Redirection: An Extension of Career During Retirement

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Purpose of the Study: This study explores (a) whether retirees’ formal volunteer experiences represent an extension of their career in the paid workforce; and (b) how this integration of life roles affects career self-concept, as interpreted through Donald Super’s life-span, life-space theory of career development.

Design and Methods: A survey was conducted involving a Canadian sample of 214 individuals aged 55–75 years to examine retirees’ volunteer activities and their sense of self.

Results: The results demonstrate the need to further develop Super’s theory with the addition of a new developmental stage, which I am labeling “Redirection” to better reflect postretirement experiences. During “Redirection,” retirees develop a “new self.”

Implications: This study indicates that retirees experienced a new stage of “Redirection” and found new meaning through volunteer work during retirement. The results will be of interest to professionals and researchers focused on career development, older workers, and retirement.

Key words: Retirement, Volunteerism and civic engagement, Work (after retirement, occupation), Career development, Donald Super

With the leading edge of the aging baby boomer cohort now reaching age 65, there have never been so many people on the cusp of retirement. In the United States, about 13% of the population is aged 65 and older, and this figure is expected to increase to 19% by 2030 (Vincent & Velkoff, 2010). These statistics are similar in Canada at about 14% and 25%, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2009). Furthermore, life expectancies have risen, age at retirement appears to be increasing, and retirement can last 25 years or more (Stone & Nouroz, 2006). These sociodemographic changes mean that increasing numbers of people will be looking for what comes next and seeking meaning in later life. Volunteerism is one way to meet this need.

This study, using Donald Super’s life-span, life-space theory of career development (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996), investigates volunteering during retirement by examining formal volunteering among retirees aged 55–75. It explores whether volunteer experiences represent an extension of career in the paid workforce, and how this influences career self-concept. By focusing on the experiences of participants who have retired from their previous paid work and are volunteering, this study explores how they have gone through a process to use their skills and experience and constructed a new career self-concept through their volunteer work. Specifically, this study examines how career develops and evolves as retired individuals find opportunities to transfer their career skills and transform their career self-concept by
“redirecting” these skills in fresh ways during their retirement. In this study, I integrate research and theory within the fields of volunteering, aging, and career development to extend Super’s theory with a new stage to better differentiate career development across the life course. I have labeled this new stage Redirection. It offers a better understanding of retirees’ actual life experiences. This is critical for organizations, communities, and those who work with retirees now that the baby boomer cohort is approaching this stage of life.

In consideration of the high contextual variability of volunteer experiences, a definition of volunteering is required (Handy et al., 2000). Volunteering has been defined as individuals choosing to use their free will in order to give their time and energy to nonprofit organizations, neighbors, friends, and family over a period of time, normally without any direct financial compensation (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996; Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009; Haski-Leventhal, 2009). Formal volunteering involves engaging in activities with a nonprofit organization. Informal volunteering refers to helping friends, family, and neighbors; however, this study focuses on formal volunteering. Hence, in this study, volunteer work is defined as individuals freely giving their time, talents, and energy to nonprofit organizations without the expectation of any direct financial compensation.

In Canada, 36% of people aged 65 and older engage in formal volunteer activities, and older adults contribute the most number of volunteer hours (Hall et al., 2009). In the United States, the volunteer rate for those aged 65 and older has been approximately 23% since 2006 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

**Theoretical Framework and Research Objectives**

Super’s life-span, life-space theory explains the evolution and progression of an individual’s career or occupational choice and also considers the development of career self-concept across the life course (Super et al., 1996). Self-concept is the set of interpretations and meanings people hold about themselves (Christiansen, 1999), and career self-concept is the part of “self” related to work or occupation (Super et al.).

Developed over a 50-year period (Super, 1951; Super et al., 1996), this theory is widely recognized within the career services professions and is used today by career counselors, coaches, and academics (Crozier & Dorval, 2002; Salomone, 1996). The theory takes a broad perspective on career development and acknowledges the series of roles played by individuals across a lifetime, the career developmental tasks, and the evolution of career self-concept (Salomone, 1996). Ideas from life-stage psychology and social role theory are integrated so that roles and career self-concept can be understood, used, and examined together.

In an approach that emphasizes life span, individuals hold roles (e.g., worker, citizen, retiree) in combination and in sequence, and these roles connect to constitute a rainbow of life experience (Salomone, 1996; Super, 1980; Super et al. 1996). Super and his colleagues outline five phases of career development across an individual’s life:

- **Growth:** where children have the tasks of a growing achievement, and in the development of competent work habits.
- **Exploration:** representing the crystallizing of a socially recognized vocation, a specification of vocational/occupational choice, and an implementation of that choice through training and education.
- **Establishment:** with the associated tasks of stabilizing (including workplace-focused orientation and socialization, and satisfactory job performance), consolidating (of the position through positive work attitudes and relationships with coworkers, and productive habits), and advancement (of career).
- **Maintenance:** the decision to hold onto the position, update skills, keep up, and innovate (with new ways of doing tasks and discovering new challenges).
- **Disengagement:** during which deceleration (slowing down and/or decreasing involvement), retirement planning, and retirement living occur.

