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# Time for Myself, Time for Others: Gender Differences in the Meaning of Retirement

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**Time for Myself, Time for Others: Gender Differences in the Meaning of  
Retirement**

By

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**Abstract:** Research has demonstrated that work is a meaningful activity that contributes to peoples' identities. This meaning, however, may depend on the stage of the life course that one is in, and may be gendered. To contribute to understanding the social meaning of work and potentially gendered life-course transitions, I examine the experiences of older adults with work and retirement. Through interviews with both retired and working older adults, I examine whether and how older men and women differ from each other in the workplace and in retirement. Men and women face different challenges if they continue to work and when they retire from formal work. One might assume that workplace identity would tend to be more important to men's formal, public sense of purpose and self-identity than it is to women, who are more likely to find that home holds a "second shift" of work that is equally important to their identity. I explain how the primary difference found between men and women is the importance of work to self-identity. This difference affects how each gender approaches when to retire, and what is done during retirement. What was surprising, however, was the lack of gender differences in terms of life satisfaction post-retirement, as previous theory would suggest gender differences in all regards of work and the workplace.

Work is one of the most important sources of economic and psychological security, as work provides such benefits as health or disability insurance, but also self-esteem (Ferber 1991: 42). Understanding the baby boomer generation's relationship with the workplace and how work and the workplace affect identity is especially important to sociological understanding of work, because as a group, they are of an age to either be working or retired, whether by choice or necessity (Burr and Mutchler 2007: 38). Therefore, researching the baby boomer cohort of older adults may allow for a better and more unique understanding of how exactly work in general potentially affects happiness, self-esteem, and overall sense of self, as researching them offers such a wide variety of representations of groups of people.

The large number of baby boomers also allows for unique exploration of older workers in general, as there are currently such a large number of workers who are retirement age and above who choose to continue to work. This growth has become increasingly salient in more recent years, as the number of older adults in the workforce has continued to increase, until one out of five workers will be over the age of 55 in the year 2050 (Burr and Mutchler 2007: 39).

Contributing more than just demographic size, such research offers a unique view of aging, working, and retirement, as this generation was among the first to include a significant portion of female workers. Studying this generation of workers offers new perspective into how women are affected by retirement, how they interact with their workplaces, and how these processes differ between men and women.

My own research addresses the ways in which older adults' retirements are related to overall happiness and life satisfaction. I also address how these influences differ by gender. My research suggests that, in general, older people tend to be very satisfied with their retirement, even in spite of current age, health status, or gender. These results conflict with some previous research, and agree with other previous findings, as there have been contradictory findings in the past (Kim and Moen 2001: 83). My findings also indicate that the importance of the workplace to self-identity and the path to retirement are more firmly divided by gender than levels of happiness post-retirement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As an over-all group, older adults are much happier than younger adults. Although older adults tend to rate their general happiness higher than younger people (Lacey, Smith, and Ubel 2006; Chipperfield et al. 2009: 216), previous research and theory on retirement has shown that the transition can have a large effect on the happiness of older adults. However, previous sociological research and theory has been contradictory in terms of the findings of whether older adults are more positively or more negatively affected by their retirement in terms of happiness. The variance in findings is typically explained by gender differences, financial stability differences, or some other variable (Hochschild 1997; Calasanti and Slevin 2001).

The findings in previous research about retirement in older adults seem to be confused, and are perhaps even conflicting (Kim and Moen 2001: 83). When researchers examine the overall happiness of older adults, without being much more specific than that, they have found that older adults are as a rule happier than younger people. Researchers who focus more specifically on retirees, however, have found differing results. Retiring can be a major transition for people, including large social and psychological changes (Kim and Moen 2001:86). Upon leaving the work force, some older adults' happiness can decrease, potentially as a result of a lack of social connectedness or a shifting sense of self (Pillemer et al. 2000: 84). On the other hand, retirement can be a relief (for some people) from work (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 132).

#### *Work and Socialization*

Some of the most prominent theory on the topic of work and its connections to happiness and self-identity can be found in Arlie Hochschild's *Time Bind*. According to her theory, working is vitally important to identity, socialization, and overall happiness. Hochschild claims that the workplace and the home have become so blurred in terms of which is prioritized, that people have come to identify themselves by their work, their workplace, and their co-workers, sometimes even more so than by their life at home. One example which Hochschild presents is the identification with the company logo, giving up on past associations with family coats of arms (Hochschild 1997: 21), thus symbolizing the importance of the workplace. To people in the modern era, the workplace is important to identity socially, economically, and otherwise (Ardichvili and Kuchinke 2009:155).

