirement self-esteem. Self-esteem, a person’s general or global self-evaluation, has the distinction of being both an overused and an underused indicator of self-concept and well-being. Within symbolic interaction theory, self-esteem has a long and rich tradition beginning with the work of William James (1890). Indeed, Rosenberg (1979) called for sociologists to go beyond self-esteem and investigated other components of self-concept. Ironically, among nonsociologists, self-esteem is an underexamined indicator of well-being (Lee and Shehan, 1989). Self-esteem focuses on the evaluative component of self. It is therefore theoretically and empirically distinct, but positively related to other indicators of well-being and mental health such as measures of life satisfaction, happiness, morale, and positive affect; and negatively related to measures of depression, anxiety, stress, and negative affect (Johnson, Lund, and Dimond, 1986; Krames, England, and Flett, 1988; Lawton, Kleban, and diCarlo, 1984).

We are interested in three issues. First, an early controversy dealt with the consequences of retirement on self-esteem. Miller (1965) proposed that retirement would create an “identity crisis.” His argument was that the role of worker is an important source of social status and self-worth. Retirement, viewed as the loss of work role, therefore would be perceived as a negative, if not degrading, experience. Along a similar line, Kohn and Schooler (1983) found occupational experiences have a profound effect on psychological functioning and on the ways that individuals perceive themselves. An implication of their research is that the loss of the worker role would be disorienting and have negative implications on self-esteem. Atchley (1971) countered Miller with “continuity theory” and the prediction that retirement typically would not negatively impact well-being. In a manner similar to McCall and Simmons (1978) and Stryker (1980), Atchley began by noting that individuals occupy multiple roles and proceeded to draw the inference that the continuity of family, friendship, and religious roles into retirement would typically prevent an overall negative consequence of retirement.

A diverse set of empirical findings has questioned the identity crisis prediction. Studies of attitudes toward retirement report that most retirees are positive about their retirement (Atchley and Robinson, 1982; Hanks, 1990; Matthews and Brown, 1987). Other studies found that retirement status does not directly influence well-being or an identity as old among older men (Mutran and Reitzes, 1981); and longitudinal investigations concluded that retirement does not appear to adversely affect the life satisfaction for either men or women (George, Fillenbaum, and Palmore, 1984; Palmore, Fillenbaum, and George, 1984). So, a preliminary task of the research is to investigate whether self-esteem declines as workers move into retirement.

Second, a central concern of this study is with the impact of preretirement identities on postretirement self-esteem.
Identity meanings are the meanings that persons attribute to themselves in a role (Burke, 1980; Stryker, 1980). Mortimer, Finch, and Kumka (1982) define four meaning dimensions among late adolescents that remained stable over time and influenced adaptation to adult roles. Three of these dimensions suggest identity meanings which are generally applicable to roles in middle and old age: (1) competent focuses on identity meanings of success or achievement in a role (Whitbourne, 1986); (2) confident captures Turner's (1968) identity-directed dimension and reflects emotional or affective identity meanings; and (3) sociable is similar to Bales's (1951) expressive dimension and entails self-meanings associated with an outgoing interpersonal style. Thus, unlike personality theorists (Costa and McCrae, 1980) who investigate general or global traits, we propose that individuals create identity meanings in roles. As the roles a person may hold vary in form and content, we anticipate that one's assessment along identity dimensions will also vary. We expect that the worker and spouse identity meanings will exert positive effects on self-esteem.

Beginning with the role of worker, Atchley (1971, 1976, 1993) argued that an important source of continuity during the retirement is that individuals continue to hold an occupational identity even after they retire. Ebaugh (1988) described the lingering effects of a former role as a "hangover identity," and noted that in an adult role a new identity is often influenced by former identities. So, retired workers may continue to use their worker identity meanings as a foundation or framework for assessing self-worth. An implication of this process is that commitment to worker role and worker identity meanings will have a positive impact on post-retirement self-esteem.