The self-concept and the career self-concept are key ideas within Super’s theory (Super et al. 1996). Individuals have multiple self-concepts. The theory by Super and colleagues described the self-concept system as a constellation of self-concepts and outlined the dimensions of self-esteem and self-efficacy. In this study, the focus is on Super’s career self-concept.

In order to empirically examine career development through volunteerism during retirement, research questions were developed using theoretical propositions by Super (1990). Four of theoretical propositions by Super and colleagues are particularly relevant and critical for this study, and these are in Table 1.

The theory by Super and colleagues (1996) is highly detailed and developed for all phases of the life span except the older adults. Although Super and colleagues recognized career development as a lifelong process, much attention was focused on the worker role and on the young people (Super, 1980). Super and colleagues state that the planning of retirement is a task within Disengagement. The theory suggests that the transition to retirement is part of
career development, but adequate attention was not given to the concept of retirement. Thus, the theory is truncated at retirement. Retirement is an important developmental phase—one that is tied to occupation and career (Hesketh, Griffin, & Loh, 2011). Super and colleagues viewed retirement as the denouement of career as opposed to seeing the possibility of an extension of career. Some findings that indicate older volunteers want to use their skills in their volunteer positions suggest that career development does not end at retirement (Hall et al., 2009).

It must be acknowledged that the theory by Super and colleagues (1996) was first developed more than 50 years ago when it was believed that older adults’ social, psychological, cognitive, physical, and occupational disengagement were part of the normal aging process. In fact, at that time, disengagement theory by Cummings and Henry (1961) was also developed, and their theory views the withdrawal from economic and community participation as mutually beneficial for individuals and society. This structural functionalist perspective does not consider context or history and is in direct contrast and opposition to the positive aging perspective. Disengagement theory is out of sync with the present reality, where individuals continue to participate in community and often engaged in economic-related activity. Furthermore, the field of gerontology moved beyond disengagement theory some time ago. This, along with changes in social attitudes toward seniors and aging, as well as our aging society and longer life expectancies, indicates that Disengagement requires further attention within Super’s theory. This study endeavors to revise Super’s theory by focusing on older adults’ career development experience during the transition to retirement and what comes later.

How does retirement fit within career development? What is the experience and meaning of volunteering during retirement? What is the transition process for individuals engaged in volunteer work? To answer these questions, we must first consider how retirement has been described and what its meaning might be today.

**Retirement**

Older workers and retirement have become increasingly critical issues in Canada and United States during the past few decades as shifts have occurred in demographics and in the labor force participation rates of mature workers (Burtless, 2012; McDonald & Donahue, 2011). Retirement policy and legislation changes influence older adults’ retirement decisions, with recent changes providing flexibility and choice (Castonguay, 2006; Marshall & Taylor, 2005). Traditionally, 65 years was the normative age for retirement. Retirement paths are becoming complex (Cahill, Giandrea, & Quinn, 2006; Carr & Kail, 2013; Castonguay, 2006; Kaskie, Imhof, Cavanaugh, & Culp, 2008; McDonald, 2006; Moen, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2007a; Stone & Nouroz, 2006), although the downturn in the economy in late 2008 and early 2009 might force older adults to delay retirement plans (Marshall, 2010; McDonald & Donahue, 2011).

Given the complexity of retirement and retirement paths, it is perhaps not surprising that retirement has been defined in different ways without consensus among researchers. Some definitions of retirement include (a) leaving one’s career, job, or work; (b) collecting one’s employer-sponsored and/or government pension; (c) departure from the labor force; (d) self-assessment of retirement; and (e) some combination of these indicators (Bowlby, 2007; Denton & Spencer, 2009; Moen, Fields, Quick, & Hofmeister, 2000). In this study, retirement was operationalized for sampling as follows: (a) participants had to have left their main employer; (b) if working, they must have taken new employment; and (c) they must have perceived themselves as retired.

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**Table 1. Selected Theoretical Propositions from Life-Span, Life-Space Career Development Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Proposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vocational preferences and competencies, the situations in which people live and work, and hence their self-concepts change with time and experience, although self-concepts as products of social learning are increasingly stable from late adolescence until late maturity, providing some continuity in choice and adjustment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The nature of the career pattern...is determined by the individual’s parental socioeconomic level, [his or her] mental ability education, skills, personality characteristics (needs, values, interests, and self-concepts), and career maturity and by the opportunities to which he or she is exposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Work satisfaction and life satisfaction depend on the extent to which an individual finds adequate outlets for abilities, needs, values, interests, personality traits and self-concepts. Satisfactions depend on establishment in a type of work, a work situation, and a way of life in which one can play the kind of role that growth and exploratory experiences have led one to consider congenial and appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The degree of satisfaction people attain from work is proportional to the degree to which they have been able to implement self-concepts. (pp. 123–125)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteering During Retirement

Volunteer work, as an option, provides community engagement (Narushima, 2004, 2003). Many older adults volunteer (Hall et al., 2009), and the interest in volunteering is very high one to two years postretirement (Caro & Bass, 1997). In addition, volunteerism early in life is related to volunteerism later in life (Vézina & Crompton, 2012).