People's happiness in general can be greatly affected by their experiences in the workplace. The workplace affects how people socialize with each other, and how they interact with the world around them. For example, one analysis concluded that "work as a process and an

institution...transcends individual frames of reference and links the person to the social, economic, and political realms” (Ardichvili and Kuchinke 2009: 155). This claim makes sense, especially when one considers how much time is typically spent at the workplace in any given day, and how important work is to shaping a person’s self-identity. The sheer amount of time spent at the workplace makes it inevitable that it would be highly influential in shaping various aspects of a person’s life. According to Hochschild, the workplace and the home are ‘reversing,’ because of the amount of time spent away from home and at the workplace, to the point that time spent at home must now be allotted toward finishing tasks from the workplace (Hochschild 1997: 45).

For people who are working, Hochschild’s research found that 47% of employees of one company said most of their friends were from the workplace, a much greater percentage than those whose friends were from their neighborhood, or their church or temple (Hochschild 1997: 200). For such people, who rely on the workplace for socialization, retirement could mean much more than leaving the workplace. Instead, it could mean a loss of a social network, which obviously can be correlated with decreases in happiness. For those people who find the shift to retirement too sudden, socially or financially, part-time work has become more common among older workers (Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007: 24) as a way to ease the transition.

Those older adults who have planned well for retirement and are well-connected socially will find themselves in a much better position after retirement than others who do not have such extensive social networks outside of the workplace. These people who are well-connected in other places are typically better off in terms of happiness and a “subjective sense of control” (Pillemer et al. 2000: 80). That is, even in spite of the importance that work has been shown to have on socialization, contact within the social network of co-workers will be “markedly

curtailed” after retirement (Pillemer et al. 2000: 82), which affects a person’s socialization even though they would have other social groups to rely upon. After this transition, the primary social groups of retirees will typically shift to be found outside of work, and will change to be more focused on family members, fellow church members, or neighbors (Pillemer et al. 2000: 84). This trend was certainly exhibited by participants of my study, who primarily socialized with their family members.

After leaving the workplace, other forms of activity become much more important. For example, volunteering becomes more of a priority, or forms of leisure activities and hobbies will take up more time than they used to, so as to keep busy. These ways to take up time are important to the continued happiness of the retired older adult, as those people who remain more isolated from the outside social world are the most likely to experience decreases in happiness (Pillemer et al. 2000: 83; Smith and Moen 2004: 264).

Isolation from others, for older adults, can even occur while still in the workplace. Alienation from younger co-workers is a possible outcome of continuing to work into old age. Much of the theory which focuses on work and self-identity (Hochschild 1997) seems to be more focused on the younger worker as a representative worker. For younger workers, work provides a means to connections to the outside world, and to constructing self-identity. For older workers, the importance of work could diminish in that regard, as the meaning of work changes.

One way in which continuing to work through older adulthood could be alienating is by exposing people to the effects of ageism. The topic of ageism is certainly relevant to the happiness of older adults in the workplace, who may be affected negatively by such prejudices, which may be based on no more than a social construct of what age is or is not. Age, being nothing more than an ideological construct, is simply one of the many characteristics which may

divide people into opposing groups (Gullette 1998: 43). Ageism is a topic which is under-addressed in the literature, despite the fact that it does occur (Dennis and Thomas 2007). One study found that people view older workers as less desirable than younger workers, based solely on age differences (Dennis and Thomas 2007: 86) These people thought that older workers were more resistant to change, and were more likely to fall behind in terms of keeping up with education about new technology.

These prejudices make it more likely that an older adult would be disappointed with their working experience, and even experience a stagnation of work position, where work opportunities become more “fixed” than for younger workers (Burr and Mutchler 2007: 38). In such circumstances, it seems unlikely that older workers would find the environment welcoming, or that they would continue to seek out primary social connections from the workplace. While obviously this is not the scenario for all older workers, it is not uncommon (Dennis and Thomas 2007; Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 19).

### *Gender and Retirement*

Certain researchers have found that women are more likely to be negatively affected by retirement in other ways than are men, including experiencing higher levels of depression, poorer health statuses, and inadequate incomes after retirement (Kim and Moen 2001: 85). On the other hand, other theory suggests that men put much more stock in their work than women in terms of having a higher sense of purpose, and creating self-identity (Hochschild 1997: 44) while they are still working. In keeping with this theory, men are more likely than women to report feeling “unproductive” after retirement (Pillemer et al. 2000: 91). This finding is useful in that Americans tend to treat being useful or productive as ways to measure a person’s well-being (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 121), and thus it can be inferred that men are more likely than

women to feel useless or unwanted after they have retired. This may be the reason that men are much more likely than women to work after retirement, and are more likely among workers in older adulthood to work full-time (Moen and Fields 2002: 31).

