

Men's Perceptions of Family During the Retirement Transition

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a phenomenological description of pre- and postretirement perceptions of family and their impact on adjustment to retirement. The study is qualitative and employs interviews as a means of collecting life stories and life scenarios of men on the eve of their retirement transition. The findings corroborate that retirement is a family transition. The most important results shed light on retirees' loneliness and need for support. Supportive preretirement interventions are recommended. In addition, the results showed family perceptions' contribution to postretirement adjustment. Thus, in order to help the retirees to accept their retirement transition, it suggests that the preretirement intervention should focus on the family as a whole, especially when retirees plan their future.

The retirement process is a developmental transition usually described as a stressor period of destabilization and adaptation (Atchley, 1976). Marital, family, and other relationships come under increased scrutiny and may be realigned (Barnes & Parry, 2004). Most retirees in the Western world are married (Savishinsky, 2000), and recent years have seen a heightened recognition of the retirement transition as a critical phase in the family life cycle (Szinovacz, Eckertd, & Vinik, 1992). As Atchley (1992) has pointed out, "marriage is the context in which most decisions about retirement occur and most individuals' retirement adjustment takes place" (p. 145). For example, retirement can undermine the husband's status in marriage and shift the balance of power between spouses. In addition, research showed that retirement affects both marital relations and family lifestyle and increases their interdependence as well as spouses' evaluations of fairness and equity (Kulik, 1999, 2004; Kulik & Zuckerman Barel,

1997). Most research has dealt with retirees' spouses, not with the extended family, such as parents, children, and grandchildren. Yet many researchers consider retirement a family event, especially male retirement (Smith & Moen, 1998; Szinovacz & Harpster, 1993).

Using life course perspective and pre- and postretirement data, this study explores how men about to retire perceive their families and how this perception influences their transition. The life course perspective posits that early experiences may affect major life choices and transitions and that lives are interdependent (Elder, 1995; George, 1993; Henretta, O'Rand, & Chan, 1993). This approach views transitions in a family context.

This study has two aims. The first is to provide a phenomenological description of men's perceptions of their family's significance on the eve of retirement, based on analyses of more than 50 retirees. Whereas most retirement studies are quantitative, our research illuminates thoughts

and behaviors in the retirement process and what family means to those facing retirement. The study aim is to contribute to our knowledge regarding the transition to retirement and men's views of the family role in facilitating or impeding that transition. The second aim is to examine adjustment to retirement through interviewees' interpretations of family.

This study sees retirement as a long-term process beginning before the cessation of gainful employment and ending sometime after ceasing employment (Atchley, 1976; Carp, 1972; Maddox, 1987). We've also adopted life span development theories (Baltes, 1997; Elder, 1995), viewing retirement as a major transition from adulthood (ages 50 to 60) to early aging (ages 60 to 70; see Viney, 1993), in which tasks, relationships, concerns, and self-image are redefined. Research based on this approach observes stress prior to retirement and improved well-being afterward (Gall, Evans, & Howard, 1997; Quick & Moen, 1998; Theriault, 1994).

The study questions are these: Do the retiree's family perceptions change during the retirement process?

If so, how? And what is the family's role in this process?

The study modifies Whitbourne's (1985) model of adult adaptation, which proposes that adults prepare for expected life events by constructing a *life story*, representing their perceptions of the past, and a *life scenario* envisioning the future. According to Whitbourne, adaptation in adulthood is strongly affected by the "life span construct" that persons create and recreate for themselves throughout their lives. In keeping with continuity theory, she defines this construct as the "unified sense of past, present, and future events linked by their common occurrence in the individual" (p. 595) and contends that it changes as its creator does. She modifies the theory, however, by proposing that the construct consists of two parts: a life story, which represents a person's subjective perceptions of their past, and a life scenario, which is a hypothetical account of their expectations and plans of the future. According to Whitbourne (1985), adults prepare for expected changes by constructing a life scenario and, when this is under way, going on to create a life story, consistent with the life scenario, which "incorporates past events into an organized sequence giving them a personal meaning and a sense of continuity" (p. 595).

According to the narrative theories (Corradi, 1991; Linde 1993; McAdams, 1985) in general and the Whitbourne (1985) model in particular, the life story illuminates the subjective perception of the past as a way

of coping with imminent retirement, and the life scenario envisions the anticipated retirement transition. Thus, we solicited preretirement life stories and scenarios. These stories and scenarios reveal major themes and events in retirees' lives as well as their interpretations, dreams and fantasies, fears and other feelings, and their cognitive perceptions of retirement.

