

Public Abstract

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Title:LIFE AFTER WORK: IDENTITY, COMMUNICATION, AND RETIREMENT

Retirement is an important phase of life in which many people will spend their last 20 to 30 years. More and more people are expecting to spend years in retirement and therefore retirement has become a popular topic of discussion in the media. Organizational communication researchers have not emphasized retirement as an important part of exiting work. This dissertation will consider retirement through two processes: identity and socialization. The purpose of this study is to explore the evolution of identity in communication about retirement. Eighty-four participants were interviewed representing the four phases of socialization: anticipatory, encounter, preretirement (metamorphosis), and retired (exit). Anticipatory group members were involved in job training prior to entering the workforce in their anticipated occupation. Encounter group members were more than 10 years away from retirement. Preretirement group members were less than 10 years away from retirement. Retired group members had officially retired from a job. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed as an overall group and in each work experience group. Overall, a master narrative of retirement was discovered among the participants describing retirement as positive and hopeful. This master narrative represented a cultural story that is implied as underlying truth. Unfortunately, many people do not have the ability to retire, therefore the master narrative promotes an idea that does not exist for all people. The anticipatory group expressed narrative identity in retirement in the theme anticipatory identity, focusing specifically on family role and social role identities. Encounter group participants expressed narrative identity in retirement as uncertain. Encounter group members had difficulty conceptualizing who they would be in retirement. Encounter themes included uncertain identity, stabilizing uncertainty, fear and uncertainty, and no uncertain terms. Preretirement participants revealed their narrative identity in retirement as fixed or adjusting. Those who saw their identity as fixed in retirement did so because they believed their identity had been the same since childhood. Those who saw identity in retirement as adjusting expected some changes to occur in their identity after retirement. Retired group members described narrative identity in retirement through the themes of role shifters, societal images, or new job-same self. This study revealed important phases of identity construction that paralleled socialization phases and the inclusion of roles described by participants as a bridge to forming identity. This study offers ideas for practice such as the creation of retirement support groups to enhance retirement adjustment and early preretirement training, focusing on important issues of retirement other than finances. Future research on retirement should be conducted to explore issues found in this study.