Older women not only feel the effects of ageism in the workplace that men experience, but must also carry the long-lasting effects of sexism in the workplace, and the world at large. Previous research has shown that older women are also more likely to experience poverty in their later years than other groups of people. To attempt to compensate for these disadvantages, unmarried older women are more likely to work at retirement age than are married older women (Hill 2002: 40), indicating that not being able to rely on money from a spouse puts single older women in a less stable position financially. In spite of women's attempts to maintain the ability to be independent, poverty is a major issue for older women in general. "It seems likely that low income provides an incentive for older women to work. The poverty problem among elderly women is extensive. Women are 70 percent more likely to spend their retirement in poverty than men" (Hill 2002: 40). In this way, work means more to women, especially older women, than a way to shape identity: it means a way to stay out of poverty. That is, men are more likely to look to work for a sense of who they are, and women in old age are more likely to look to work for financial stability. These findings that men are so much more heavily affected by the workplace than women in terms of identity may be limited. For example, these previous findings may have been based on a different generation of women, or may be class-based in some way.

Moen and Fields found significant differences in happiness between men who work and men who are retired, in that men who are retired are more likely to have low self-esteem, and experience more depressive symptoms than men who are currently working (2002: 36). The differences in after-retirement happiness between men and women seen in previous research

could conceivably be due to the differences in their previous occupations. Work is inherently gendered, and so men and women will have very different experiences in the workplace. As a result, men are more likely to view paid employment as being a necessary part of self-identity (Smith and Moen 2004: 264), whereas women are less likely to need that aspect of work to continue to be happy after retirement. This may potentially be because of the types of employment that men and women were previously a part of, or, it may well be because of the ongoing expectation for women to carry on both paid and unpaid work throughout their life.

Women's domestic labor continues, even past retirement, but men are more likely to cease work entirely upon retiring (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 131). In fact, for some women, work is more stressful in the home than in the workplace, and so for these women, the workplace is a way to "escape" their second shift at home (Hochschild 1997: 40). As a result of these differing expectations between men and women throughout the life course, it seems obvious that their views on retirement, and their reasons for retiring, would differ from each other. Men have described retirement as a freedom from the responsibilities of work. Women have described retirement as the freedom to schedule their domestic labor more freely, without having to maintain a job in the work-force (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 132). Therefore, retirement allows older women to focus on just one career, and focus their identity in one place, instead of maintaining a double shift as both a family care-giver, and an employee in a separate workplace.

In addition to these expectations of continuing to perform domestic labor, women are also more likely than men to work as 'caregivers' for other people around them, even in their old age. The number of other household members, and their various needs, has an effect on the decision of whether a woman will continue to work (Hill 2002: 43), suggesting that women are likely to

use the needs of other members of their families as a way to determine if they should continue to work in the workforce.

For women, the expectations for doing care-work can be very high, potentially including taking on more domestic work after retiring. Women will often end up taking care of multiple members of their family, or even someone outside of their family (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 134). It is not surprising that women are more likely to act as caregivers past retirement. Women are much more likely than men to do caregiving work in general, and to be the primary caregiver during their employment, as well as after retirement (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 146).

### **Research Methods**

Although a number of researchers have studied the topic of aging in the workplace, as well as how gender complicates this subject, there has been a dearth of qualitative studies on the topic. Individual views are important to the study of such topics as identity and happiness, which are not always easily summarized in extensive, quantitative-focused surveys. Qualitative interviews are one way to obtain these more in-depth answers from research participants, as so much previous research has focused on quantitative analysis of older workers' experiences, and "Relatively few available studies investigate the subjective responses of older workers to their employment experiences" (Burr and Mutchler 2007:41). Without these more comprehensive answers, the research on older adults and the transition to retirement will be lacking.

To answer the question of how work status affects social identity in older adults, I use qualitative methods, primarily in-depth one-on-one interviews.<sup>1</sup> There were eleven participants, including four men, and seven women. Eight of these participants were retired, and three described themselves as continuing to work, although some retirees did continue work in some

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<sup>1</sup> In all instances where a name is used, it is a pseudonym.

form. All of the participants were sixty years of age or older, and were recruited from a local church and synagogue.

These qualitative methods are not without some drawbacks. First, although qualitative interviews allow for more in-depth answers than surveys, the sample size becomes inherently more restricted than that of a quantitative study. Therefore, some of the results may be due to some unforeseen variable that is common among this small group of participants that could be controlled in a larger sample size. For example, these participants are all white, and could be described as middle to upper class, and so would have had very different experiences in the workplace, and in retirement, than other groups which are not represented in my study.