Although Super et al. (1996) did not discuss retirees’ successful adaptation to retirement beyond an outline of the three tasks occurring within Disengagement (deceleration, retirement planning, and retirement living), some research has examined retirement transitions and retirees’ adaptation to retirement through volunteering (Moen, 1996; Wang, 2007; Wang, Henkens, & van Solinge, 2011). Retirement adjustment is a process and many factors contribute to it. Community, social connection, and identity are important for the well-being of retirees. Volunteer work is especially important for retirees who are not reemployed postretirement and is particularly positive for men, those with lower income and those in poor health (Moen & Fields, 2002).

Previous research has used continuity and activity theories to examine later life pursuits and the adjustment to retirement (Everard, 2009; Morrow-Howell, 2010; Pushkar et al., 2010). Some research has examined the amount and type of later life activity including volunteerism (Chambré, 1984, 2003; Moen & Fields, 2002; Price, 2000); however, activity theory focuses on what older adults are doing and minimizes the psychological aspects (Howe, 1987).

Researchers using continuity theory argue that older adults are predisposed and motivated for psychological and social behavior consistency using strategies from their past experiences (Atchley, 1989). Seeking evidence of this continuity makes this theory overly general and difficult to apply and test rigorously from an empirical perspective. As the field of gerontology developed, use of the above stated theories has decreased as newer theories were introduced and became dominant (Howe, 1987). Recently, Morrow-Howell (2010) called for attention to the aspects or characteristics of volunteering that contribute to older adults’ well-being. This study accomplishes this by examining volunteerism during retirement from a career development perspective.

Career Self-Concept During Retirement

Previous research has demonstrated that paid work is important for shaping an individual’s sense of self, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Brown et al., 2001; Christiansen, 1999; Stone, 2003). Without paid work, self-esteem suffers; however, all work activities—whether paid or unpaid—enable people to feel productive within society (Dickie, 2003; Howie, Coulter, & Feldman, 2004).

Although retirees occupy socially productive and work-related roles (Morrow-Howell, 2010), few researchers have focused on the evolution of career self-concept. Past research has examined the loss of professional identity (Teuscher, 2010) and the influence of professional identity on retirement adjustment (Reitzes & Mutran, 2006). A few notable studies have considered broad occupational identity development during later life recognizing the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness for building identity (Howie et al., 2004), as well as the processing of life events (Brown et al., 2001; Howie et al., 2004; Stone, 2003). This indicates the complexity of this process and demonstrates the importance of opportunities for reflection. Little research has specifically considered the evolution of career self-concept during retirement (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005; Steer, 1973), or examined the coherence and development of vocational identity during retirement (Jonsson, Josephsson, & Kielhofner, 2001; Price, 2000, 2003; Wiseman & Whiteford, 2007). Retirement activities or roles that are similar to those in preretirement work are associated with higher levels of satisfaction. This suggests that satisfaction stems from participation in activities that are congruent with self-concept (Laliberte-Rudman, 2002; Steer, 1973). Research points to the importance of reinforcing a consistent self-concept during later life; however, it does not address whether or how career self-concept is transformed during retirement with the loss of the work role. An examination of volunteering during retirement using theory by Super and colleagues (1996) can contribute to our understanding of older adults’ experiences and whether volunteering represents an extension of career.

Methodology

This study describes qualitative results from a larger mixed methods study that examined volunteering during retirement. As theory by Super and colleagues (1996) describes the development of career self-concept and the learning and advancement of skills and abilities, these concepts and ideas were central to the design of the research questions (Salomone, 1996). Three questions were asked in this article: (a) Do retirees’ career self-concepts change through their volunteer activities from those developed during their paid work careers? (b) What part of this process did retirees find most difficult? and (c) Based on these findings, what are the implications for life-span, life-space theory of career development?

Although this study had two phases, with the Phase 1 case study informing the development of Phase 2, the Phase 2 survey results are reported in this study. Purposive
sampling was used to guide the selection of participants (Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Purposive sampling is appropriate because this study is exploring the process of retirement transition through the volunteer role and what this means for career development. Inclusion criteria were that participants (a) had retired within the last 10 years, (b) were volunteering and giving 3 hr or more per week to an organization, and (3) aged between 55 and 75 years.

Participants were asked to describe themselves during the year before they retired and at the time of the survey. They were also asked about what they found most difficult during the transition to retirement. Table 2 presents the open-ended questions that they were asked in the survey.

Access to potential participants who were both volunteering and retired was facilitated through nonprofit organizations including those affiliated with a volunteer bureau that was part of Volunteer Canada and those connected with the social economy research centers researching nonprofit organizations across Canada. Subsequently, specific organizations that might have older volunteers were contacted, including the Diabetes Society, the Alzheimer’s Society of Canada, and Meals on Wheels. Finally, three retirees’ associations were contacted. Three hundred and twenty-five e-mails with a link to the online survey were sent out to the individuals who indicated an interest in participating. In addition, paper copies of the survey were requested by a few organizations and seniors directly. A total of 56 paper copies were mailed out to those requesting them, and of these, 12 were completed and returned.