The Generation of Retirees Studied in This Research

Israel's collective labor arrangements mandate retirement at age 65 years for men and 60 for women (Center for Planned Retirement, personal communication, December

2002). Aside from retirement age, the generation of men studied herein shared a historical and ideological background that colored their perceptions. Born between 1932 and 1934, they were all adolescents when the State of Israel was established in 1948 and adults in the country's formative years. Some fought in prestate paramilitary forces and

most in wars in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Virtually all helped transform the barren backwater of their youth into a modern, industrial state. And all shared in their generation's elevation of work to a central value that defined identity and gave life meaning.

In addition, most of this generation lived difficult lives. Most immigrated to Israel after the Holocaust or fled persecution in the Arab countries of the Middle East and Africa. Many were housed for extended periods in transit camps, tents, or shacks offering little protection from the elements. Many arrived penniless as adolescents or young men and threw themselves into any work to support themselves and their families. These hardships were compounded by participation in Israel's numerous wars. Since people cope with expected changes by drawing on their past (Whitbourne, 1985), this generation's experiences influenced its retirement perceptions and adjustment.

Methods

In 14 workplaces (evenly divided between the service and production sectors), we interviewed 56 Jewish men, or 86% of those about to retire. Approximately 40% were in management. Participants were born from 1932 to 1934, and most immigrated to Israel from America or Europe (39 %) or from Asia or Africa (43%); only 18% were Israeli-born. Almost all were married (93%), 79% had

But the main themes of all these [family] relationships are similar: The retiree seeks support, a coping model, instrumental help, and, especially, partners in this life transition.

completed at least some high school education, and 97% had two or more children. Approximately half (49%) identified themselves as healthy, and most as either traditionally observant (59%) or religious (32%).

Instruments

Two instruments were used: The standardized Personal Data Questionnaire (Sagy, 1989), which recorded respondents' demographics and preretirement situations; and semistructured interviews, conducted to obtain the life story and life scenario of each participant. Interviewees were asked to tell their life story and envisage the future (life scenario). Additional questions were posed to probe for information when respondents had difficulty expressing themselves. At the end of the interview, further questions were asked to obtain information on issues missing from the responses (e.g., family, friends, and work); the information was needed to interpret the specific interview and compare it with those of the other participants.

Procedures

Approximately 6 months before retirement (as is standard in retirement research; see, for example, Gall, Evans, & Howard, 1997), employees approaching retirement age were located in collaboration with occupational and industrial social workers and interviewed in the workplace according to Kaufman's (1986) approach: (a) Respondents were informed that the purpose of the interviews was to examine life transitions in general and their transition to retirement in particular; (b) one interviewer conducted all interviews with the help of written guidelines to ensure reliability; and (c) the sessions were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted during working hours, and each lasted 1 to 3 hours. Following the interviews, participants completed the Personal Data Questionnaire. All respondents gave written consent to participate in the study.

For the sake of reliability, the interviews were analyzed by both the researcher and another senior social worker following the three main steps of the content analysis guidelines (Patton, 1990; Unrau & Coleman, 1997). First, each text was read in order to hear the interviewee's voice. Second, meaning units in the life stories and life scenarios were collected and reduced to 11 content clusters: family, self, life events, work, retirement, leisure, bridging life stages, health, social comparison, interpersonal relationships, and aging. Finally, we analyzed the subthemes in each cluster. In this study, we report only on the subthemes in the family cluster.

Findings

Some 91% of participants mentioned the family in their life stories and life scenarios. On the eve of retirement, life stories referred to respondents' parents and children,

whereas life scenarios paid far greater attention to spouses and grandchildren.

Parents in Life Stories

Respondents' life stories presented parents in a broad spectrum of roles and points in the life cycle. In childhood, parents contained, supported, protected, and rescued; in early adolescence, they served as guides. In midlife, life stories paid parents little attention, but in the transition to retirement, the parental role reasserted itself, and contact with parents rose even more. Participants assessed their parents' contributions, deaths, and old age. Most portraits were very emotional, full of longing and extensive descriptions of parents' deaths, which dashed hopes of parental attention to the next generation. Hence, the perception of retirement as a loss.