Although recruiting church members may result in overall happier participants, due in part to the social support of a congregation, doing so allowed me to keep support networks relatively constant between participants, and also allowed me to recruit working and retired older adults from one location. As a result, these participants could be likely to experience higher levels of happiness than are other older adults, due to their built-in social network, including many people in their own age or socioeconomic group, outside of the workplace.

Using interviews allowed me to acquire more specific and meaningful answers to such questions as “Are you satisfied with your job?” “Why did you decide to retire? Was it voluntary or involuntary?” or “Do you ever regret your decision to retire?” While these questions seem general, when discussing them in a one-on-one situation allows for further follow-up questions, which can lead to more in-depth and personal answers than can be found in a survey.

Answers to questions like these are vital to understanding the topic of working or retirement in older adults. Quantitative studies, while essential in revealing general trends, are unable to expose deeper meaning to the reasons behind the trends. Using interviews also allowed

me to focus on the decision to retire or not retire as a process, instead of a more simplistic view of retirement as an event independent of outside factors and consequences.

### **Analysis**

Previous research about employees and their relationship with their workplace and work identity is extensive. However, research has been less focused specifically on older adults than on more 'typical' workers. In addition, those studies focused on older adults do not usually include gender as a component of their analysis. Therefore, my own analysis is an important contribution to the research about older adults, especially because some of my findings are incongruous with previous research and theory.

#### *The Importance of Work to Identity and Happiness*

The general theory about workers, and how work contributes to identity, while useful, is not necessarily applicable to everyone. Previous theory states that the workplace is the primary source of a social network, as opposed to the previously assumed, stereotypical center coming from the neighborhood or the family (Hochschild 1997: 40). However, my own findings were just the opposite, in that work and the workplace did not serve as the primary source of socializing for these participants.

For these older workers, as well as the retirees, the workplace had ceased to be the source of their primary social network, if it even had ever served that function. If their primary social network had come from the workplace, it had now transitioned to be mainly from another source. The majority of the participants stated that their primary social network was based in their church, their neighborhood, or in their families. For Gina, a recently retired woman, when asked if co-workers made up her primary social group, she said,

I think when I was working, it was. And now, it's probably more my family, my kids, and my sister, and her children, because she had two new babies, we have three new grandchildren...So, we tend to do a lot more events together now.

Therefore, whether an older person chooses to continue to work, or to retire, their workplace no longer serves the same social functions that it would have previously.

Age differences certainly do not encourage socialization. Laura, a teacher, even said that she is "a grandma figure" in her workplace, and that "people ask me why I'm still working." Ruth has found that "...they look at me as somebody who's older, and still working, and isn't it a miracle?" The fact that younger people would have these feelings about older workers implies that they think being able to, and choosing to work into older age is something out of the ordinary, or that older adults are not capable of such a task. Being viewed through this lens of seemingly benign ageism does affect older workers, as they can feel a distance between themselves and their younger co-workers. Ruth specified that she "never [sees] them socially outside of work, at all," specifically due to the age difference.

For those who choose to continue to work past the typical retirement age, the reasons given for continuing to work begin to differ from those of younger workers. The reasons behind this choice to continue working have an effect on their feelings toward work and their workplace. For those who are continuing to work because it has become necessary financially, work has become something which is compulsory, and not necessarily a part of identity anymore. For Laura, who is in her upper sixties, gives her reasons for continuing in the workforce as being mainly financial. For her, work has become a means to financial security, and taking pleasure in her work has become secondary.

It would be advantageous if I kept working until I was 65... I sort-of view it that I should work, have to work, I suppose if I were disabled or something that we'd get by fine. I think, financially it's nice that I'm working, so it's nice that I enjoy what I'm doing.

For Laura, the fact that she enjoys her work is secondary to her need for financial security.

Unlike younger workers, for whom working for financial reasons is normative, if it is necessary for older workers to work for financial reasons, they do not necessarily get the social and identity benefits which younger workers receive. They are more likely to have established their social networks elsewhere, or to have simply planned poorly for an upcoming retirement.

On the other hand, another interviewee, Julie continues to work as a kindergarten teacher strictly by choice. She says that she is incredibly happy with her current job, and that she has no desire to retire at this point in her life, even though she is an older adult working with small children, and she is often tired. People like Julie who do not cite financial reasons for their continuing to work, but are still old enough that they do not need to rely on their workplace for their connections to the outside world or their self-identity, the reason for their working is typically because they find it inherently rewarding in some other way. Julie loves her work so much, that she has not even considered retirement. Even though her primary social group comes from her family, and from her neighborhood, and not her work, Julie simply enjoys her work: "It's the best job. It's not even a job. I can't believe I get paid for doing this." While certainly Julie's work is an important contribution to her sense of identity, she does not derive her social identity from her work, which is more common in the younger workers previously typically researched. Most of her socialization and free time is centered on spending time with her aging father, and acting as care-giver towards him.

