Family, Gender, and Attitudes Toward Retirement

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The relationships between marital status, proximity of children, and attitudes toward retirement of 432 men and 373 women on the verge of retirement were studied. Three dimensions of attitudes were examined: attitudes toward losses associated with retirement, toward gains in entering retirement, and toward gains in leaving work. Women hold significantly more positive attitudes toward both types of gains; there are no gender differences concerning attitudes toward losses. The married of both sexes perceive more gains in entering retirement. Proximity of children is curvilinearly related to gain in entering retirement, especially among women. Attitudes toward losses and gains in leaving work are not associated with familial state. The meaning of work and the myth of the primacy of family for women are discussed.

Little is known about the association between gender, familial states, and attitudes toward retirement. The assumption that women are primarily family and home oriented has led many to believe retirement is not problematic for women (Seccombe & Lee, 1986). Consequently, research to date has been preoccupied with attitudes of men, while the attitudes of women have largely been neglected (Fox, 1977; Gigy, 1985–1986; Szinovacz, 1982). Our knowledge of the effect of familial states on the retirement experience is even more limited. The concentration on retiring men, most of whom are married at this age, and the disregarding of retiring women, who are less likely to be married, has left this matter almost unexplored. Nevertheless, it seems gender and family are related to attitudes toward retirement (Abel & Hays-
The purpose of this article is to study the relationships between marital status and proximity to children of men and women on the verge of retirement, and attitudes toward retirement.

There is no doubt that retirement involves a major role loss and a deprivation from an essential source of self-identity (Atchley 1975; 1976). Yet work, albeit central, is not the sole source of social roles and identity, and personal relationship, such as with family and friends, are equally important. It is plausible that, with retirement, the significance of these alternative social roles and relationships will increase to compensate for those lost by retirement. In other words, a substitute for the role of worker will be sought among the various roles and relationships in which the retiree is already involved (Atchley, 1975). Some empirical evidence for such a shift can be found in Gigy's (1985–1986) work. Her findings suggest that retired women tend to spend more time with their families compared to women anticipating retirement. Moreover, over one-quarter of the retired women in her study named family and friends as resources for successful retirement.

Since mandatory retirement is almost universal in Western countries for most salaried workers, some process of anticipatory socialization (Merton, 1958), during which attitudes toward and expectations of the approaching event are shaped, is bound to take place (Evans, Ekerdt, & Bosse, 1985). Indeed, Glasmer (1976), who studied the attitudes toward retirement of older male workers, suggested that a process of moderation of the importance of work takes place "so as to achieve a degree of cognitive balance by the time retirement occurs" (p. 106). Crawford (1971), studying men near retirement and their wives, found that one-third of the men and over half of their wives were looking forward to retirement, hoping to reengage with their family and friends.

Role substitution, however, is more feasible if alternatives already exist. Atchley (1975, 1976), for example, noted that broad engagement before retirement facilitates the consolidation of the hierarchy of personal goals, and thus the adjustment to retirement. Being married and having one's grown children nearby could provide the foundation for such a role shift and hierarchy consolidation. It can be hypothesized, then, that during the process of anticipatory socialization to retirement, the availability of family will encourage the development of positive attitudes toward retirement. Thus, being married and living close to one's children should be associated with positive attitudes toward retirement.

The concept of attitudes toward retirement, however, calls for some clarification. While retirement involves role loss, the loss of a source of identity, and the loss of the social relations established at work, it also involves gains. There are gains in leaving work, such as freedom from a dictated sched-