Another possibility, also in line with symbolic interaction theory, is that retirement may be more difficult for men and women who have invested greater prominence, salience, and commitment to the worker role (Stryker and Serpe, 1994). Thus, men and women who were committed to the worker role and held positive worker identity meanings will have lost a key anchoring identity and be more likely to feel a sense of anomic or depreciated self-esteem until they have gone through the process of readjusting or reforming their role hierarchy and sense of self. Commitment to the worker role, which may have been beneficial throughout a person's work career, would generate a "cost" or contribute to an identity crisis in early retirement.

Past research offers a rather inconclusive set of findings. On one hand, two cross-sectional studies of retired workers suggest that preretirement commitment to the worker role may not hinder adjustment to retirement. Atchley (1976) found that a high positive work orientation, measured by retrospective assessment of the worker role, among retired women was not associated with high anxiety, high anomic, or a dislike of retirement. Matthews and Brown (1987) reported that for a sample of retired workers, work saliency, a retrospective assessment of the extent to which respondents missed the intrinsic satisfaction of their job, had a positive effect on global morale for retired men but no impact on the morale of retired women. On the other hand, Erdner and Guy (1990) reported that female teachers with a strong work identity, measured by the inclusion of the role of teacher on a 20-statements test, had a less positive view of retirement. Finally, two studies contain pre- and postretirement measures. Beck (1982) found that preretirement commitment to work did exert a negative but not statistically significant effect on evaluation of retirement; and Maxwell (1985) found that for Whites, but not for Blacks, preretirement assessments of job satisfaction and job commitment had negative effects on postretirement life satisfaction.

The role of spouse provides a less controversial example of the impact of a preretirement role on postretirement self-esteem. Nonwork roles, as Atchley suggested, may serve as bridges which connect the past to the future during the retirement transition process. However, past research tends to focus either on the positive influence of the preretirement role of spouse on preretirement well-being or on the influence of postretirement role occupancy on well-being (Beck, 1982; Mutran and Reitzes, 1981; Seccombe and Lee, 1986). Commitment to the role of spouse and the spousal identity meanings may provide the individual with a source of continuity and stability in the maintenance of one's self-concept. Therefore, preretirement commitment to the role of spouse and spouse identity meanings may not only influence preretirement self-esteem but also have direct effects on postretirement self-esteem. The key is not just role occupancy but the ongoing positive impact of a role invested with meaning and affect. Suggestive but limited support for the positive influence of spousal role quality is provided by Wheaton's (1990) finding that among women (but not men) in low stress relationships, those married had fewer distress symptoms than those not married. The second issue, therefore, focuses on whether preretirement commitment to worker and spouse roles and their identity meanings have positive or negative impacts on postretirement self-esteem. Do self-investments in the worker and spouse roles help or hurt in the transition into retirement?

Third, the preretirement worker and spouse roles and identities may not independently influence postretirement self-esteem when we take into account preretirement self-esteem. Burke (1980) argued that the situated and specific contexts of identities encourage individuals to be sensitive to the identity confirming (or challenging) responses of others and the outcomes of behaviors. As a result, individuals get frequent confirmations (or challenges) to their identities; and identities are relatively easy to modify. Self-esteem, as a global self-evaluation, is influenced by current identities but also by past experiences and pressures for self-consistency. Indeed, in an earlier analysis (Reitzes and Mutran, 1994), we found that the self-esteem of middle-aged working men and women was influenced by their worker, spouse, and parent identities. Together with preretirement social background variables, the identities explained 44 percent of the variance in self-esteem for the men and 30 percent of the variance in self-esteem for the women. Further, commitment to roles of worker and spouse and a worker identity as competent exerted positive effects on self-esteem for both men and women.

As workers retire they may use their former self-esteem as a reference or framework for constructing their current self-esteem. Thus, individuals entering new situations or career stages may turn to the past, in this case their past self-esteem,
to aid in efforts to structure and organize the present and future. This may continue until new identities in postretirement enable the person to engage in new lines of action which support a stable and consistent postretirement self-esteem. So, the third issue explores whether preretirement roles and identity meanings affect postretirement self-esteem indirectly through the influence of preretirement self-esteem.