Coding

Using methods described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), participants’ descriptions of their preretirement and present self were coded for evidence of life roles. Participant preretirement and present roles were categorized based on Super’s life roles (Super et al., 1996). Many participants described a number of roles held before retirement. For example, some mentioned family related roles, as well as their volunteer roles, with specific nonprofit organizations. For their current roles, participants often described their retiree or volunteer role first or second. If participants expressed involvement in multiple roles, evidence of the role of retiree, volunteer, or retiree/volunteer was noted and coded because taking on these particular roles was regarded as a transformation of self from preretirement. In addition to life roles, some participants mentioned personal characteristics in their self-descriptions. These were not coded for the purposes of this study. Following methods described by Creswell and Plano Clark, the question focusing on participants’ transition to retirement was coded to assist with understanding the process that individuals experienced. Themes emerged from this coding process.

Survey Sample Characteristics

There were 214 participants with a mean age of 64. Eight percent were self-identified as members of diverse ethnocultural groups. Fifty-seven percent of the participants were women, and 43% were men. This is consistent with the characteristics of the national sample in the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP; Hall et al., 2009). In addition, in both this study and the CSGVP, volunteering increases with higher educational attainment and higher income levels. Compared with the 2007 CSGVP, participants in this study were highly educated, with 91% having at least some postsecondary education. Participants reported how long they had been involved in volunteerism as shown in Table 3. The majority of participants reported being fully retired (72%). Interestingly, 13% indicating they were semiretired and 3% stating they were gradually retiring. Eight percent stated that they were retired and working in a new position. Finally, 4% explained that they had retired multiple times from second, or in some cases third, careers. Their various pathways into retirement are consistent with previous research (Cahill et al., 2006; McDonald & Donahue, 2011).

Table 2. Questions on Participants’ Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Open-ended questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self and self-concept</td>
<td>In the following four questions, I am trying to understand how you see yourself now and in the year before you retired. This is because the “self” undergoes a transition during this time. Some retirees speak about how their working self is gone. Please provide three statements to each of the following. How would you have answered the question “Who am I?” during the year before you retired? Who am I now? (at the time of the survey) When people ask you “What do you do?” What do you say? We are reflected through the eyes of others. How do you think those around you see you today? (e.g., former colleagues, neighbors, and/or society in general)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement transition</td>
<td>What was most difficult for you during your transition into being retired and becoming a retiree?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Participants’ descriptions of themselves were examined using the roles in theory by Super and colleagues (1996), both 1 year preretirement and at the time of the study.

Table 3. Number of Years Participants Involved in Volunteer Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–30</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or more</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Selected Examples of Participants Change in Career Self-Concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant demographic characteristics</th>
<th>Description of the self</th>
<th>At the time of the survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 57</td>
<td>[I am] a hard working teacher, a singer, a nature lover.</td>
<td>I am a retired teacher. I am a leader in my diocesan council...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 59</td>
<td>I was a team leader. I was an office coordinator.... I was an interface between workers and management and between customers.</td>
<td>I now use my previous writing skills to write Standard Operating Procedures and training manuals for the organization I volunteer for. I also use my skills with Microsoft Excel to create and modify financial spreadsheets to allow more accurate record keeping of monthly sales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 55</td>
<td>I am driven, detail oriented and therefore a bit of a workaholic. Work was a big part of my life and defined myself to a certain extent.</td>
<td>Now, I am still driven, detail oriented and a bit of a workaholic but now I apply these characteristics to my volunteer work. As a retiree I have more time than other volunteers. I feel useful and part of something. It makes me happy. I received a lot in my life and feel I was very lucky, so it makes me happy to give back in various ways, particularly through volunteer work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 56</td>
<td>My working self is not gone. I had a good job, secure, that paid enough for me to do what I wanted. The job required nothing of me, outside of work hours, and during work hours there was ample time to think about and organize what I would be doing with my time after work. My connections at work were often an asset to my other activities. To my knowledge, I was not defined by my job.</td>
<td>I now have the time to do more of the things that I want to do. I do not have the inconvenience of a work schedule to juggle. I see few of the people I worked with now, but will stop by to visit if I am nearby (not at work, where they live). For the most part I would say, and I think others I know would agree, that I am not much different. My priorities have not changed. I also have many more things I want to do, so time seems tighter now than it was while I worked ....[If] they ask [“What do you do?”]. The easy answer is “retired”...If they ask, “How do you spend your time?” I answer, “More time at Habitat [for Humanity], more time at Church, more time with wine, and I am trying to clean the basement.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 63</td>
<td>I would see myself a caring, intelligent, educated person who was in a helping profession designed to improve the education of both young people and adults alike. As an elementary school Principal, I had a myriad of responsibilities and duties which included a wide-ranging involvement in the school community and in the city at large. I was and am a lifelong learner.</td>
<td>I am still the same person I was, only now, there is not the “public recognition” of a titled professional. Nevertheless, all of the skills, education and experience I have gained in my lifetime of work, has now been transferred into other activities which continue to help and educate people in the broader community. I am still me!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the worker role during the year prior to their retirement
saw themselves as volunteers at the time of the survey.
Furthermore, despite the range of roles prior to retire-
ment, at the time of the survey more than 50% (52.1%)
of participants in this sample currently saw themselves as
volunteers. In addition, about 20% identified themselves
as retirees, and 10% saw themselves as retirees and vol-
unteers. Almost 8% continued to work part-time and saw
themselves as workers. Almost 7% saw themselves pre-
dominately through their family roles and only 3% viewed
themselves as leisurites during retirement.