Ruth, also, continues to work as an on-call nurse, only because of her satisfaction with her work and how it keeps her occupied, stating “I enjoy the people I work with, I enjoy the mental stimulation, I...I just like it... [the work] just keeps my brain going.” Clearly, the reasons for continuing to work have an effect on the way that it is viewed. Work that is voluntary and self-driven is more likely to be appreciated as a part of their continued self-identity in the workplace. Work that is viewed as unavoidable is less correlated with overall happiness. For these people whose work is necessary, retirement is something to look forward to with anticipation, and work is not necessarily something that is enjoyed. Conversely, people who derive more positive self-identity from their workplace may be more likely to continue to work. The order of the cause and the effect in this situation are impossible to determine beyond doubt.

#### *After Retirement: How People Are Affected*

When asked if she ever felt stressed or over-stimulated since having retired, Madeline said, “I don’t feel that way at all... [While working] I think I did. When I got home from [work], some days, I couldn’t stand to hear noise anymore.” Madeline’s sentiment goes directly against the finding that women are more likely to be negatively affected by retirement, and that women are more likely to experience poor health and inadequate incomes after retirement (Kim and Moen 2001: 85). Previous findings from other researchers state that satisfaction in retirement can differ according to gender, financial status, or other factors (Kim and Moen 2001). My own findings, however, suggested that all of the older workers are satisfied in their retirement. Madeline shows that satisfaction in retirement is not always dependent on gender or financial variables. Although some people were more satisfied with their lives than others, high satisfaction, levels of happiness, and lowered stress were seen nearly across the board, regardless of gender, duration of retirement, reason for retirement, previous work, or health status.

One participant, Rick, compared his life when he had worked to his life currently. Although he had thoroughly enjoyed his work as a professor, he has not regretted his retirement at all, and feels more in control of his time. Appreciating control of time since retiring from work was a very common theme among the participants in general. As Rick said,

So, you just sort of step on [the treadmill] at one end, and it goes, whether you take steps or not. I guess what I've always felt, is I value my time, and the freedom of not working. If you wanted to read books that aren't related to [work], there's no guilt to it. So, and you can take off in the cold months and go someplace warm.

Like Rick, the rest of the participants were likely to say that they were enjoying retirement, and enjoyed the freedoms associated with it, including the ability to be more "spontaneous" or to "slow down." It was the freedom of being able to choose what to do with their time that many of the participants enjoyed so much.

Although the reason for continuing to work seemed to have had an effect on how these older adults felt about their workplace, the reason for retirement appears to have less of an effect on the resulting experience of retirement. For example, although Charles was forced into an early retirement, he still is enjoying his life, and is happy with how things have worked out. When asked if he regretted what had happened with his former work, he replied,

In hindsight, no. It all worked out really well. But, at the time, you lose that income stream, and you kind of wonder, what's going to happen here? But, it worked out really well... I have the freedom to do what you'd really like to do with that moment.

For Charles, retirement meant an opportunity to have more free time, and thus retirement brought him more freedom of choice and spontaneity. It is worth noting that this may be a way that my sample of middle-class people could differ from others, as their finances allow an easy transition.

In my study, there was one significant exception to the rule of retirement being more associated with happiness and life-satisfaction to people. One man, Carl, had to retire “prematurely” at the age of 85 due to health problems. He had put so much personal stock in his former work, and identified so strongly with his job, that since his retirement, he has not been able to find his footing. When he was working, he “had a reason to get up every morning,” which is now lost since he has retired from working. Carl even said that he had “toyed” with the idea of going back to work, at the age of ninety, with a bad hip, even though he “doesn’t really need to” in terms of finances. The reason he gave was that without work, he is “lost.” Of working for a living, he said, “If you love your work, you’ll never work another day in your life. And I did...love the work itself...and I didn’t want to quit.” Carl’s exception to the rule of overall high satisfaction after retirement is not inexplicable. He spends his time going to the library and reading, as well as going to coffee shops, in an attempt to keep himself busy. While he does volunteer a small amount each week, he does find himself feeling bored throughout the week. “I go someplace a couple times a day just to do something. Just to get out of the house.”

According to previous research, keeping busy, and doing things that one considers to be ‘worthwhile’ is very important to continued happiness (Pillemer et al. 2000: 83; Smith and Moen 2004: 264). For example, many of the participants did enough volunteer work to consider themselves kept “busy”. Many of them stated their reasons for volunteering as being a desire to remain socially connected, and to do good for the community, and for other people in general.