Finally, we are interested in two other sets of factors that may influence self-esteem in retirement. First, preretirement social background factors such as health, social economic status factors, and race not only influence the opportunities and quality of preretirement life but they continue to impact the way that individuals experience and assess retirement. The bulk of past research has focused on the impact of postretirement social background factors, and the findings suggest that for men and women health and income, but not necessarily occupation, education, and race, influence postretirement morale, retirement satisfaction, and well-being (Beck, 1982; Matthews and Brown, 1987; Seccombe and Lee, 1986). Second, the extent to which individuals anticipate and plan their retirement may have a positive influence on self-esteem in retirement (Dorfman, Kohout, and Heckert, 1985; Hatch, 1992).

METHODS

Data
The preretirement and postretirement data were collected in 1992 and 1994 as part of our ongoing study of the transition into retirement (CHATS, Carolina Health and Transitions Study). Beginning with the preretirement data, the sampling procedures were designed to identify approximately 400 men and 400 women aged 58 to 64 years old who worked at least 35 hours a week and resided in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, North Carolina, metropolitan area. In order to gather a representative sample of middle-aged working men and women, we began by obtaining the driver history files maintained by the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles. The file is estimated to include over 80 percent of the entire population in the age group and a higher percentage of full-time workers. From the list, which records age, address, and gender but not the telephone number or work status of applicants, we randomly selected names in proportion to the size of the three counties included in the study area. Following Dillman (1978), we sent out two introductory letters and screening postcards (3 weeks apart) and follow-up telephone calls (up to 9 tries) to verify telephone numbers and identify full-time working subjects living in the area.

Of the people identified by our screening procedures as eligible, 62 percent (826) consented and participated in our two 20-minute telephone interviews (60% of the men, 64% of the women). A comparison with census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993) for men and women aged 58 to 64 residing in the Raleigh-Durham metropolitan area suggests that we may have oversampled Whites and middle-class people. Our baseline sample contained fewer African Americans (18% vs 23%), fewer people who did not attend college (41% vs 57%), and fewer people with incomes under $25,000 (26% vs 38%). However, our sample was restricted by design to full-time workers, a population that may be expected to have higher levels of education and incomes than the census population, which also includes men and women who are unemployed or employed less than 35 hours a week.

Each of the 826 workers was tracked at 6-month intervals over the next two years. By July 1994, 758 of the respondents had either retired or remained working full-time. The attrition rate of 8.2 percent reflects the loss of 68 cases (14 died and 54 dropped out). Of the 758 respondents who completed the follow-up interviews, 438 were still employed full-time and 300 had retired.

In this investigation, we focus on the retired workers: 129 men (43%) and 171 women (57%). This group of 300 contains 220 people (73%) who are married; 241 (80%) who are White; 121 (40%) who described their retirement decision as voluntary; 108 (36%) who had been employed in managerial or professional occupations; and 113 (37%) who had retired between the ages of 58 and 61; 80 (27%) who were 62 years old and 107 (36%) who were aged 63 to 66 at the time they retired. The 1994 interviews were compiled from 111 (37%) 4-6 months postretirement, 135 (45%) 12-14 months postretirement, and 54 (18%) 24-26 months postretirement interviews. We believe that our sample contains a diverse set of retirees with a variety of social background characteristics. It will allow us to proceed with the primary goals of testing hypotheses and exploring the impact of preretirement factors on postretirement self-esteem.

Variables
Four sets of variables are used in the data analysis. The dependent variable, postretirement self-esteem, derived from Rosenberg (1965), has proven to be a durable and well-known measure of a person's summary or global assessment of self. One of the issues concerning retirement, as noted above, is that individuals may feel less valued as a result of being retired and no longer being employed full-time. Self-esteem measures self-worth, the evaluative dimensions of self-concept, and therefore is well suited for this investigation.