Parents as facilitators of their children's integration.

Parents appeared most commonly as attentive, containing, and shaping figures in respondents' childhoods. One respondent described his parents' concern that he fit into the youth movement rather than wander the streets: "And when my father he saw me roaming around there by the soccer field most of my free time, he made sure they would take me to the Young Guard chapter in Petah Tikva."

Parental support also manifested itself in army induction, then one's ticket into Israeli society:

I was small and thin. . . . and I even had a problem with my right hand, and if they detected it, they might not want to draft me. . . . My mother and I were so scared they wouldn't want me, but I was drafted and made it through the army. We couldn't let ourselves think I wouldn't be drafted.

Father was the distant educator, while mother played an emotional role ("we were scared") and was more of a partner.

Even respondents who disappointed their parents spoke of how their mothers and/or fathers prepared them for life and expressed clear expectations. Simhon's father urged him to acquire a profession and an education, but he remained a simple laborer:

My father, of blessed memory, told me, "Go study, in Morocco, learn to read, learn well." [Father] took me to study, and I would run away. One day he said to me, "You'll grow up, get married, have children, and the fact is that I'll talk to you and be embarrassed."

Parents as impediments. Some described their parents as having held them back and narrowed their options. Out of economic necessity, Lavi's parents wanted him to be a farmer: "I very much wanted to act in the theater. For all

kinds of reasons, it didn't work out. My parents objected, and I had no support from them, so after 3 years of trying, I left it."

To this day he feels he's in the wrong place and profession. To cope with his distress, he tries to generalize his frustration and create an inclusive social solution:

As a parent, I can no longer correct the mistakes my parents made, but from a more general social perspective, I can say that today I would require every couple about to get married to take a parenting course, because we go learn every profession except the most important one. So sometimes I ask myself what right parents have, since from the start you see what will come of their education. Sometimes I can ask what right they have to bring children into the world. [long silence]

These words illustrate the importance of a containing, supportive figure throughout the life cycle; if not a parent, someone else. For instance, Haim transferred this role to his wife (see the later section on spouses).

Parents as children. Life stories depicted role reversals between parents and children, especially in the wake of two life events: immigration to Israel and parents' aging.

Immigration to Israel. Respondents contrasted their smooth childhood integration into Israel with their parents' helplessness. Thus, in effect, they served as their parents' parents. Maurice recalled his immigrant parents' advanced age, foreignness, and helplessness:

I worried about my parents, who were in a transit camp, and I helped them make a living. I began working in the post office, and then, ... to manage to support everyone, I switched to working in a bank in 1963.

Parents' aging. Parent-child role reversal increases as parents age. Their dependence and suffering weighed heavily on respondents, usually in the context of their parents' deaths. Shemer spoke about his parents' aging and its toll on their family:

My mother wasn't okay. She was fearful. We kids took sleeping shifts so she wouldn't be alone at night. In the last year, 1996, [thinks] I was there. I made her food. I invited her to eat, I sat her in a chair ... she didn't know what was happening with her. I knew she'd had an attack. I called the caregiver and Magen David [emergency medical service]. They took her to the hospital. [sobs]

Parents after death. The demise of parents, young or old, was a watershed in respondents' lives, however long ago it occurred and whatever its cause. Maurice talked about the

pain of his parents' death and the need to cope with life by himself:

When I was 7, my father died of a blood pressure-related disease.... I suffered for lack of a father. [pause] In 1984, my mother passed away. It made a major impact on me. Slowly I got over it. Over time.... When I was a boy, Mother made every effort to ensure that we lacked nothing. She helped us survive.... and when we immigrated to Israel, Mother was in a transit camp, and I was in the army during that period. [pause] I was attached to her, and I miss her.

Accounts of parents' deaths were filled with emotion, crying, yearning, and feelings of lack, particularly when the circumstances left respondents unresolved. For example, Dani's mother committed suicide on the eve of his demobilization; he has lived with this secret for more than 40 years:

I suffered a tragedy. A month before I got out of the army, my mother passed away. I was left with my father. Listen ... this is the first time in my life that I'm talking about it with a stranger. The first time in my life.... I told you my mother passed away a month before my release. Actually, she committed suicide. Is that a simple matter?! I've never told anyone. It was very traumatic for me.