Participants’ descriptions of their current roles illustrate
how their career self-concept has changed postretire-
ment through their volunteer role (see Table 4). In their
comments, the participants shared their thoughts on their
transition and the process of how their career self-concepts
changed from those developed during their previous paid
work to those developed through their volunteer activities.
They explained how using skills was important within their
volunteer role(s).

Participants’ paid work skills are an important part of
their career self-concept that they transfer to their volunteer
roles. For example, a respondent said she is not using lead-
ership or management skills anymore: “. . . I am still car-
ing and organized and have extra time and energy to work
with a charitable organization to help them achieve their
goals without being responsible for those goals” (female,
age 61). Another respondent stated:

It is difficult to realize that you are no longer needed and
feel that, in some instances you have nothing to offer
anymore. Volunteering at the Habitat for Humanity
Restore . . . gave me a new outlook and a purpose.
I enjoyed working there and was looked up to for my
abilities and knowledge. . . . (Male, age 72)

Some participants were very open and insightful about
this process as volunteering became a large part of their
life, explaining this career self-concept change in their own
words. Many of the female participants were particularly
candid, as the quotes in Table 4 demonstrate.

To further examine the transition process, participants
described what they found most difficult about the process
of retirement and becoming a retiree. A selection of par-
ticipant responses is presented in Table 6. These represent
a broad range of retirement experiences that reflect the key
challenges identified within this process.

The majority of participants described their retirement
and their challenges in enough detail to provide insight
into the process of retirement that they experienced. Some
participants described changes to their identity as difficult
to deal with during retirement; others mentioned a loss of
structure to the day or the search for something new that
could provide meaning. A few participants mentioned that
they were dealing with serious life issues as the transition
to retirement unfolded. These participants reported that
ill health, death, divorce, or a household move interfered
with their transition and made it more complex, challeng-
ing, and stressful. These events made retirement much more
difficult to deal with and adapt to for these participants.

A few participants stated that they had no challenges
with the transition to retirement and expressed what they
did to make their transition go smoothly. Most often, this
involved planning for their retirement or observing some-
one else’s retirement and learning how to design a meaning-
ful retirement lifestyle from these observations. Examining
these descriptions indicates that many of the participants
were anticipating retirement and either being anxious or
planning for it; seeking new structure and/or activity; feel-
ing the loss of identity and status and/or finding oneself; and

### Table 5. Cross-tabulations of Roles Prior to Retirement vs. Roles Since Respondents Retired

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles during the year prior to retirement</th>
<th>Roles since respondents retired</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Retiree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and family</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker and leisure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and citizen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family role</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker, family role, and citizen</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker, family role and leisure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family role and citizen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker, family role, leisure, and citizen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Participants’ responses were coded using roles of Super et al. (1996). N = 190 because some participants provided personal self-concept descriptions, not role descriptions in answer to these questions.
The participants engaged in volunteer work and explained why it was meaningful, fulfilling, and important to them. Many participants described how their volunteer work became important during the transition to retirement. Together, these descriptions provide better understanding of the experiences of these participants and their process of career development and career extension as they transferred career skills to volunteer work and developed a new career self-concept.

Building Upon Life-Span, Life-Space Career Development Theory

Super and colleagues (1996) outline five stages of career development. Until now, later life and retirement were not explored within this particular theory. As we develop a career or occupation, the career self-concept and the worker role are initiated through the process of career development. The retirement phase is part of this process and is just as critical as the selection of vocation (Hesketh et al., 2011); however, Super’s term Disengagement is limiting and inaccurate in today’s society. The results of this study and other research indicate that Deceleration may be a better descriptor, as interests and energy levels appear to shift with later life maturation.

