

**INFLUENCES OF AGE AND GENDER ON
WORKERS' GOALS FOR RETIREMENT***

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ABSTRACT

Having clear goals for retirement is a critical determinant of life satisfaction and adjustment during the post-employment transition period. The purpose of the present study was to explore individuals' goals for retirement and determine whether age and gender differences exist among those goals. A sample of 55 working adults (aged 20-67) were asked to list their retirement goals. Items contained on respondents' lists were then classified into a taxonomy of retirement goals adapted from the work of LaPierre, Bastin, and Bouffard (1997). Both age and gender differences were identified in the concreteness of individuals' goals. Additionally, the number of retirement goals individuals hold decreased across the lifespan. Results also revealed patterns of age and gender differences across the various coding categories in the goal taxonomy. Findings are discussed in terms of the applied benefits of understanding the retirement goals of American workers.

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The act of leaving the workforce and entering retirement is a long anticipated event for many workers. This significant life transition is typically accompanied by a variety of optimistic hopes and aspirations. However, at the same time, the early stages of retirement can be psychologically challenging and anxiety provoking (Atchley, 1975; Gall, Evans, & Howard, 1997; Hayslip, Bezerlein, & Nicholas, 1997), due in part to the uncertainty of not knowing what the future may hold. Recent studies have shown that some of the best predictors of late life satisfaction and adjustment in retirement involve having positive, concrete, and stable goals upon which to rely (Rapkin & Fischer, 1992a, 1992b; Robbins, Lee, & Wan, 1994; Robbins, Payne, & Chartrand, 1990; Smith & Robbins, 1988; Thurnher, 1974). The purpose of the present study is to investigate the nature of individuals' goals for retirement. Specifically, we focus our attention on age- and gender-based differences in the content of individuals' retirement goals.

It is important to understand the different types of goals individuals hold for retirement, in that they have been shown to be a significant determinant of late life adjustment and well-being. Information about normative patterns of retirement goal content should prove useful for those in a variety of professions. For instance, it could benefit psychotherapists and retirement counselors who find themselves advising clients on life transitions (Richardson, 1993), researchers who develop applied models of decision making (e.g., Hershey & Mowen, 2000; Prothero & Beach, 1984), educators who develop retirement intervention programs (Bernheim, Garrett, & Maki, 1997; Hershey, Walsh, Brougham, Carter, & Farrell, 1998), and marketing specialists who work to develop communications that target different segments of consumers (Mowen & Minor, 1998). Understanding the content of individuals' retirement goals is not only a useful undertaking, but it is a timely one as well, as the number of retirees will roughly double in many major industrialized countries over the next three decades (European Commission, 1998; U.S. Social Security Administration, 1997).

The concept of personal goals appeared in the psychological literature as early as the late 19th century in the writings of William James (Boring, 1950). Although goals have played an important role in dozens of theories of human behavior and motivation, researchers have yet to agree upon exactly what they are or the mechanisms through which they shape individuals' behavior. In a recent review of the literature on goals, Austin and Vancouver (1996) defined goals as "internal representations of desired states" (p. 338). The authors drew distinctions between three types of research on goals: structural research; process research; and content research. Structural research characterizes goals in terms of their interrelationships, by focusing on the properties of goals and how they are organized in relation to one another. Process research seeks to describe how "goal processes" guide our actions and help motivate us as we strive to achieve desired states. Content research, as the name implies, focuses on describing the content of individuals' goals within particular domains. According

to Austin and Vancouver, researchers have devoted the least attention to assessing goal content, which is somewhat surprising given the relative ease with which this form of data is obtained. The focus of this study is on the specific types of goals individuals have for retirement, which places it within the latter of the three areas described above.