[Volunteering is], well, quite good. It beats whatever else I might be doing at the time, I’d say, even though that might be fun too. The stuff I do at home is kind-of by myself, so it’s important to see people regularly and laugh a little, and help them out.

For Rachel, volunteering has become her new work. She volunteers roughly 40 hours per week. She wanted to volunteer because she felt that it would help her remain socially connected to other people, which is something that she envies in her husband's current work as a physician.

My husband is in a field where every day, he would come home and talk about the people that he worked with. So, I looked for something that was more personally rewarding in that way.

Through her volunteer work, Rachel was able to not only keep herself busy in her retirement, but also to do something which she personally felt was a valuable use of time.

Volunteering is only one way that retirees can keep busy. Keeping up hobbies seems to be equally effective. Rick and Ruth, a married couple, keep their lives busy by playing golf, nearly every day. Maintaining a part-time job is an excellent way to keep active, mentally and physically. For Stephen, who works part-time as a plumber, keeping busy is an important reason for continuing to work. He said that work "keeps me busy...I still enjoy going out and helping."

Spending time with family is one way that retirees can maintain high levels of happiness. For women, spending time with family means something different than it does to men, as it can become a sort of second job. It does not seem to matter what the specific activity is that retirees keep up with, just as long as they are capable of doing something which they feel is productive, or at the very least, is worthwhile.

#### *Gender Differences in Retirement and Work*

My findings suggest that this importance of work and the workplace to self-identity applies primarily to male workers. This difference would certainly have a great effect on how men and women differ in terms of how they spend their time in retirement, and how they view their lives since retiring. While many women do identify with, and enjoy, their work, it is not

necessarily viewed as their primary and most significant career. That is, the workplace does not hold their only career. Women essentially maintain two jobs, one in the home, and one at work (Calasanti and Slevin 2001:129). Therefore, the idea of the importance of the workplace to identity would be more applicable to male workers, whose career does not involve domestic labor, but only primarily their career outside of the home.

Hochschild, theoretically, would agree, as she presents the idea of the “second shift,” performed by women in the home. Once women entered the workforce, their expectations in the home to do the majority of the housework did not disappear, and so women essentially had two jobs to perform every day (Hochschild 1997:37). As one of my interviewees, Madeline, explained her life outside of the workplace, “I had the work that any married woman has. Cook a meal, and do whatever I could. Probably collapse in bed at probably around eight o’clock.”

One woman, Laura, sometimes found herself wishing that she could retire, because “at home, it’s my own time, my own schedule.” Laura’s statement is in keeping with the relevant research about retirement, in which men describe retirement as freedom from the responsibilities of work, but women describe retirement as freedom to schedule domestic labor more freely, without needing to maintain a job in the work-force (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 132). In addition to performing housework duties, women will more often than men assume the role of caretaker to other people, even into their own old age and retirement. Women make up “three-fourths of informal carers of the old...” (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 146). Madeline, retired for 26 years, has been taking care of her neighbor. As she described her new, unpaid, work:

Well, I’m busy all the time. I’ve sort-of become the caretaker of the man across the hall from me...That keeps me busy. I spend a lot of time taking care of him. He’s lived there

for ten years now...I sort-of pop in and out to see if he's okay. I cook a nice meal at night for him.

Although Madeline had said she was retired from working, she describes this caregiving as a form of work, even though it is unpaid. She had previously identified with her workplace while she was working in education, but now defines her free time as being spent being the "caretaker" of her neighbor. She did not view this work as a burden, and even enjoyed spending time with her neighbor. She identified with her new work in the same way that a person might identify with their paid work in the workplace, willingly spending her free time taking care of him.

Another woman, Rachel, said that she has "been helping my mother a lot, and also helping my son, who now has two children." She stated that she feels like her retirement has had a positive effect on her husband and their relationship, because "he doesn't have to worry about a lot of the things that I can take care of." Rachel was more able to make time for domestic labor. Before her retirement, her husband had been doing the bulk of the domestic labor, and it had put a strain on their relationship that her retiring lifted. There are expectations for women to be the home managers. Men, however, feel more relaxed at home, where their expectations are lessened (Hochschild 1997:40). As with Rachel, when that dynamic had been threatened, it negatively affected their marriage, but was solved upon her taking on the role of domestic laborer.