Career development is a psychological and social process. The participants’ comments demonstrate how both psychological and sociological experiences are intertwined and lead to Redirection. The results indicate that retirees relinquished their paid-work career, took on the retiree and volunteer roles, and integrated these roles within their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant demographic characteristics</th>
<th>What was most difficult during the transition into retirement and becoming a retiree?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 64</td>
<td>Thinking about it ahead of time. It felt as if I was going to jump off a cliff!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 67</td>
<td>Finding the balance between having enough free time to be spontaneous and flexible and having enough structure so that I feel that I am accomplishing something worthwhile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 65</td>
<td>Finding myself and keeping interested in new projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 61</td>
<td>After the initial flush of enjoying not having to jump up and get into high gear every morning, I began to feel somewhat useless, i.e. I wasn’t accomplishing much over the period of, say, a week. I began to fish around for some volunteer work that would give some structure to my week and also introduce me to a new set of friends who were at a similar stage in their lives. Since my first career was in the health-care field I went to that area [and volunteered] quite easily. I still needed more variety so I had to stretch and challenge myself a bit. That is when I started working at the ReStore. I had never worked in retail before but I was firmly behind the concept of Habitat for Humanity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 60</td>
<td>I found it hard to give up the structure of my organized life and to give up my title and reputation in the workplace. My career was a big part of my happiness, but I have come to realize it was what I did, not who I was. I am finding a new order and a new routine in retirement and am able to participate in so many new and exciting experiences in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 68</td>
<td>Finding things to do with meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 71</td>
<td>Learning to live with cancer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female age 63</td>
<td>Redefining myself; finding worthwhile activities; staying healthy, physically and emotionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 67</td>
<td>The loss of a specific title as “teacher” and the loss of a good wage and the daily commitment and purpose. It took a while to get over it but when I see my old colleagues and students come to the museum [where I am a docent], they give me a boost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 63</td>
<td>Reduction in prestige and effectiveness in helping community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 59</td>
<td>The first year or year and half was very difficult. Finding enough to do to fill the days and things to do that would be fulfilling. I think I needed a purpose and I needed to learn to relax and just enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, age 56</td>
<td>Nothing! I’d been thinking about it for so long, I had it pretty well mapped out and it has turned out pretty much as planned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 69</td>
<td>Breaking the routine and making sure that each day you have something to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 66</td>
<td>My plan was to do consulting work after retirement, which I did for three years. I fully retired when it became apparent that my part-time consulting was demanding my mental attention full-time, thus negating my reason for retiring. I needed to be physically and mentally active and became involved in volunteering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, age 73</td>
<td>Nothing. I chose to retire 5 years prior to retiring by reducing my active business role by one day per week. In the end, I was acting as a consultant with the partner who bought out my business shares. Each day taken off was used in volunteering for a local charity. So the transition was easy in retiring.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
career self-concept to create a new sense of self. These participants transferred their career self-concept to their volunteer activities. Preretirement, the work role appeared to be very important to participants. This extension of career and the description of participants’ transferral of career self-concept indicate that retirement is a stage of career development and demonstrate that there needs to be a further development and expansion of theory by Super and colleague (1996). The retirees entered a new stage of life, with the role of volunteer providing new meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Based on the results of this study and the experiences of these participants, a new stage is required.

I am calling this new stage Redirection. In this study, the experiences of the participants indicate that it occurs after they are anticipating retirement and the changes this brings. The participants had retired from their full-time career and were distancing themselves from it as they anticipated the next phase of life:

During the year before I retired I was aware that I was transitioning to a new phase of my life and I was worried about not being busy, not doing enough, being forgotten and looking at life instead of contributing to it. (Female, age 55)

The change that comes with retirement is the first step that participants experienced as part of this process. Feelings of uncertainty and an awareness of looming change are generated. These feelings propelled participants into the Redirection stage. Redirection involves four tasks: redefinition, discovery, renewal and integration. I have labeled the four tasks based on the participants’ experiences and the transition process. Each of these tasks is descriptive of a step in the process.

First, Redirection involves a redefinition where retirees feel that they are losing their identity because their occupation provided this. Retirees are forced to redefine themselves as their former work role is ending or has ended. The transition to a new role pushes retirees to see themselves differently. Hence, the sense of self undergoes a change. Retirees recognize that the need to reinvent themselves to feel whole or complete again. This task is evident in the following quote:

My [sense of] self as a mother and career person was slowly disappearing, and I began to feel insecure and small as I wondered how and where I would find fulfillment for the rest of my days. (Female, age 73)

The second task in Redirection is discovery. This may involve joining groups, organizations, and clubs, as well as gathering information, resources, and tools that might assist with the transition. Participants explored options and sought out information in the community. This same participant was very candid and opened about her experience:

I did a great deal of exploring and joining to discover who I had become at this stage. Soon I realized what and where I wanted to be, and made decisions in the direction of satisfaction. (Female, age 73)

The third task in Redirection is personal renewal, where, over time, a new direction or path develops, which provides purpose and meaning in life. The following quote demonstrates this:

I wasn’t feeling “Where’s my life taking me?,” “What am I doing with my time?,” “How come I don’t feel fulfilled?” My volunteer world became actually everything I really wanted to go forward with. . . . (Male, age 55)

As volunteering grows in importance, it fills a void and provides meaning and fulfillment. The final task is integration, and this is when the participants have formed a new sense of self:

For many of us our identity during the working years came from our family and our jobs. With retirement we lost that bit around the jobs and volunteering helped to fill the gap . . . . I find it surprising to some extent that in conversation with new people I meet I very seldom ever refer to my retired profession of social work. (Male, age 67)

Integration involves the creation of a “new me,” which becomes a source of self-esteem, creating a new life style and new balance. Some participants spoke of a “new me” and an “old me” as they moved on. By fulfilling the tasks of Redirection, the participants have reexplored and reestablished themselves through volunteering. They have developed a “new me,” designed a life style they are comfortable with, and have found new avenues for fulfillment that provide meaning in life. They have achieved the tasks involved in the stage of Redirection.

By choosing a life style that includes volunteering, retirees have chosen pursuits that give to the community, but they also receive something back. By volunteering, retirees feel wanted and needed. They know they are making a difference in someone’s life in their community. When they go to the nonprofit organization to volunteer, retirees have the sense not only that they are making a difference but that they are connected. Overall, it provides a new life meaning, new fulfillment, and a new life direction. It is rewarding and psychologically uplifting.