In an effort to position this article within the existing psychological literature, we make a distinction, albeit subtle perhaps, between late life goals and retirement goals. Within what has grown to be an enormous literature on goals, only a few studies have examined goals specific to late life (cf., LaPierre et al., 1997). A small number of papers have focused on the self-reported goals of retirees, or the goals of older working adults. However, we failed to identify any investigations that focused specifically on individuals' goals *for* retirement. In developing the present study we made a distinction between the concepts "late life" and "retirement" because, we believe for many, the former implies a stage of life characterized by loss or decline (Secombe & Ishii-Kuntz, 1991). Retirement, in contrast, often implies a period of newly found freedom, a time when hobbies and leisure activities can be pursued with increased vigor, intensity, and commitment (Costa, 1998). Although we distinguish between retirement and late life, we acknowledge the conceptual overlap between the two (the temporal overlap if nothing else, in that for most, late life is nested within retirement). Due to this overlap, in developing the present research we were able to draw upon the work of those who have studied late life goals. Specifically, we modified an existing taxonomy of late life goals and used it as a framework for classifying individuals' retirement goals.

A number of personal goal taxonomies have appeared in the psychological literature. These taxonomies typically vary in terms of the number of goal dimensions they employ (most contain between 5 and 12), and whether they represent goals at a relatively specific (e.g., Wicker, Lambert, Richardson, & Kahler, 1984) or abstract level (e.g., Winell, 1987). For the purpose of this study, we sought a goal taxonomy that would allow us to classify individuals' retirement goals for further analysis. In making our selection, three key factors were considered. First, a taxonomy was needed that had a sufficiently large number of dimensions to differentiate the various retirement goals individuals listed. Second, to facilitate sorting of individuals' retirement goals, we sought a taxonomy in which the dimensions were specific and clearly defined (as opposed to abstract). Third, because we planned to have individuals list their aspirations for retirement, the adopted goal taxonomy needed to have content categories that were appropriate for this stage of life. We found that the taxonomy developed by LaPierre et al. (1997) fit each of these criteria.

The LaPierre et al. (1997) taxonomy of personal goals was specifically developed to identify late life goals. It was normed on a sample of over 700 individuals aged 65-90. The taxonomy contains 10 different general life goal categories (self; self-realization; realization; contact; contact from others; wishes

for others; exploration; possession; leisure; and transcendental), three of which contain multiple subgoal categories. It was apparent, however, that in the present investigation not all 10 categories would be needed as they had been original conceptualized. This is because elements of the LaPierre et al. taxonomy were designed to accommodate general life goals (e.g., "health preservation") and goals that focused on decline (e.g., "have a good death"), as opposed to goals specific to retirement. After some deliberation, it was determined that retirement goals could be appropriately classified within a modified 9-dimension version of the LaPierre et al. model.

The *exploration*, attainment of *possessions*, and *leisure* dimensions all remained unchanged in our adaptation of their model. In the LaPierre et al. (1997) scheme, there were three goal categories related to the self. The subtle distinctions between these categories were deemed to be unnecessary for the present study, therefore, LaPierre et al.'s self, self-realization, and realization dimensions were collapsed into a single *self* category. Similarly, we combined the contact and contact from others categories in the LaPierre et al. model into a single *contact with others* category. The wishes for others category in their model was recast into a *contributions to others* category, and the transcendental dimension was renamed *spiritual/transcendental*. Finally, we added a *financial stability* dimension to the retirement goal taxonomy, as well as an *other* category for responses that could not otherwise be classified. For illustrative purposes, Table 1 contains examples of participants' actual retirement goals classified into each of the nine coding categories.

In our review of the literature we were unable to identify any comprehensive studies of gender differences in retirement goal content. However, there were a small number of studies that examined gender differences in perceptions or planning practices within specific retirement domains (e.g., finance, leisure). At best, these studies shed dim light on whether one could expect to find reliable gender differences in retirement goal content. However, as Winell (1987) points out, a person's physical, social, and cultural contexts will all exert a strong influence on the development of one's goals, as will the individual's biological and temperamental make-up. If goals are indeed shaped by the array of sources outlined by Winell, then it would not be surprising to find gender differences in retirement goal content. Moreover, Kim and Moen (2001a,b) stress that the process of retirement is qualitatively different for men and women which, if true, could help to explain why qualitatively different goals might develop.

