

# *Social Role Identities Among Older Adults in a Continuing Care Retirement Community*

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Basing their hypotheses on identity and life-course theories, the authors examine the social role identities of a group of older adults ( $N = 92$ ) both before and after their move into a new continuing care retirement community (CCRC) to investigate whether this transition is linked to changes in social role identities. The congruence between actually enacting a role and choosing it as a role identity varies with the role. Current role behaviors and satisfaction predict role identity for two institutionalized, public roles (volunteer and church/synagogue member) but are less related to two more private roles (parent and friend). Cluster analysis reveals a typology of three discrete groups, based on social role identities: an involved group with a high number of role identities, a group focused on family roles identities, and a group focused on the friend role identity. The social role identities of the three groups changed in different ways after moving to the CCRC.

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*Social role identities* are key components of self-concept, perceptions locating individuals in the larger matrix of social relationships. These identities reflect the system of social positions held by an individual. But it is unclear as to whether identities reflect *currently* held roles, *past* roles, or roles *expected* to be taken on in the future. Moreover, this system of social role identities may well change during the life course,

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as individuals move in and out of roles. In later life, many older adults have few prescribed roles—most are no longer employed for pay and few are responsible for young children. But the fact that society provides few norms for later life may also mean that the role identities of older adults are less constrained by actual role involvement than are those of younger adults.

Life-course theory holds that transitions are related to changes in roles and, possibly, to changes in identity as well (Elder 1995; Moen 1995). One common transition in later life is a move from independent housing to some type of congregate housing. For example, increasing numbers of older Americans are choosing to move to continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs). For a substantial entry fee and continuing monthly fees, these facilities offer independent living with a variety of health services and facilities available when needed. A CCRC is designed as a comprehensive facility so residents have a continuum of care available in one place (Sherwood et al. 1997).

Although the transition to a CCRC is voluntary and may involve relocating within the same city or town rather than a major geographic move, a shift to age-segregated congregate living is nonetheless a major transition for older people accustomed to residing in the broader, age-integrated community. Most must sell or disperse a significant portion of their possessions as they “downsize” from single-family homes to the CCRC’s small cottages or apartments. In moving to a CCRC, residents often sell the home in which they raised their children, with some moving away from friends and a familiar community. The move from a mixed-age setting to a residence with only older people may affect both social relationships and individual social identities.

In this article, we examine the social role identities of a group of older adults both before and after their move into a new CCRC, to investigate whether this transition is linked to changes in identities. We address hypotheses based on a life-course formulation framework (which suggests that identities may well reflect a cumulation of experience, including past as well as current roles) in tandem with identity theory (which suggests that role identities reflect role salience as indicated by current role behaviors and domains of life satisfaction). These analyses extend our knowledge of possible influences on role identities in later life.

### *Theory and Hypotheses*

The view of the self as composed of a number of identities has a long history, beginning with William James (1890). Early role theory emphasized the congruence between the self and the social environment, such that roles—and role identities—reflect individuals' positions in the social structure (Linton 1936; Parsons 1951). More recent theory views social roles and identities as more loosely coupled, giving more weight to the possibilities of subjective definitions, apart from actual role enactments (Biddle 1986; Stryker 1980; Turner 1978).

Similarly, identity theory views the self as composed of many separate parts, including role identities, or “internalized positional designations” (Stryker 1980:60). Identity theory suggests that social role identities are organized into a *hierarchy of salience*. This helps to explain choices among different lines of action: The salience of an identity is key to its invocation in any particular situation (Wells and Stryker 1988).