#### *Differences in Reasons for Retirement*

There are many reasons that people may give for retiring. For example, some people retire because they feel it is necessary, some people retire voluntarily, and others will be forced into retirement involuntarily. I found that these variations depended largely on differences in gender. For one woman, the reason for retirement was to better be able to take on the role of caretaker. Gina had been helping to care for her daughter and baby grandchild while working,

but felt that she did not have enough time while doing both of these jobs. When another grandchild was on the way, she decided to make room for her newer job of caregiver, which was now more important to her, and to her identity as a grandmother, than was her previous work.

The other big reason [for my retiring] was my daughter was pregnant. I was going to have a grandbaby in May. So, I wanted to be available for her, because I was not available for the first baby...I was at her house every day, helping her clean, and fix meals, and take care of the baby, for her two month pregnancy leave...I loved it. I was so glad to be there for her, because she was exhausted.

Gina's reasons to retire were to better accommodate her new work as caregiver. Similarly, Rachel stated that, in her retirement, "I can contribute to my extended family, where it's needed. That's kind-of been my top priority." For women who retire to better take on the role of domestic laborer and caregiver, their priorities in identity shift from the workplace to the home.

The reasons that men were more likely to give for their own retirement, on the other hand, had nothing to do with taking on new work roles outside of the workplace. Presumably, these differences would be due to the fact that men draw more of their self-identity from the workplace than do women, who feel that both of their jobs, in the home or workplace, are of equal importance to their identity, and so women's identities are not affected as strongly by retirement as men's, and women are able to retire before the point of no longer being able to work. Take, for example, Rick's reasons for retirement:

I decided that I was running out of gas, I didn't feel I was as effective as I had been. I decided, it's time to quit... It's just something you feel in your bones, you're just maybe not connecting with students quite as well. That and I think I could feel I was slowing down. There was just more work.

Rick's reasons for retirement are very different than those of the women's reasons. For him, it was a personal decision, due to listening to his internal, private feelings. He waited until he felt he was ready for retirement, but made no mention of doing so because of any obligations or expectations from others. He also illustrates the trend of Americans measuring productivity in work and equating it to well-being (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 20). His value as a laborer was in his ability to be productive in his workplace. A woman, however, retires when they are unable to keep up with the work at home as well as in the workplace.

More typically, however, men's retirement was somewhat involuntary. They were far more likely than women to have been pushed into retirement, they felt, prematurely. That is, they were not as likely as women to have chosen to retire of their own accord. Carl, who had previously loved his work so much, only retired because of his declining health. Stephen regretted retiring from working as a plumber so much that he decided to return to work, part-time. In fact, he even said, "I think I really made a mistake in retiring." Although retirement ultimately worked out for Charles, he was laid-off in his fifties, and did not return to work because he could not find subsequent employment, due, at least in part, to the prejudices of ageism.

One reason that older adults may find themselves retiring is because of the effects of ageism in the workplace. Older adults are more likely than other workers to be seen as an economic burden, especially past age 65, when people are eligible to collect Social Security (Calasanti and Slevin 2001:20). Charles, found himself unable to find work after he was laid-off of his last job, so he was forced into retirement, in part because of his older age.

I was laid off...I tried [to go back to work] and there was really nothing in my field, at my age...There was no direct information [about reasons for not being hired], you just

have to figure it out. Everyone is afraid of getting sued for age discrimination. I applied for one job, and it fit me to a T. There might be one other guy in the Twin Cities, that, by my estimation, would fit that well. They wouldn't even talk to me.

In spite of his qualifications, Charles could not find work anywhere, and thus was forced into an early retirement.

Rachel, another retired person, felt that any potential businesses that were hiring would say, "Why would we hire you, now that you're older?" There are certain expectations and stereotypes of aging workers. American culture as a whole highly values individual worth and productivity, as well as peoples' ability to maintain independence (Calasanti and Slevin 2001: 20). Older workers who are trying to get a job, such as Charles, or who are trying to move up in their place of employment, may find it difficult because of the underlying assumptions about older workers' productivity and independence, which are so highly valued among employers, and American culture in general.

People who feel as though they were the victims of ageism seem more likely to have felt negatively about their retirement, at least at one point. While Charles seemed upset that he had been unable to return to work because of his age, Madeline, who had chosen to retire at the age of fifty-eight, said that she felt only positively about her retirement. Even though both of these people felt as though they are currently doing well financially, Madeline seemed to feel much more positively about her retirement from the beginning, which is in keeping with the idea that the context of important life transitions affect how positively or negatively they are perceived (Kim and Moen 2001: 84). That is, having the choice to retire seems to reflect more positively on the experience than being forced into it.

## **Conclusions**

Previous research has stated that women and men differ in terms of their life satisfaction after retirement, but I did not find that to be true. More specifically, what I found was that men and women alike both found retirement to be more than satisfactory, and that their levels of stress have decreased since retiring from work. This general similarity is even in spite of health problems, differences in age, gender, type of previous work, and differences in lengths of retirement. Although Hochschild's theory does not apply to or support this finding, the theory is still applicable to my other findings about the differences between men and women.