In a study of the personal goals of older adults, Holahan (1988) found that women were more concerned with relationship involvement than men. Another study revealed that women view financial planning for retirement as less important than men (Kragie, Gerstein, & Lichtman, 1989), which suggests that men could be expected to have stronger goals in this domain. Keddy and Singleton (1991) found that working women consider financial issues, leisure issues, and attitudinal issues

Table 1. Examples of Participants' Actual Goals Sorted into Each of the Nine Different Coding Categories

Exploration	See more of the USA; Go to Disneyworld; Travel to Alaska and perhaps Australia; Travel; Take a trip to Israel before I die; Go to unique places
Attainment of Possessions	Have some land with cattle on it; Buy a Winnebago motor home; Have a big house in the country; Buy a brand new car; Go shopping all the time and buy whatever I want
Leisure	Fishing; Play golf; Publish western novels; Play with my old cars and trucks; Work on projects in my metal shop; Have lots of sex; Have a second childhood; Take long walks
Self	Be able to relax; Still be mobile; Be happy; Enjoy life; Rest--I've worked all my life and will enjoy having time to rest; Have good health; Have fun at all times
Contact with Others	Spend time with the family; Enjoy grandkids; Strengthen my marriage; Spend good quality time with my parents; Visit people you don't see everyday; Go out with friends
Contributions to Others	Help the needy; Volunteer; Get into the Peace Corps; Teach part-time for fun; Spend time and resources in social and humanitarian endeavors such as Habitat for Humanity
Spiritual-Transcendental	Work with church; Experience a full and abundant life; Be at peace with God; Be involved in my grandchildren's spiritual growth; Prison ministry
Financial Stability	Get a good return on my investments; To be out of debt; Be self-sufficient; Financially provide for family
Other	Retire at age 45; Do more housework; Serve as a communications consultant; Think about getting married

critical in retirement (in descending order of importance). In a separate study, two of the three domains identified in the Keddy and Singleton report (financial and leisure issues) were judged to be equally important by working men and women who were within three years of retiring from the workforce (Thurnher, 1974). Unfortunately, studies on the relationship between gender and retirement goals are sparse and sometimes contradictory, which makes it difficult to formulate clear expectations about how the goals of men and women would be expected to differ.

There were three specific data analysis goals in the present study. The first was to determine whether age or gender differences exist in the number of retirement goals individuals generate. We hypothesized that as individuals grow older and

closer to retirement, their goals would become increasingly well defined, and therefore more numerous. No specific *a priori* hypotheses were made regarding gender differences in the number of goals individuals would generate. The second goal was to examine the level of concreteness of individuals' goals. Again, consistent with the assumption that retirement goals become increasingly well defined as one nears retirement, it was anticipated that there would be an age-related increase in goal concreteness. There were no specific *a priori* hypotheses regarding the relationship between gender and goal concreteness. Finally, a series of analyses were planned to determine whether there were age or gender differences in the types of goals individuals generated for each of the nine categories in the retirement goal taxonomy.

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-five pre-retirees (26 women; 29 men) volunteered to participate in the study. The sample ranged in age from 20–67 years ($M = 45.1$, $SD = 15.2$). For analysis purposes, the sample was divided into three age groups: young workers ($n = 18$; aged 20–35); middle-age workers ($n = 15$; aged 36–51); and old workers ($n = 22$; aged 52–67). At the time of testing, all participants were employed and working a minimum of 20 hours per week, and none reported being previously retired.

Procedure

Participation in the study was solicited at public locations in North Central Oklahoma (e.g., recreation areas, community centers, businesses, shopping centers). An effort was made to sample roughly equivalent numbers of men and women whose age range covered the traditional working lifespan. Participants were prescreened to ensure that they met the inclusionary criteria for the study: to be employed on at least a half-time basis, and not previously retired. Questionnaires were completed individually or in small groups of 2–4 persons.