Discussion

A lifelong view of career development and the career trajectory must include possible shifts and changes that occur during later life. With retirement and the next phase of life, the participants in this study underwent a
With the anticipation of retirement, individuals sense they are in transition and recognize the need for life change within their roles, purpose, and self-concept. This is where Redefinition occurs. Through Discovery, retirees try new things, explore, and learn. Retirees find new avenues to use prior skills and knowledge. They develop new interests and new skills (Cook, 2011). Retirees engage in learning about their community, volunteer role, and about themselves. They are not pursuing roles and activities exactly like their previous paid work. Their new roles provide opportunities to use their skills and knowledge but in new ways. This Renewal enables a new career self-concept (or Integration) to emerge as retirees find these new outlets and pursuits reenergizing and reinvigorating.

As opposed to viewing career self-concept as ending, this study helps us understand the evolution of career self-concept and the process individuals might go through. Redirection involves integrating former skills and career self-concept with new skills and a redefined career self-concept. This indicates that Redirection is different from continuity theory, which argues that middle aged and older adults are predisposed and motivated for both psychological and social role continuity (Atchley, 1989). My study demonstrates how and why volunteering helps individuals deal with changes in retirement. Thus, theory by Super and colleagues (1996) enables an in-depth exploration of volunteering during retirement that goes beyond continuity (Atchley, 1971) and activity theory (Chambré, 1984; Rowe & Kahn, 1998) to examine the various connections across roles and the development of career self-concept in later life.

Retirement is a time of transition where individuals find new roles (Reitzes & Mutran, 2006). Engagement in meaningful roles and “occupation” is important for cultivating a sense of selfhood (Christiansen, 1999; Jonsson, Josephsson, & Kielhofner, 2001) and finding meaning and fulfillment is critical during later life (Reis & Pushkar Gold, 1993). The participants found this through volunteering, and the significance of later life meaning and purpose corresponds with findings by Narushima (2004) and Moen and Fields (2002). The findings resonate with theoretical propositions by Super and colleagues (1996) presented in Table 1: career self-concepts can change but at the same time, they are somewhat stable; the career development process is contextually driven; and growth and exploration lead down the pathway to establish an “occupation,” situation and way of life that seems most congenial, appropriate, promising, and fulfilling for that individual. Another key proposition by Super and colleagues stated: “work satisfaction and life satisfaction depend on the extent to which an individual finds adequate outlets for abilities, needs, values, interests, personality traits and self concepts” (p. 125). The participants

 psychological change in “career-self.” The results demonstrate that where they went past these changes, they entered a stage postretirement that I identified. To better reflect the experiences of these retirees, I propose that Donald Super’s life-span, life-space theory of career development (Super et al., 1996) be extended to include the new stage of Redirection. The findings indicate that Redirection occurs socially and psychologically, both within roles and through career self-concept. The four tasks of Redirection that I specified are redefinition, discovery, renewal, and integration. Theory by Super and colleagues provided a unique perspective on older adults’ career trajectory, retirement, and volunteering, and assisted in providing a better understanding of this issue with all of its complexities and nuances.

Although approximately 24% of participants were volunteering for more than 30 years, the majority of participants began volunteering during retirement or as retirement approached. Most participants (61%) reported becoming engaged in volunteer work within the last 14 years. Approximately 46% of participants reported becoming involved in volunteerism during the last 9 years and about 26% developed volunteer pursuits within the last 4 years. This indicates a strong interest in volunteerism as retirement approached and suggests that during this time of transition, the volunteer role became increasingly important to the participants.

The volunteer role also appeared to become more meaningful. Participants reported a transformation in their sense of career self-concept during their transition to retirement. Many participants explained that the volunteering became very important. It offered them a new life role and they embraced it. In fact, some participants saw themselves as full-time or professional volunteers. These participants seem to have redefined themselves through this role. Volunteering seemed to assist participants with their transition to retirement by providing an extension of career that enabled them to integrate the old and the new, thus leading to new pursuits and a “new self.”

Retirement adjustment impacts quality of life during retirement (Wang et al., 2011), thus influencing overall health and well-being. Volunteering has helped the participants’ transition to retirement by providing a new direction. Through the four tasks in the process of Redirection, retirees have reinvented themselves after the loss of their working self. Volunteering was a critical step in their psychological and social adaptation to retirement. Retirees went through an active period of self-reflection and career self-concept change as they found new roles. These participants wanted to be engaged in the community and volunteering provided them with new meaning and fulfillment in life.
accomplished this; they discovered new meaning, fulfillment, commitment, passion, engagement, and an outlet to use their skills—all by volunteering within the community. This is similar to the types of occupational engagement during retirement found by Jonsson, Josephsson, & Kielhofner (2001). The findings demonstrate that Redirection is a time of reinvention as new meaning and fulfillment are found. They also show that personal development and career development are intertwined (Super et al., 1996; Sweet, 2001), even during retirement.