Parental loss as a mandate for continuity. Many respondents lost their parents in the Holocaust. Some of these mothers and fathers sacrificed their lives to save their children. Respondents reconstructed their final moments with their parents, noted parental influence on their lives today, and yearned for their parents in their own retirement and old age.

Many participants felt continuity between their parents' generation, their own, and their children's. Others sought to create it by serving as an intergenerational link. Reuven even hoped that the education and values he had received at home and passed on to his children would extend to future generations of his family:

We were taught that the family is a framework. I'm one of four children. I have four children. I was very attached to my parents, and my children are very attached to us, to my wife and me. I hope their children will also see the family as a framework. I hope so.

Yitzhak also described himself as emulating the parenting he saw in his parents' home: "I try to apply what my parents taught me.... My mother used to say, 'The children

will do what you do.' And I say, 'My parents helped me, and I help my children.'"

Parents in Life Scenarios

The emotional significance of parents in life stories continued in the life scenarios in light of retirement and aging.

Parents as role models. Respondents used their parents as models of what to do and not do in retirement and old age. Yaki, Menahem, and Menashe tried to learn from their elderly parents' mistakes: "I won't sit home like my father. He deteriorated; it wasn't good for him."

Parents as an emotional resource for coping with retirement and aging. Parents provided significant assistance in the transition to retirement. Thus, Menashe tearfully longed for his father: "If my father were alive today, I'd consult him.... I miss him, I miss having a father figure who's knowledgeable and helpful.... If he were alive, I would turn to him; he would help me."

Retirement as an opportunity to repair relationships with parents. Some respondents attempted to repay their debt to their parents. Levi planned to move near his children abroad, thereby atoning for having left his own parents in immigrating to Israel:

Some things have left really deep scars: Father's death, my immigration to Israel, my heart surgery, and the departure of the children.... Today I'm traveling to be with my children, not as I left my father to grow old alone.

Children in Life Stories

Life stories presented children as a meaningful backdrop to self-portraits and self-perceptions throughout the life cycle.

Children as symbols of the transition from married life to family life and parenthood. Children appeared principally in respondents' descriptions of themselves and their families: "My name is Shlomo. I'm married and have three children—two are married—and three grandchildren."

Some interviewees ranked their children's births among the most significant events in their lives, constituting an emotional transition to family life:

In 1962 I got married, and at the end of that year my first child was born. This was of course tremendously moving. We labored to give our children the best. The birth of our first, the feelings surrounding the birth, the events that one might say I underwent, evoked great emotion and changed my life.

Children as a resource. Some respondents viewed their children as a source of pride, satisfaction, and strength: "My family life has been superb to this day. May it continue. I get satisfaction from the children."

Reuven, a Holocaust survivor, prized his daughter's documentation of her family's wartime history:

My daughter wrote ... this story in her own words.... The teacher said it was a beautiful story, and she told the teacher it wasn't a story, it was true. So [the teacher] asked to keep the page as a memento.

Children as a stumbling block. Occasionally children represented educational and health challenges. Yehoshua lamented his need to support his unemployed son despite his own scarce resources:

The children ... are also in a bad way.... The youngest got married. He was working. That day they threw him out of work. He sits at home. And he comes to my house to eat. He and his wife. What can I do? ... I also don't earn much.... Throw them out? I can't throw them out.

Menahem recalled his son's injury in the Lebanon War:

In '94 [or '95; he goes back and forth], my youngest was wounded in Lebanon. He's an IDF disabled vet. He lost an eye. He still has shrapnel in his body.... It was really the only traumatic incident there was.... He was supposed to come for his birthday, it was in December. He called from Rambam [Hospital] and said he'd been hit. On our way to the hospital, they announced on the radio that someone had been severely wounded. In the army, "severely wounded" is like ... 99% of the time, it's the end.... When I finally saw him, I realized it wasn't so bad.... Externally, it was a little scary, he absorbed the impact internally, his eyes were swollen ... and his face was black.... He was blinded in one eye. He managed, he didn't manage. He made peace with it. He didn't complain even about this. He didn't sink into depression. He encouraged those who were with him. [long silence]

Children as torch bearers bridging past, present, and future. Children were seen as bridging past, present, and future in family, education, and occupation. Within the family, respondents emphasized patterns, customs, and behavioral norms characterizing their parents, themselves, and their children. Moreover, they hoped their children would take after them. Regarding education and occupation, they hoped their children would revive family traditions disrupted by external factors such as war

and immigration to Israel. Said Yitzhak, "Before the war my father was a doctor.... You know the rest: Today my son is studying medicine, and I'm pleased. He's continuing the family tradition of studies and a prestigious profession."