Materials

Participants were given a 1-page sheet titled “Retirement Goals Questionnaire.” The instructions read as follows:

Please take a few minutes to list below the goals you have for retirement. Your goals may be general (e.g., “be happy”), or they may be specific (e.g., “spend time with friends”). There are no right or wrong answers, we are only looking for your opinions. Thank you for agreeing to complete this brief survey.

Below the instructions were 20 lines that stretched roughly two-thirds of the way across the page upon which participants could list their goals.

Response Coding

Each goal on a participant's list was coded two ways. First, it was classified into one of the following nine categories: 1) contact with others; 2) self; 3) financial stability; 4) exploration; 5) leisure; 6) attainment of possessions; 7) contributions to others; 8) spiritual/transcendental; and 9) other (see Table 1). Next, each goal was evaluated in terms of its level of concreteness based on a short ordinal scale that ranged from 1 (abstract) to 3 (concrete). Examples of abstract goals included things such as "be happy," "enjoy life," and "have no worries." Concrete goals included things such as "travel to Alaska," "buy a Winnebago motor home," and "serve as a mentor to young women." Once each goal had been scored in terms of this concreteness dimension, a mean goal concreteness score was calculated for each respondent.

RESULTS

Number of Goals

Taken together, the 55 participants generated 318 retirement goals. The minimum number of goals generated by a participant was 2, and the maximum was 17 ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 2.66$). The number of goals listed by men ($M = 6.27$, $SD = 3.13$) and women ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.92$) did not differ, $t(53) = 1.47$, *ns*. However, the goal count was found to differ as a function of age. Contrary to expectations, the mean number of goals *decreased* monotonically over groups: young workers ($M = 6.89$, $SD = 3.16$); middle-age workers ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 2.46$); and old workers ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.93$). The mean number of goals generated by the young and middle-age groups did not differ, $t(31) = 0.82$, *ns*; however, the young and old workers' means were significantly different, $t(38) = 2.72$, $p = .01$, and mean scores for the middle-age and old groups were marginally significant, $t(35) = 1.91$, $p = .06$. Consistent with these developmental effects, the Pearson correlation between individuals' actual age (coded as a continuous variable) and the number of goals generated was $-.39$ ($p < .01$).

Goal Concreteness

The goal concreteness data also revealed an interesting pattern of effects. Half of all goals listed (48.5 percent) were found to be concrete, nearly one-third (29.2 percent) were classified as moderately concrete, and just over one-fifth (22.2 percent) were rated as abstract. The mean concreteness rating for the entire sample was 2.18 ($SD = 0.50$). Men's goals ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.44$) were found to be

significantly more concrete than those generated by women ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.51$), $t(53) = 2.45$, $p < .05$.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a statistically significant trend in the relationship between goal concreteness and age group, $F(2, 52) = 2.55$, $p = .09$. As significant gender differences in concreteness had already been identified, and because the proportion of men and women was not perfectly identical across age groups, a separate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to explore the relationship between age and goal concreteness using gender as a covariate. In that model, the effect of the covariate gender was significant, $F(1, 51) = 6.51$, $p < .05$, as was the main effect of age group, $F(2, 51) = 3.33$, $p < .05$. The mean concreteness score for young workers was 2.13 ($SD = 0.48$), for middle-age workers it was 2.41 ($SD = 0.28$), and for old workers it was 2.05 ($SD = 0.58$). Three follow-up paired comparisons were then conducted using the error term from the ANCOVA and a calculated minimum critical difference threshold of 0.305 based on a .05 p level. This revealed a reliable mean difference in the goal concreteness scores of middle-age and old workers, $C. diff. = 0.36$, $p < .05$. The contrasts between the concreteness scores of young and middle-age workers, and young and old workers were not found to differ ($C. diff. = -0.28$, ns , and $C. diff. = 0.08$, ns , respectively). It was also found that there was a significant positive correlation between the number of retirement goals one generated and individuals' mean level of goal concreteness, $r = .36$, $p < .01$.