The key themes of contributing to self-concept, being active, and giving back to community described in this study are similar to those described by Bambrick & Bonder (2005). Narushima (2005) found that her participants wanted to be altruistic by giving back to their community and using volunteering for personal development to help fulfill their need for generativity (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Narushima (2004) also found evidence that volunteering provided connections to prior roles and identity. Today, with our aging population, it is particularly important for older adults to maintain career self-concept when they can experience up to 30 years of retirement. This contributes to a positive sense of self. In this study, the retirees wanted to be active, engaged, productive, and contributing. This has compelled them to strive for Redirection. The retirees are contributing, and they feel competent and connected. Because their volunteer activities keep them physically and mentally active, as well as socially engaged in their community, this helps them to achieve healthy, successful aging (Swinson, 2006).

The participants at the time of this study were between the ages of 55 and 75, representing the baby boomer, World War II, and the silent generation or depression era cohorts. Although great attention is given to baby boomers who are changing retirement expectations and attitudes, participants in this study across all ages and of both genders were striving to remain active, participate, and engage in the community through volunteer work. They experienced Redirection to transfer skills into volunteer activities and redefine career self-concept.

The part of career that is focused on older adults who are retiring or retired and their engagement in new activity or pursuits is Redirection, and this concept is distinct from Super’s concept of recycling (Super et al., 1996). Recycling explains that individuals do not necessarily follow a linear career development path but instead may recycle through the career development stages as they change jobs, positions, or careers. The career trajectory or career path can vary because of individual circumstances, motivations, age, or maturity. Sometimes there may be a need for retraining as individuals start over within a new industry or field. Redirection emerged from examining retirees’ unpaid volunteer roles during the transition into retirement, and this is a qualitatively different experience than recycling to change jobs. The older adults in this study want to stay engaged and active and have a lot of skills, experience, and knowledge that they can transfer into volunteer work. In the process, they have found renewal, new meaning, and fulfillment. They have redefined themselves through a “redirection” that integrates the old and the new to achieve a new sense of self.

Redirection more accurately reflects the experiences of these participants, and replaces Disengagement which no longer fits. In addition, this development of Super’s theory (Super et al., 1996) to reflect recent changes in careers and career pathways necessitates a definition of several key concepts. An extension of career during retirement involves first searching for, and then finding an outlet that transfers and utilizes old skills in new ways, and where individuals also construct a new career self-concept. Within career development theory, Redirection is the stage that describes this process during the career trajectory. A career change involves switching occupations and sometimes industries. The process involved in making a job or career change is called recycling. Career cessation involves stopping employment for retirement, health, family, industry, and employer-based or other reasons.

The participants in this study provided a retrospective description of themselves including their career self-concept and their skill usage during the year prior to retirement. Although retrospective accounts can be questioned for accuracy, it is these reflective, subjective self-descriptions and re-accounting of life events and occupations that help researchers to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and their lives (Howie et al., 2004; Laliberte-Rudman, 2002; Stone, 2003). Most importantly, the meaning and impact of life experiences on the self become evident through reflection as individuals gain an understanding of themselves and their lives. Individuals’ interpretations of their experiences and their assertions of identity are critical to providing insights into “selfhood.” Self-reflection tends to occur retrospectively, or after the fact.

It must be noted that this study used a limited sample, and the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population. The study was meant to be exploratory to better understand the experiences of the participants, their possible extension of career, and the process of career development through volunteering during retirement. Thus, the study used a convenience sample of retirees who formally volunteered with nonprofit organizations. The participants in this study were a highly educated group of retirees, and this may have biased the results, although volunteers tend to be higher educated professionals (Hall et al., 2009; Tang, Morrow-Howell & Hong, 2009).
This study provides new understanding of how individuals make sense of the evolution of career during their later career trajectory as they transition to retirement by pursuing volunteer work and how career self-concept transforms and develops during the later part of life. A major contribution to the field is the improvement of Super’s theory through adding the stage of Redirection.

I chose formal volunteering as the model for defining Redirection, and this stage might not occur among retirees who are engaged in other pursuits. Although these limitations may affect transferability of the findings, the stage of Redirection warrants further investigation. It is important to see if this stage is found more broadly in later life pursuits. Future research needs to examine whether Redirection is restricted to formal volunteering or whether it is present within other spheres such as paid work, informal volunteering and caregiving, lifelong learning, and leisure and hobbies.

This study demonstrates that the volunteer role in the lives of retirees can lead to personal renewal and reshaping of the career self-concept, or what is labeled as the stage of Redirection. Redirection will become increasingly important with the almost 10 million baby boomers in Canada approaching later life and longer life expectancies providing almost 30 years of retirement (Statistics Canada, 2007b; Stone & Nouroz, 2006).

Conclusion

In this study, I presented a new life stage that I have labeled Redirection. This stage supplements Donald Super’s (Super et al. 1996) life-span, life-space theory of career development by focusing on retirees’ volunteer and previous paid work roles and how this influences their career self-concept. To my knowledge, this is the first study to address this. The new stage of Redirection is required to better reflect the experiences of retirees within the context of social and demographic change. An important next step is to determine if Redirection is restricted to formal volunteering, or if it can be extended to other spheres of life such as informal volunteering and caregiving, leisure, paid work, and lifelong learning.

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References