Others perceived their children as finishing what they themselves had started or missed out on in light of generational, economic, health, or other constraints:

When I look at my children, they've finished [their studies] in an orderly way, and now they're working in their professions. I always missed that. I felt the lack of studies, of sitting in school ... I took courses ... evening and morning courses ... I didn't learn in an organized fashion.

Children as part of life assessment. In assessing their lives, respondents judged their success partly by their children's educational accomplishments, affluence, or prestigious occupation or by their offspring's triumph over the Nazis. Conversely, children's woes pointed to their parents' failure to educate or provide. Menashe connected his feelings about his life to his opinion of his children:

With my children, I really labored to give them the best education.... I didn't force them into anything.... With my oldest son I'm satisfied: He studied, he progressed. My other son is a fine young man, but in terms of studies he's a little disappointing, so he also suffers in life. He lacks a proper profession. He completed high school and that was it. My daughter is also okay.

Children in Life Scenarios

Here children constituted a resource in grappling with retirement and aging.

Children as a source of emotional support. Children "held the anxiety" in respondents' transition to retirement, which most viewed as a crisis event, a stressor, a cause of uncertainty: "The children are more worried than I am. I've worked 60 years—that's enough for me. It's time to rest. That's what I say to calm them. They're anxious."

Children were also supportive partners in the decision-making processes attending retirement. For example, only with his family did Yanai feel safe enough to waver about his life and future:

I don't look at someone [and think] I'll be like him, because it's impossible to be someone else. In my thoughts, except for my close family, my wife, the children, or friends, I'm not ... going to tell this story. About retirement and aging, I'm not talking.

Additionally, associating retirement with aging, sickness, and dependency, respondents questioned whether their children would take care of them when necessary. Some participants were encouraged by their own attention to their elderly parents, including role reversals following immigration to Israel. Reminiscing about his father, however, Menashe fretted about his own declining health, his old age, and his dependence on his children:

Maybe because I'm retiring, I'm remembering my father's difficult moments ... may my children not have to help me, and I hope I won't get to that point. Because my father's saying is really so true, that a father should give to his children, not take. What now?... Today I'm getting old. I see my capabilities dwindling physically and healthwise, and it's a little scary. I hope not to burden the family and the children.

Children as something to do in retirement. Children helped occupy respondents' spare time. After retirement, then, children and their families would provide something to do, for example "I'll work with my son" and "I'll help my children, I'll travel to them." Reuven detailed his daily schedule, including helping his family, which he considered a means of coping with retirement:

The family will grow and needs reinforcements. For instance, I got to work late because my daughter needed to be in court—she's a lawyer—and my son-in-law was sick, so I had to take care of him, bringing him for checkups, as well as taking my grandson to kindergarten. Even today, if the family needs help, that's the most important thing.

Spouses in Life Stories and Life Scenarios

In both life stories and scenarios, most respondents assigned their spouses an emotional role—positive or negative—throughout the life cycle, whereas in life scenarios an instrumental function was added. Spousal descriptions were dichotomous, "good wife" versus "bad wife." The dominant voice (some 70% of respondents) referred to the spouse in the third person and indirectly. Some presented their wives as stumbling blocks. These findings accentuate the perception of retirement as a crisis and a stressor period.

In light of these results, we will present the spouses' sub-themes together in the life stories and scenarios.

In life stories, wives appeared four ways:

In comparison to their husbands. Both Boaz and Menahem described their wives as their opposites: "Unlike me, my wife doesn't work. She's home, she doesn't want to go out and have a good time." "I'm secular, but my wife is religious."

In the background. In these cases, the respondent referred to being married and a parent, but never mentioned his wife's name, occupation, or relationship with him.

Indirectly. These third-person references were distant and negative, as in "I'll fix her so she'll go overseas with me." Some respondents ignored their spouses' existence. When asked about this omission, Lavi replied, "Why mention her?"