Goal Content

The chart in Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses across the nine categories in the retirement goal taxonomy. Taken together, contact with others, leisure activities, and self goals accounted for more than half of all responses. In descending order of frequency the remaining goal categories included: exploration; financial stability; contributions to others; attainment of possessions; spiritual/transcendental; and other.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of goals across the nine categories decomposed as a function of each of the three age groups. Tests of independent proportions (with p set at .05) were used to determine if age effects existed within each category. Different subscripts for a particular goal category in the figure indicate statistically significant age group differences in the percentage of responses. Five of the nine categories in Figure 2 (contact with others, self goals, financial stability, exploration, and other) failed to show age effects. The frequency of mention for the remaining four goal categories all revealed reliable age differences (leisure, attainment of possessions, contributions to others, and spiritual/transcendental). Old workers listed significantly fewer leisure goals than young and middle-age workers, and young workers listed attainment of possessions as a goal more frequently than middle-age or old workers. Middle-age workers

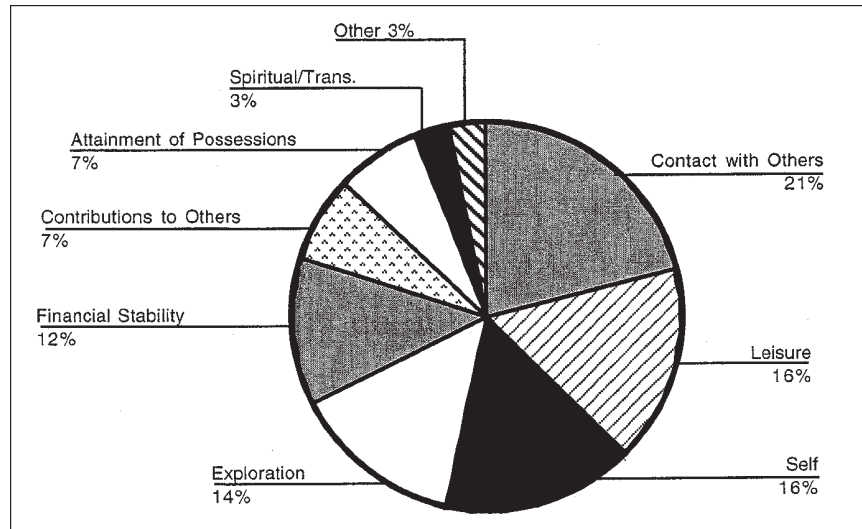


Figure 1. Pie chart showing the distribution of retirement goals collapsed across all members of the sample.

mentioned both spiritual goals and contributions to others more often than young workers, but the old group did not differ from the middle-age or young groups on either of these dimensions.

Additional tests of independent proportions revealed significant gender differences ($p < .05$) for three of the nine goal categories (see Table 2). It was found that women listed the goal of contact with others more often than men (26 percent vs. 17 percent, respectively). Relative to men, women also listed self-oriented goals more frequently (13 percent vs. 19 percent, respectively). In contrast, men listed leisure goals more than twice as often as women (24 percent vs. 9 percent, respectively).

DISCUSSION

The pattern of results revealed age differences in both the number and concreteness of individuals' goals. In addition, the findings revealed developmental differences in the specific types of goals individuals listed for retirement. Goal categories that failed to reveal age differences in frequency of mention included contact with others, self, financial stability, exploration, and other. The relatively high frequency of mention of goals in the first three categories (contact with others, self, and financial stability), in combination with a lack of age differences in each, suggests that these dimensions represent meaningful and