The scale includes 10 items: "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others"; "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"; "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure" (recoded); "I am able to do things as well as most other people"; "I feel I do not have much to be proud of" (recoded); "I take a positive attitude toward myself"; "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself"; "I certainly feel useless at times" (recoded); "At times, I think I am no good at all" (recoded); and "I wish I could have more respect for myself" (recoded). Responses ranged from "strongly agree" (4) to "strongly disagree" (1) (alpha = .89). The same items taken from the preretirement instrument are used to measure preretirement self-esteem (alpha = .88). To determine low self-esteem and high self-esteem groups we used the mean score on preretirement self-esteem as the cutting point.

We are interested in two sets of preretirement variables. The first set included preretirement commitment to the roles of worker and spouse and their identity meanings. Worker commitment and Spouse commitment are composed of a scale containing 6 items adapted to each role: "I feel I'm
truly at home when I'm at work” or “with my wife/husband”); “I'm very committed to my work” [or “husband/wife”]; “It is important to me that I succeed in my work” [or “as a husband/wife”]; “I wish I were not in this line of work” [or “as a husband/wife”] (recoded); and “If I could, I would give up being a worker” [or “being a husband/wife”] (recoded) with four response categories ranging from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1) (alpha = .70 for preretirement worker commitment and alpha = .85 for preretirement spouse commitment).

Identity meanings refer to shared meanings a person attributes to him/herself in a role. Mortimer, Finch, and Kumka (1982) suggest a multidimensional identity measure which we adapted to identities in the work and family roles. After the leading phrase, “As a worker, I am...” or “As a husband/wife/partner, I am...,” adjective pairs were organized in a semantic differential 5-point format (Osgood, Succi, and Tannenbaum, 1957). To establish the structure of identity meanings, we entered the 10 worker adjective pairs for the worker identity into a principal components factor analysis. Three factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. A similar set of factors was extracted when we analyzed the 10 adjective pairs for the preretirement spouse identity. The three identity meaning dimensions include: competent, active-inactive, successful- unsuccessful, and competent-not competent (alpha = .56 for preretirement worker, and alpha = .70 for preretirement spouse identity meaning); confident, relaxed-tense, happy-sad, confident-anxious (alpha = .60 for worker; and .66 for preretirement spouse identity meaning); sociable, interested in others-interested in self, warm-cold, open-closed, and social-solitary (alpha = .64 for preretirement worker; and .70 for the preretirement spouse identity meaning).

Table 1 displays correlations among self-esteem, commitment, and identity meanings. Beginning with the upper panel, we find only modest correlations between worker commitment and each of the three worker identity meanings (ranging from \( r = .17 \) to \( r = .21 \)) for the entire sample. As expected, there are moderate correlations between the three worker identity items (ranging from \( r = .38 \) to \( r = .50 \)). In order to explore the impact of a nonwork-related, preretirement identity on postretirement self-esteem, we focus on married respondents and the spouse identity. Turning to the lower panel, we find a similar pattern of modest correlations between spouse commitment and the spouse identity items (ranging from \( r = .17 \) to \( r = .33 \)); and moderate correlations between the spouse identity meanings (r = .50 to r = .68).

The findings suggest that variables appear to be measuring related but different identity meanings. Finally, it is interesting to note the correlations between worker and spouse identity meanings among married respondents. The correlation between worker competent and spouse competent (r = .45), worker confident and spouse confident (r = .54), and between worker sociable and spouse sociable (r = .54) also confirm the related but distinct character of worker and spouse identity meanings.

Preretirement social background characteristics are measured by seven health and status measures. Poor health taps functional limitation and is based on a 7-item scale of difficulties in activities such as walking, using stairs, standing or sitting for long periods of time, bending, lifting weights up to 10 pounds, and reaching above your head with responses of “Never,” “Sometimes,” or “Often” (alpha = .82). Race is measured with a dummy variable, White, with Whites coded “1” and non-Whites coded “0.” The non-White category is almost entirely composed of African Americans (less than 1% of the non-Whites self-identified as Asian American, Hispanic, Native American, or with an-
other racial group). Marital status, married, is also a dummy variable coded in the direction of being married, and female is a gender dummy variable. Income comes from a question which asks for the total 1991 household income with 10 response categories ranging from "$7,500 or less" (1), "$35,001 to $50,000" (5), to $200,001 and over" (10). Education is based on the highest grade completed in school and coded in years. Occupation refers to preretirement occupation and is measured by a 100-point occupational prestige scale using 1980 U.S. Census occupational classifications and 1989 National Opinion Research Center prestige scores. Scores range from "86" for physicians and "75" for lawyers to "09" for shoe shiners and "19" for new vendors (NORC, 1991). Further, we distinguish four occupational categories: managers and professionals; sales and administrators; service providers; and craft, operators, and laborers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