As a partner. These participants spoke about their spouses empathically, warmly, and appreciatively, frequently using the phrase "my wife." What did respondents' wives mean to them? Answers varied:

A symbol of the transition from the freedom of single life to the burden of family and routine. Spouses were commonly mentioned in marking the event of marriage. Generally, this reference was accompanied by comments about the significance of the change ("moving from single life to marriage is already something else"), the respondent's choice of spouse ("it's a good thing I married my wife"), and her unique qualities ("a woman of valor") rather than sentimentality ("I'm lucky to have her"). These references sometimes prompted mention of retirement as well ("like marriage and childbirth, retirement is also a developmental life transition").

A partner in creating the past. For some 30% of respondents, the spouse served as a partner in life, sharing experiences, emotions, work-related dilemmas, family, friends, and decisions throughout the life cycle. Moshe detailed the areas of partnership: "We did everything together, including even deciding about emissary work, childrearing, and even the move to a moshav."

So, too, Dani, Yaakov, and Menashe told their stories in the plural: "We, meaning I and my wife," and sometimes, "We, meaning my wife and I."

Reuven expanded on this togetherness:

She's my partner. These things I learned from my father. He said, "My partner is my wife." And I'm not at all ashamed of it. We consult each other about everything. Aside from that, I told you that in 31 years we still haven't finished our honeymoon; 31 years and we're still on our honeymoon.

Menashe saw his wife as a full partner as well, especially in resolving disagreements:

When I got married, I knew my wife would have to be a partner in life and nothing else. So ... whatever I demanded of my wife, I demanded first of myself.... I'll tell you what I also told my wife when we got married: We'll quarrel among

ourselves about all kinds of things, but after half an hour, whoever concludes that he's at fault should come ask for forgiveness. This is the secret of our family life to this day.

Later, he described the traits that had made his wife a resource:

With my wife, I've really lived an ideal life. I have a wife who makes allowances, understands, and also has modest demands. Here and there she knows what the options are, and in keeping with that ... there's complete harmony between us.

A partner in the future. Among a smaller segment of respondents, the spouse also constituted a partner in the future, in retirement planning and philosophy ("My wife told me that my retirement date was coming up, that I couldn't go on denying it, that I had to start preparing"), and in discussing and dealing with aging and the continuation of life. These participants viewed their wives as someone to talk to and spend time with. With their spouses, they wouldn't be alone.

Albert spoke warmly of his wife and expected to be together with her after retirement, even in prosaic things like "watching TV together." Ze'ev described the importance and good feeling of coming home and sharing work experiences with his wife: "You know what it's like to come home, sit myself down at the table, and relate what's happening. My wife knew them all, she also worked here. I didn't even have to name names—she knew."

An obstacle. Many respondents saw their spouses as stumbling blocks in realizing their ambitions and dreams. The role of shattering illusions, cited by Gould (1978), was assigned to their wives. Recalled Rami, "We had tickets on a ship to Israel, which the parents had sent us, and at the last minute she nixed it ... afterward war broke out, and we came to Israel with nothing."

Spouses demanded concession and consideration: "If someone gave me a retirement plan, I'd tell him that maybe it sounded good to me, but since we're a couple, maybe my spouse had other plans ... I had to check."

An emblem of failure. The life assessments inspired by life stories and the transition to retirement left some respondents with a bad feeling about their lives, occasionally symbolized by their spouses. Remarked Lavi, for example, "I wanted to stay in business, but financially it didn't go. She never forgets that and doesn't let me forget."

A dialectic symbol regarding life in general and retirement in particular. The spouse moderated the transition to retirement but served as an unwelcome reminder of both past and anticipated attitudes. Within this context, wives were expected to "hold" their spouses' anxiety. Respondents spoke of their apprehension about the future but attributed it to their spouses. Yitzhak described his

wife's anxiety about his retirement:

My wife is worried about what I'll do and what will happen in retirement.... My wife is concerned about it. She tells me, "You're absorbed in work all day ... what's going to be when you retire?" She's more worried than I am.

Participants also felt ill-equipped to spend so much time with their spouses:

My wife says, "You'll sit here at home and drive us crazy".... In the [retirement] workshop they spoke about relationships with one's wife, but talk is one thing, and actions, another ... I don't know how we'll get along together ... I'm afraid of it.

In addition to the emotional relationship, respondents assigned their wives a functional role, especially in life scenarios.