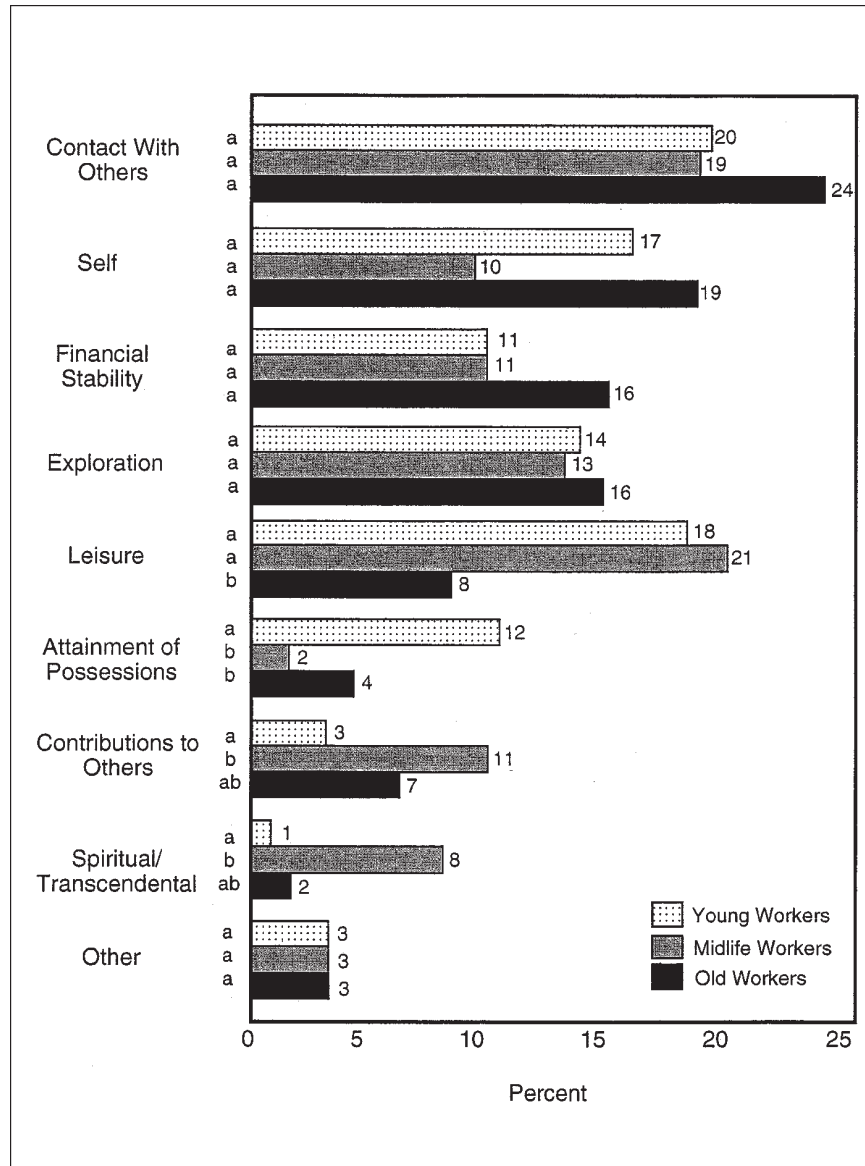


Figure 2. Percentage of retirement goals classified in each of the nine categories, shown as a function of age. Within each category, lack of a common subscript indicates a statistically significant difference between groups at the $p < .05$ level. The sum of percentages within each age group across all categories totals 100 percent (less rounding error).

Table 2. Percentage of Retirement Goals Classified in Each Category as a Function of Gender

Goal Type	Gender	
	Women	Men
Contact with others*	26	17
Self*	19	13
Financial stability	12	12
Exploration	13	14
Leisure*	9	24
Attainment of possessions	8	6
Contributions to others	7	7
Spiritual/Transcendental	3	3
Other	3	3

* $p < .05$ based on tests of independent proportions.

universal goals from a developmental perspective. Goal categories that revealed age effects included leisure, attainment of possessions, contributions to others, and spiritual/transcendental. The number of goals generated did not differ as a function of gender; however, men's goals were found to be more concrete than women's. Moreover, gender differences were observed in three of the nine goal categories.