Finally, retirement planning is taken from the preretirement survey and is composed of four items asking whether the worker had: “discussed retirement with others”; “read about retirement”; “attended a preretirement program, lecture, or seminar”; and “actively planned for retirement such as trips, activities, or calculated retirement expenses and income,” with response categories of “frequently” (3), “occasionally” (2), or “never” (1). The items were suggested by Dorfman, Kohout, and Heckert (1985) (alpha = .64).

RESULTS

Descriptive Overview

The data analysis begins with Table 2. Our first concern focuses on changes in self-esteem as workers retire. The comparison of pre- and postretirement mean self-esteem scores reveals that there is not a decline in self-esteem during the passage into retirement. There are also no statistically significant mean differences between pre- and postretirement self-esteem for men or women, non-Whites or Whites, non-married or married respondents, or by the occupational categories of managers and professionals, sales and administrators, service providers, or craft, operators, and laborers.

Table 3 allows us to investigate factors that may distinguish workers with low and high preretirement self-esteem. Starting with the social background characteristics, older workers with low self-esteem are in poorer health, have lower income and lower occupational status, and less likely to have engaged in retirement planning than workers with high self-esteem. In addition, the low self-esteem group has a lower percentage of Whites, 74 percent vs 88 percent. However, the two groups are not different in their percentage of married or sex composition. Thus, older workers with low self-esteem are in a less advantaged social position (poorer health, lower income, education, and occupational status) than workers with high self-esteem.

When we turn to identity variables we find that men and women with low self-esteem have lower mean scores on commitment to the role of spouse and view themselves as less competent, confident, and sociable in the role of spouse than do high self-esteem married workers.

Factors Influencing Postretirement Self-Esteem

Our central investigation dealing with preretirement factors that influence postretirement self-esteem begins with results presented in Table 4. Initially, we included a larger set of variables but dropped two social background variables, White and occupation, and three retirement variables, voluntary retirement, retirement age, and time in retirement, that failed to exert independent effects on postretire-

Table 2. Means Levels of Pre- and Postretirement Self-Esteem on Selected Background Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Preretirement Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Postretirement Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Whites</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-married</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft/Laborers</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p-tests revealed no significant difference at the .05 level.

Table 3. Low and High Self-Esteem in Preretirement: Mean Differences (Assessed by t-tests) in Social Background and Identity Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Low Self-Esteem</th>
<th>High Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor health</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White***</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income***</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education***</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation***</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement planning**</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker commitment***</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker competent***</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker confident**</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker sociable**</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse commitment***</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse competent**</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse confidant***</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse sociable*</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
Next, the four worker identity variables were entered into the regression equation. They increased the $R^2$ by .08 to .26. Commitment to the role of worker and each of the identity meanings exerts a positive impact on self-esteem in retirement (with Beta coefficients of .13, .10, .10, and .10, respectively). Equation (2) adds preretirement self-esteem in a step after the social background variables and before the worker identity variables. We are interested in the impact of preretirement self-esteem on postretirement self-esteem. Preretirement self-esteem exerts a powerful, positive influence on later self-esteem (Beta = .42 and $R^2$ increased by .20). In addition, the preretirement worker variables now fail to exert statistically significant effects on postretirement self-esteem. Together they add only 1% to the explained variance and they do not independently exert statistically significant effects on postretirement self-esteem.