A manager. Several respondents deemed their spouses their "managers." Amotz expected his wife to continue playing that role: "Like on kibbutz, my wife organizes my work. She tells me what to do, and more than that, she sees to all my needs. My wife will already tell me what to do."

This attitude was more prevalent in life scenarios, about which there was greater uncertainty and searching for a dominant/decisive surrogate parent.

Grandchildren in Life Stories and Life Scenarios

Grandchildren figured significantly more in life scenarios than in life stories. (Whenever the narrator related to his grandchildren in his life story, he actually talked about the future.) Relationships with grandchildren were more positive than those with significant others and offset past failings and present worries. In addition, grandchildren significantly enhanced respondents' sense of continuity and perceived impact on the future.

Interviewees generally smiled in discussing what grandchildren variously meant to them.

Grandchildren as symbols of future development, bridging past, present, and future. At this stage of the life cycle, with families shrinking due to spouses' deaths, grandchildren crossed the boundaries between present and future and even helped define the family: "I'm married, with two children and three grandchildren."

Even participants who were not yet grandparents tended to say, "I'm married, with two children, and I hope I'll have grandchildren."

Grandchildren fostered a sense of continuity, particularly in the life scenarios:

I'm trying to apply what my parents taught me.... I learned life experience from them, and I try to pass it on to the children.... And you see it even in the grandchildren, with my children.... Children will do what you do. What children learn at home, that's what they do. Me, my son, and my grandchild.

Barak, a Holocaust survivor, took his entire family on a tour of its roots:

It was the first time I'd left Israel in 50 years. My grandson became bar mitzva, and the whole family went on a trip. I felt nothing, because it didn't interest me. I did it for him and for my wife.... I arrived in Paris and showed [them] where I'd lived 50 years ago. The place hadn't changed. But for them it was an experience to see where Grandpa had lived and to take pictures. If I take another trip elsewhere to show them what we went through, where I was, so they'll know.

Grandchildren as a resource in coping with retirement. Respondents worried about how they would occupy themselves leaving the workforce. Some planned to spend time with their families, including their grandchildren: "My children and grandchildren occupy me today when I'm busy, working. My wife and I devote time to them. So certainly when we're totally free, we'll have more time."

Involvement with grandchildren as compensation for inattention to children. Said Menahem,

Now I'm trying to compensate the grandchildren, how you say, in place of the children, because I didn't pay attention to the children when they were little. I always thought my career was my first priority.... and today when I have time, I try to live it up—I take the grandchildren to the park, I take them on outings. I don't remember taking my child out in a stroller. Maybe on Saturday; during the week I don't remember taking them.... I don't remember a day of going or staying because of them, or a parents' meeting or taking them to the doctor. My career was more important.

Grandchildren as a source of satisfaction, pleasure, and meaning in life. Respondents spoke about their grandchildren with ease, pride, and satisfaction. Amram joyfully described his "ritual" of get-together with his children's children. Menahem also enthused about his family, especially his only grandson:

It's already a week since I've seen the grandchildren. ... I'm going to see them... And when Grandpa comes, they ask, "What did you bring?" [smiles] ... I have a terrific 4-and-a-half-year old grandson ... I don't know what to do with myself anymore. He's not here. I haven't seen him for several months.... Every Friday I took him out. The greatest pleasure ... I love children, what can I say? And my children, I have an excellent relationship with them. They love me and I love them. But a grandchild [growing emotional], that's something.... They always told me, I heard from others ... but I didn't know.

Grandchildren as extending the parental role.

Respondents enjoyed helping their grandchildren and children financially. For Simha, the fact that he had managed to continue providing for his grandchildren proved that retirement was not a difficult transition, or at least not "some kind of plunge."

Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, respondents' life stories and scenarios presented family issues in a broad spectrum of roles and points all over the life course, and the family emerged as a significant factor that affected and shaped their entire life space throughout life. On the eve of the retirement, respondents wished to see their families as a supportive, containing environment, even if in practice the situation seemed otherwise. The need for family support and even the ability to feel contained and held by the family during the retirement period matched findings in other studies

(Lowenthal, Thurnher & Chiriboga, 1975; Szinovacz et al., 1992), including those conducted by Sagy and Antonovsky (1992) and Kulik (1999), who examined Israeli retirees' marriages and concluded that the family was central in the transition and adjustment to retirement. Moreover, on the eve of retirement, husbands expected to be dependent on their wives (primarily in health matters), and this expectation increased after retirement. The literature on retirement and aging maintains that an emphasis on family and familial closeness offsets the processes of disengagement from work, friends, and environment characteristic of this life stage (Hochschild, 1975).