A good deal of recent research has been devoted to the structure of social and personal identities (Deaux 1993; Ogilvie 1987; Reid and Deaux 1996; Rosenberg and Gara 1985), some focusing on older people (Freund and Smith 1999). Other research on identity in later life focuses on the relationship between physical changes associated with aging and changes in identity (Whitbourne, 1985, 1996). Here we focus on the social role identities of a group of older adults undergoing an important life change. Focusing on social role identities allows us to examine the relationships among role occupancy (currently enacting a particular role), role satisfaction, and role identity (specifically, saying that this is an important way in which they see themselves). Our goal is to understand the relationship between a change in the social environment and continuity and/or changes in older people's social role identities. Identity theory suggests a correlation between role occupancy and social role identity, and between role satisfaction and social role identity:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Older adults who currently engage in role-related activities will see this role as highly salient to their self-concept. This implies that current role-related behaviors are positively related to social role identity.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Older adults who find a great deal of satisfaction in a role will tend to see this role as highly salient to their lives. This implies that the areas in which individuals find a great deal of satisfaction will be positively related to their social role identities, regardless of whether they currently occupy that role.

Life course research holds that past experiences matter, shaping subjective definitions and assessments (Giele and Elder 1998). In addition, continuity theory (Atchley 1989) posits that individuals seek to maintain coherence and continuity. Thus, older adults may well retain social role identities tied to their past lives—identities associated with roles they either no longer occupy or in which they have reduced their involvement. Roles that are more privately defined (such as parent and friend) may generate strong identities that transcend time and place (e.g., Deaux 1993). This suggests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Private role identities may persist regardless of current role enactment.

Identities and their relative salience are not static but change during the life course as individuals enter and leave social roles. Changes in the social environment force individuals to forge new links between important role identities and their new environment (Deaux 1993). We suggest that moves to senior housing may be a key life-course transition with implications for both roles and social role identities. The decision to move to a long-term care environment signals awareness of the need to provide for possible future health problems and limitations. It is also, by definition, one's "last" move. Thus, we expect that the move to a CCRC may lead to changes in the way residents see themselves.

This is also congruent with person-environment theory, which views behavior as a joint function of the person and the environment (cf. Lawton and Nahemow 1973; Lewin 1935, 1951), an environment that is social as well as physical. For example, Carp and Carp (1980) show that more extroverted individuals benefit from a move to a socially enriched environment, whereas those who are socially disengaged prior to moving become even more disengaged after moving to congregate housing. Individuals will tend to seek out environments that are congruent with their needs (Kahana 1982).

Social role identities may be an important resource for coping with life changes (Freund and Smith 1999; Moen 1995; Ogilvie 1987). Life-course scholars (Giele and Elder 1998; Moen and Fields 1998; O'Rand 1996) point to the possibility of an *accumulation of advantage*, with those occupying roles at prior life-course stages and/or experiencing satisfaction in particular role domains most apt to continue to incorporate those role identities into their self-concept. This suggests the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3:* Those individuals holding more social role identities before entering the CCRC will maintain or increase their identities, whereas those with fewer social role identities prior to the move may lose some of their role identities.

## *Method*

### *SAMPLE*

We test these hypotheses by using data collected in the first (1995) and second (1997) waves of the Pathways to Life Quality study, a long-term study of residential change and adjustment in the later years. Respondents in wave 1 consisted of 101 individuals from the group that founded a CCRC in upstate New York, who were interviewed prior to their move. They were recruited through a letter sent by the director of the facility. This baseline premove sample consisted of 50% of the 204 individuals who were expecting to move into the CCRC during the winter of 1995 to 1996. Of the 101 who participated in the first wave, 4 decided not to move to the CCRC and 5 died before the summer of 1997. We interviewed all of the remaining 92 individuals in the summer of 1997, almost two years after their move. Respondents are all White and most are highly educated (61% have a graduate degree). This reflects the typical composition of CCRCs given their high cost (Sherwood et al. 1997). More than half of the sample is female (64%) and more than half are married (68%). Most moved into the CCRC from the local area (78%). Using a detailed questionnaire, we interviewed respondents in their homes. They also completed a self-administered booklet, which they returned by mail.