The pattern changes when we consider the impact of a nonwork identity that continues into retirement. In equations (3) and (4) we limit attention to married respondents in order to focus on the impact of the preretirement spousal identity on postretirement self-esteem. After the inclusion of the social background variables, the four spouse identity variables were entered into equation 3. The set of identity variables increased the percentage of explained variance in dependent variable by .10 to .24. Commitment to the role of spouse (Beta = .21) and an identity as a competent spouse (Beta = .17) independently influenced postretirement self-esteem. When preretirement self-esteem is added to the analysis in equation (4), it continues to exert a strong influence on preretirement commitment (Beta = .35). Among the identity variables, only commitment to the role of spouse retains its independent positive impact (Beta = .15) on postretirement self-esteem.

**DISCUSSION**

This study focuses on the transition into retirement and the implications of preretirement factors on postretirement self-esteem. Four findings are interesting. A preliminary finding was that there was not a statistically significant difference between the mean pre- and postretirement self-esteem scores. Thus, there appears to be a continuity in self-assessment through this career transition. A possible explanation is that unlike widowhood, retirement, for most workers, is an anticipated transition (Ekerdt and DeViney, 1993) and so is less likely to have a dramatic negative impact on self-esteem.

Second, the main concern of this research is the effect of preretirement identities on postretirement self-esteem. In the literature there is a disagreement about the positive or negative character of the preretirement worker identity. On one hand, Atchley (1971, 1976, 1993) argued that the past identities may serve as a source of continuity that enables individuals to bridge the passage into retirement. Having invested commitment roles and identities, retirees will continue to see themselves from the perspective of their valued roles and identities. On the other hand, the greater a person's commitment to the worker role, the greater the "loss" when the role is exited. So, greater commitment to the worker role may have a negative impact on self-esteem in retirement. The findings at least partially support Atch-
ley's description. Preretirement commitment to the role of worker and worker identity meanings are positively related to postretirement self-esteem. However, the positive coefficients fail to maintain their statistical significance when preretirement self-esteem is entered into the regression equation. Preretirement commitment to the worker role and worker identity meanings appear only to indirectly influence postretirement self-esteem through preretirement self-esteem. Indeed, Table 1 reveals a correlation of $r = .36$ between worker commitment and preretirement self-esteem and a correlation of $r = .27$ between worker commitment and postretirement self-esteem.

The role of spouse allows us to explore the impact of role commitment and identity meanings on postretirement self-esteem when the role is not terminated by retirement. The findings indicate that preretirement commitment to the spouse role continues to influence self-esteem for married respondents even independently of the impact of preretirement self-esteem. The identity meanings of "ex roles" may indirectly influence self-esteem, while past identity meanings and commitment to ongoing roles may continue to directly influence self-esteem. Thus, there appear to be different ways in which preretirement roles and identities can influence postretirement assessments of self.

Third, we found that preretirement self-esteem continues to influence postretirement self-esteem. The finding suggests an interesting convergence of theoretical perspectives. Even during a status passage, past self-esteem emerges as an important reference or foundation for current self-esteem. Personality theorists (Costa and McCrae, 1980) propose that the stability of general personality traits provides individuals with a framework to cope with (or adapt to) change. We suggest that given the uncertainties of being retired, former workers may rely on the ways they viewed themselves in the near-past to provide an initial reference point or benchmark in assessing themselves at a new stage in their lives. Rather than being directionless, or without a sense of self, individuals entering new situations or stages in their life cycle may use their past, in this case their past self-esteem, to guide them in the present.

Fourth and finally, the findings suggest that there are things that can be done in preretirement to foster self-esteem in retirement. One implication is to help prepare and encourage workers to take advantage of the new opportunities available in retirement. Along this line, the findings suggest that preretirement planning may be especially beneficial. Planning may help to anticipate and reduce some of the financial strains associated with retirement and suggest new roles and activities to bolster postretirement self-esteem. Further, the consistent finding that the greater the preretirement commitment to the spouse role, the greater the postretirement self-esteem suggests once again that the quality of role ties may be more important than the quantity of roles or role supports. At least initially, more important than new roles or more roles may be the maintenance and strengthening of the quality of roles that continue into retirement. As Atchley (1976) noted, the retirement process begins well before the last days at work. Therefore, successful efforts to enhance self-esteem in postretirement may begin in preretirement.

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REFERENCES


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