Surprisingly, a late life developmental decline was found in the mean number of goals generated across age groups. Based on intuition, we had expected that this variable would show a developmental increase, due to the refinement of one's goal structures as retirement age approaches. The mean number of goals generated by young and middle-age respondents did not differ (6.9 and 6.1 goals on average, respectively). However, older respondents' goal lists were significantly shorter (4.7 items on average) than that of either of the other two groups. Moreover, older respondents' goals were the least concrete, significantly less concrete than those generated by middle-aged respondents, but not different from those of younger individuals. These findings clearly ran counter to expectations, by revealing that

individuals move from a larger number of fairly specific retirement goals in middle-age (e.g., "See Disneyland"), to a smaller number of more abstract goals (e.g., "Go to unique places") during the years prior to retirement. Perhaps it is the case that in the 10 to 15 years prior to retirement, older workers goals become transformed into "higher order" representations, as conceptualized in terms of the theoretical notion of a personal goal hierarchy (cf., Winell, 1987). This structural hypothesis regarding an age-related shift in goal content is certainly worth entertaining as part of a future investigation.

Goal content differed across age groups in four of the nine categories. Leisure goals were one area in which the old group differed from the other two. Those in the young and middle-aged groups listed leisure as a goal in 18 and 21 percent of the cases, respectively. In contrast, only 8 percent of older individuals listed leisure as a goal. A second area in which the groups differed was in terms of the attainment of possessions. Younger workers were more likely to cite possessions as a goal relative to members of the other two groups, which suggests that they differentially value material belongings. Interestingly, we found that middle-age participants differed from young respondents in terms of their likelihood of listing spiritual/transcendental goals, as well as in their tendency to value contributions to others. Perhaps this finding reflects the fact that members of the middle-age group entered adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when there was an enhanced socio-cultural focus on spiritual and interpersonal values.

In addition to developmental differences in goal content, certain gender differences were identified. As mentioned above, women generated as many goals as men on average, however, those goals were significantly more abstract. Moreover, gender differences were observed in three of the nine goal categories. Women were more likely to list contact with others and self-oriented goals more frequently than men, whereas men mentioned leisure goals more often. The sexes did not otherwise differ in frequency of mention across the remaining six content categories. The finding that women were more likely than men to focus on contact with others is readily interpretable, in that in our society females have been differentially socialized to establish and maintain interpersonal bonds (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Miller, 1986). The observation that men focused more on leisure goals and women focused on self-oriented goals is intriguing, in light of the nature of the goals associated with each category. That is, leisure goals tended to be fairly specific and task-oriented for the most part (e.g., play golf; plant flowers), whereas self goals, by comparison, tended to be less concrete and more concerned with general states of well-being (e.g., relax; enjoy life). It is interesting that men revealed a tendency toward generating task-specific goals that would allow them to achieve a state of well-being (i.e., playing golf allows one to relax), whereas women were more likely to identify the psychological "end state" as the goal (i.e., to be relaxed; to be happy). Reasons for why this particular gender effect emerged go beyond the scope of the present study. However, it would seem worthwhile to conduct follow-up research that examines

why men tend to focus on the means that will allow them to achieve well-being, whereas women focus on the end state itself.

A distinction was made in the introduction between retirement goals and goals for late life. In light of the findings from this study, it is worth posing the question: how similar (or different) are individuals' retirement goals to the goals they have for late life? To examine this question, participants' responses from this investigation were compared to the data reported by LaPierre et al. (1997). However, there is one methodological point worth noting before making this comparison. The samples in the two studies were comprised of nearly non-overlapping age ranges. Participants in the present study were 20-67 years of age, whereas those in the LaPierre study were 65-90 years old. Sample differences notwithstanding, there were certain parallels between the two sets of findings, as well as a number of noteworthy differences. Goal categories in which there were appreciably more responses (i.e., ≥ 5 percent) in the retirement study as compared to the late life goal study included exploration (14 percent vs. 1 percent, respectively), attainment of possessions (7 percent vs. 2 percent), and leisure (16 percent vs. 8 percent). In the present study, 12 percent of individuals indicated having the goal of financial stability; however, no respondents in the LaPierre et al. study identified this as a late life goal. Moreover, in the late life goal study, 55 percent of participants mentioned self-oriented goals, whereas in the present study only 16 percent of respondents listed goals related to self. Categories across the two studies that failed to reveal differences of greater than five percentage points included contact with others, contributions to others, and spiritual/transcendental goals.