Ultimately, the largest difference between men and women was the differing importance of work to self-identity. Although not unidirectional, the reasons for retirement differed between men and women. Women would choose to retire so as to have more time to take on responsibilities in the home. Men, however, were less likely to have retired voluntarily than women, as the importance of the workplace for men as a contributor to self-identity was more significant than for women, who were able to establish self-identity through means other than their workplace. Women would be far more likely than men to describe themselves as care-givers, which is how they defined their time in retirement, whereas men described their time in terms of personal activities.

Retirement for men was a way to step away from the workplace, and to enter a new stage of their life in the home. This new stage of life would include less stress, and fewer obligations. For women, on the other hand, retirement was a way to step away from the workplace so as to more easily accommodate the time and work their second job takes up in their lives. That is, for many women, retirement is simply the beginning of their transition to domestic laborer as a more full-time position. These women are more likely to be expected to do the house-work and they are far more likely than men to be expected to act as care-giver to other people. Many women

find themselves taking care of one or both of their parents, their children, their grandchildren, and, in the case of one of my participants, the neighbors. Retirement for men is a time to relax; retirement for women is a way to make more time for more work, regardless of what their previous employment in the workplace had been. That is, women who had worked or not worked as caregivers previously were equally likely to be taking care of others in their retirement, but it should be noted that these women still enjoyed their retirement.

One way in which my study has differed the most greatly from the theoretical perspective is in the socialization of these older adults, whether they are working or retired. While Hochschild stated that the home and workplace are blending, and even switching with one another in terms of social significance and importance to identity, I did not find that to be the case (Hochschild 1997: 36). Presumably, this disconnect can be explained by the population studied. While Hochschild's claims may remain true for certain workers, it seems that older workers are an exception to her findings. For the older adults I interviewed, their social circle was far more likely to revolve around family, the neighborhood, or church. Almost none of them said that their primary social group was from work. Although it cannot be ruled out that these social circles may be substitutes for work, and their age made socializing with younger co-workers more difficult, almost none of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with their not socializing primarily with co-workers.

The degree of social connection helped determine whether retirement resulted in high life satisfaction. Those older adults who spend their time volunteering, maintaining hobbies, or spending time with their families seemed to be extremely satisfied, and had high levels of happiness, which is consistent with previous theory about older adults, specifically those who have retired. Only a couple of people, both of them men, stated that they regretted retiring. One

of these people was forced into retirement, where he has been unable to keep himself sufficiently occupied. For the other, retirement had been his decision, but he since regretted it because of his not being active enough, as well as financial reasons. He decided to return to work part-time, and now thoroughly enjoys his situation. These men illustrate the idea that social connection is extremely important to people after retirement, as they felt they were lacking sufficient social connections, and so were the only people to have stated feeling boredom or dissatisfaction in their retirement.

While the small sample size limits any claim of population representation, these findings are still useful for further research or policy. There is an under-representation in my sampling of older adults who are continuing to work, and there are no males represented who are continuing to work full-time and an under-representation of males in general. Therefore, the generalizability of my study is not very great, and it cannot be assumed that my findings about gender differences or about what affects happiness in older adults and what does not can be applied to all older adults. Instead, my study offers an in-depth study of a small population, so as to raise questions about whether these findings could be applied to older adults in general.

In addition, there are other explanations to my findings which cannot be ruled out. While I found that retirement and happiness are linked to one another in some way, without exception, these findings may be because of something which is particular to the population that I have studied. For example, these high levels of happiness may be because of my recruitment from a church, where people have a built-in social circle that not all older adults have. Having this support system to fall back on would make old age and retirement far less stressful than being without any support system. Also, my participants were universally at least middle class, and not one of them stated that they had substantial financial concerns, or were profoundly affected by

the current economic climate. Happiness and financial comfort are two things which are not unrelated to each other. Being financially secure would make retirement much easier than it would be for a person who does not have sufficient financial resources.

To fully understand the topic of how gender and old age affect interactions with the workplace, further research will need to be conducted. First, the topic of ageism needs to be recognized in nearly every study of older adults and their work, as it is a prevalent frame of mind, and affects these older workers so strongly. Second, gender and old age are not always both considered when approaching the topic of work. While there are a large number of studies which study each individually, further studies should be conducted to fully understand the gender difference not only in working for older adults, but also in retirement. Finally, how older adults socialize with others is a topic which should be further studied, as it cannot be assumed that the patterns of younger workers and their socialization can be applied to older workers.

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