*MEASURES*

One section of the interview schedule inquired about current, past, and expected social role identities. Respondents in wave 1 and wave 2 were given a list of 11 social role identities and were asked to place a check next to those “most important to you now.” In addition, in the first interview, they were then asked to check those that “will be most important to you two years from now” and “those that were most important to you when you were in your 50s.” The social role identities are daughter/son, parent, spouse, student, worker, friend, citizen, homemaker, church/synagogue member, grandparent, and volunteer. Because few respondents chose them, we do not include the role identities of the homemaker, student, and worker in the analyses.

Because respondents were not asked to order them in importance, we have limited insight into the relative rankings of their social role identities. However, because respondents were asked to check only those identities “most important to you now,” the data we do have should include the social role identities at the top of respondents’ hierarchy of salience, rather than every social role identity held by each individual.

Domains of life satisfaction were assessed with the following question: “Which of the following has given you the most (and next most) satisfaction in your life?” Response choices were leisure activities, family, community or volunteer activities, employment/career, religious involvements, friends, other. These were coded into dummy variables indicating whether the respondent chose the area as either the most satisfying or the second most satisfying involvement. For example, those reporting “family” as providing the greatest satisfaction would give a score of 1 on the family satisfaction measure.

*ANALYTIC STRATEGY*

We use logistic regression to assess the relationships between personal characteristics, role behaviors, role satisfaction, and social role identities. Because of the small sample size, we first tested individual independent variables. Only those variables significantly related to the dependent variable in the bivariate analyses are included in the final model. We use cluster analysis (Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1985) to examine possible patterns of social role identities.

## Results

### *SOCIAL ROLE IDENTITIES AND OCCUPANCY*

Table 1 shows the distribution of eight social role identities that respondents reported in 1995 and 1997 in columns 2 and 3, only for the 84 respondents answering the role identity questions in both years. Column 4 of Table 1 describes the criteria for role occupancy, whereas column 5 shows the percentage of the sample (in 1997) currently occupying each role. Column 6 in Table 1 shows the congruence between role occupancy and social role identity—that is, the percentage of those (in 1997) currently occupying each role and who identify with it. The last column of Table 1 gives the percentage of the sample currently occupying the role and who do *not* identify with the role.

The spouse role produces the most congruent responses—almost all of the married respondents (98.2%) choose the spouse role identity. At the lower end, only about a quarter of respondents (27.4%) identify with the citizen role. These two extremes are useful for considering the nature of social role identities. Being married structures daily experience in many different ways; marital status is also a key status variable for social relationships within the CCRC (Oggins and Kalinowski 1999). Citizenship, however, generally has little significance for daily activities and is often salient only during elections. Table 1 shows that the rate of social role identities for those occupying other roles is between 45% and 60%.

### *PREDICTING FOUR ROLE IDENTITIES*

Recall that we hypothesize that regarding particular social role identities, both current role-relevant activities and satisfaction in the role will be positively related to choosing the social role identity as one of the “most important.” We next assess whether social role identities are predicted by current role-relevant behavior and main areas of life satisfaction. There is sufficient information in the interview to consider role activity and satisfaction for four different social role identities: parent, friend, church/synagogue member, and volunteer. Table 2 shows the results of logistic regression predicting the choice of parent identity (for those respondents with children only). The key finding from Table 2 is that choosing the parent role identity shows

TABLE 1  
 Distribution of Role Identities and Role Occupancy Among Residents of a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC)

<i>Role Identity</i>	<i>Percentage Choosing Role Identity 1995</i>	<i>Percentage Choosing Role Identity 1997</i>	<i>Who Occupies the Role (1997)</i>	<i>Percentage Occupying Role</i>	<i>Percentage Occupying the Role Who Identify With the Role</i>	<i>Percentage Not Occupying the Role Who Identify With the Role</i>
Spouse	69.0	66.7	Married in 1997	67.9	98.2	0
Friend	78.6	59.5	Has at least one friend	100	59.5	0
Parent	50.0	53.6	One or more children	88.1	60.8	0
Grandparent	54.8	51.2	One or more grandchildren	82.1	60.9	6.7
Volunteer	39.3	38.1	Report volunteering inside or outside CCRC	82.1	46.4	0
Church or synagogue member	45.2	34.5	Attend religious services	67.9	50.9	0
Citizen	39.3	27.4	All	100	27.4	—
Daughter/son	26.2	25.0	Have living parents	0	—	25.0

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, CCRC sample 1997;  $N = 84$ .



