

LIFE AFTER WORK:  
IDENTITY, COMMUNICATION, AND RETIREMENT

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ABSTRACT

Retirement is an important phase of life that may be viewed using 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). Overall, a master narrative of retirement was discovered among the participants describing retirement as positive and hopeful. 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 through themes of uncertain identity, stabilizing uncertainty, fear and uncertainty, and no uncertain terms. Preretirement participants revealed their narrative identity in retirement as fixed or adjusting. 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. Future research on retirement should be conducted to explore issues found in this study.