The life stories and life scenarios differed with respect to

the chief family figures. The life stories related mainly to parents and children, the life scenarios to spouses and grandchildren. According to developmental psychology, aging adults tend to dredge up memories of life assessment (Coleman, 1986). Reminiscing about earlier periods of life helps the older person reorganize the past within a stronger and more meaningful life structure, clarify questions and unresolved conflicts, and deepen his understanding of the network of significant people (usually family) and events in his life. On the eve of retirement, then, one is very involved with his past and chiefly with his relationship with his parents. On the other hand, to grapple with and accept the future, he deals with his relationships with his wife, children, and grandchildren. But the main themes of all these relationships are similar: The retiree seeks support, a coping model, instrumental help, and, especially, partners in this life transition. The significance attributed to family, particularly parental representation, can be understood in light of developmental-psychoanalytical theories emphasizing object relations throughout life (Cohler, 1998; Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981; McCrae & Costa, 1990). During the retirement period, most respondents granted their parents a key role. Clearly, prior relationships with parents influence the entire life cycle (Strenger, 1999), including retirement and aging (Sagy & Antonovsky, 1999; Bar-Tur, 1991). This study's findings demonstrate the life-long need for a significant figure on both inner and concrete emotional levels. This figure shifted from parents and children in life stories to spouses and grandchildren in life scenarios, reflecting adaptation to a new situation and the

need for continuity even posthumously. The weight assigned to the spouse stemmed from feelings of impotence, anxiety, and dependence accompanying retirement and concern about health deterioration. In contrast, talk about grandchildren bore out the continuity theory, in which intergenerational existence frees a person to accept the end of life without fearing death (Ryff, 1984; Theriault, 1994). In addition, the

... intervention should focus not only on retirees and their wives but on the family as a whole, including children and grandchildren ...

finding supports Whitbourne's (1985) adult adjustment model. Analyses of the life stories and life scenarios reveal that looking at and evaluating one's past (as seen in the life story) and, simultaneously, looking towards the future (as seen in the life scenario) are part and parcel of the process of retirement and it enables the subjects to prepare themselves to the upcoming transition.

The importance of the family issues might be explained

by the demographics such as Jewish tradition and Oriental origin (which characterized most of the population of this study), coupled with Israel's security situation, account for the great importance respondents attached to family (Peres & Katz, 1990); or by the fact that only cases with health problems the respondents were preoccupied with the present, fighting feelings of dependency rooted in medical conditions and not just in old age (Baltes, 1997). Negative life stories and scenarios were accompanied by family involvement. Furthermore, respondents acknowledged the significance of their parents and of childhood relationships with them throughout the life cycle, even in retirement. Likewise, Hagberg's (1995) research on aging adults found that childhood and adolescence profoundly affect adjustment to retirement.

Study Implications

The research findings elicit several practical recommendations for therapists and practitioners who work with people on the eve of their retirement. Many of the recommendations can be implemented in retirement workshops that aim to improve the retirement adjustment process. The most important results shed light on retirees' loneliness and need for support. Supportive preretirement interventions are recommended to resolve emotional difficulties posed by the prospect of ending work. Such interventions would help preretirees rely on their families and help family members create a supportive, useful environment. Second, the findings shed light on the importance of creating a future and continuing the "life dream." Thus, it would be worthwhile to adopt narrative methods of interventions for facilitating the creation of life stories—including references to prior family relationships; help individuals develop life scenarios in accordance with current developmental tasks; create continuity between past, present, and future; and grapple with retirement. Third, therapists should be bear in mind that health problems, unhelpful families, and occupational-concrete dilemmas portend maladjustment. Fourth, based on the life scenario, family perceptions' contribution to postretirement adjustment suggests that intervention should focus not only on retirees and their wives but on the family as a whole, including children and grandchildren, especially when retirees plan their future and create a sense of continuity to help them accept their retirement transition and their aging.

Although these recommendations are based on the experience of a particular cohort of Israeli men, the study findings are also thought-provoking for countries where gender roles and work-retirement behaviors are more diverse. Further study with diverse populations, such as women, is recommended.

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