The above comparisons between retirement and late life goals revealed one particularly striking content difference. There was an overwhelming tendency among respondents in the LaPierre et al. (1997) study to identify self-oriented goals (e.g., be happy, have good health, make own decisions). In contrast, participants in the present study de-emphasized self-oriented goals, focusing more on goals related to exploration, leisure, possessions, and financial stability. One way to think about these four retirement categories is that the first two (exploration and leisure) involve expectations about what one can expect to do after leaving the workforce, whereas the second two categories (possessions and financial stability) are related to what one expects to have once retired. Thus, individuals in this study revealed a bias toward pragmatic goals (i.e., involving what I will do and what I will have) not seen to the same degree among the late life goals listed by the respondents in the LaPierre et al. study. Certainly, the most important conclusion to be drawn from this comparison is that retirement goals and late life goals are not synonymous with one another. Therefore, in future research the two constructs should be properly treated as conceptually unique.

From an applied perspective, the data from this study should prove useful for retirement counselors, psychotherapists, and other practitioners who actively work in therapeutic contexts to explore the goals of working adults. Knowledge of

normative patterns of retirement goal content would help allow practitioners to work constructively toward identifying, clarifying, and strengthening individuals' post-employment goals. Not only have strong goals been shown to influence life satisfaction and adjustment (Rapkin & Fisher, 1992a, 1992b), but the level of one's retirement goal clarity has itself been shown to be a significant predictor of adaptive planning behaviors (Stawski & Hershey, 2001). Certainly, from a training and intervention perspective, there is much to be said for efforts aimed at cultivating clear and strong retirement goals. Unfortunately, in the United States most intervention programs stress the financial implications of departure from the workforce, to the exclusion of other important life planning topics (Richardson, 1993). Worse yet, most of these (financially-oriented) programs have been geared toward workers over the age of 55—at a point in one's career where the individual's economic fate may have already, to a great extent, been cast. We believe that from a long-term societal perspective, a more productive intervention approach would involve the development of goal-oriented training programs for young working adults. Developmentally appropriate exercises aimed at encouraging individuals to formulate specific retirement goals (cf., Winell, 1987) could be incorporated into large-scale retirement planning programs, or adapted for use with individuals in private counseling contexts. Of critical importance will be timing the introduction of specific goal-setting exercises at specific points in a worker's career, so as to produce the maximum desired impact. For instance, programs could be designed to cultivate financial and health goals early in adulthood, whereas goals related to housing, transportation, and the timing of one's departure from the workforce can typically be postponed until a decade or so prior to retirement (Hershey, Brown, Jacobs-Lawson, & Jackson, 2001).

The data presented on age and gender differences in retirement goal content are interesting in their own right. However, the findings from this study represent only one of the three major dimensions of goal-based research outlined by Austin and Vancouver (1996). It would also be of value to understand how retirement goals are organized with respect to one another (i.e., a focus on goal structure), and how one's goals influence long-term planning and decision-making activities (i.e., a focus on goal process). Research in these two areas is for the most part non-existent; perhaps future investigations could be focused on these important topics.

It is unclear to what extent the developmental findings reported in this study represent true age effects, or whether they reflect the influence of period effects. Disentangling the influences of age and cohort is a tricky matter under the best of circumstances, and the cross-sectional nature of our data preclude speculation as to which was in fact responsible for the observed differences across the three (age) groups. In future studies it would be valuable to explore the development of retirement goals in a longitudinal context. This would allow for assessment of the way age-related and societal forces differentially shape the evolution of individuals' goals.

The present study was designed to be a modest and straightforward attempt to describe the range of goals individuals hold for retirement. Findings of age and gender differences among those goals indicate that more comprehensive, psychometrically sophisticated follow-up studies are warranted. Efforts along those lines are currently underway in our laboratory. We believe that future research aimed at identifying the content, structure, and processes associated with individuals' retirement goals are of great potential value. They may hold the key to understanding why some people plan appropriately for the period following their departure from the workforce, whereas others do not.

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