TABLE 2  
 Odds of Choosing Parent Role Identity in 1997  
 by Personal Characteristics, Parent Role Behaviors,  
 and Areas of Life Satisfaction, for Parents Only (logistic regression)

Current role behaviors	
See children often	.31*
Give regular help to children	3.57**
Areas of life satisfaction	
Leisure	.17***
Community activities	.32*
-2 log likelihood	80.9
<i>N</i>	74
Not significantly related to parent role identity	
Personal characteristics: gender, age, marital status	
Current role behaviors: child lives locally, talk to children often, receive regular help from children, has grandchildren, number of children	
Areas of life satisfaction: friends, career, family	

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, continuing care retirement community (CCRC) sample parents 1997.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

little relationship to actual contact with children—whether any children live in the local area, whether the respondent talks frequently to children, whether the respondent is a grandparent, whether the respondent receives regular help from children, or the respondent's number of children. In fact, seeing children often (at least several times per year) is *negatively* related to the choice of the parent identity (odds = .31).<sup>1</sup> However, providing regular assistance to children is *positively* associated with the parent identity (odds = 3.57). Although choosing family as a primary area of life satisfaction is unrelated to parent identity, choosing leisure or community activities as primary areas of life satisfaction are *negatively* related to choosing the parent identity (odds = .17 and .32, respectively). Looking at the whole sample and including parenthood as a dummy variable shows that ever having had a child is what is key to seeing oneself as a parent, regardless of when that occurred (data not shown). Parenthood appears to be a perennial role identity, for men as well as women.

These results suggest that seeing oneself as a parent in later life does not necessarily reflect the degree of contact with children or the importance of family. It may be that being a parent is taken for granted in this sample of older adults. Most of the children of these

TABLE 3  
Odds of Choosing Friend Role Identity in 1997 by  
Personal Characteristics, Role Behaviors, and  
Areas of Life Satisfaction (logistic regression)

Personal characteristics	
Female	2.81*
Age	.88**
Married	.24**
-2 log likelihood	88.6
<i>N</i>	77
Not significantly related to friend role identity	
Role behaviors: number of close friends at continuing care retirement community (CCRC), number of close friends in local area, frequency of contact with close friends, made new friends since move, difficulty in making new friends	
Areas of life satisfaction: leisure, family, community activities, career, religious involvement, friends	

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, CCRC sample 1997.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

respondents have been functioning as independent adults for many years; their relationship to their parents may no longer be central. Note that the parent role does seem to be more integral to parents' role identity when parents in the CCRC sample are continuing to provide regular assistance to adult children.

Table 3 shows a similar analysis for the friend identity. No indicators of role behaviors or life satisfaction in that role are significant in the analysis. However, women, younger respondents, and those who are not currently married are more likely to see themselves as friends. This is the case despite the wide variation in the actual number of, and contact with, friends reported by respondents.

Table 4 depicts the predictors of respondents in a CCRC seeing themselves as church/synagogue members. In contrast to the parent and friend identities, several key role behaviors significantly predict concept of oneself as a religious person. Being currently involved with religious organizations (odds = 3.29) and talking to other members (odds = 1.36) are both positively associated with choosing the church/synagogue member identity. Although not statistically significant (due possibly to sample size), religious affiliation does seem to matter. Compared with those who report no religious affiliation, Jews who attend services are more likely than Catholics or Protestants who

TABLE 4  
 Odds of Choosing Church/Synagogue Member Role Identity in 1997  
 by Demographics, Religious Role Behaviors, and Areas of Life  
 Satisfaction, for Those Who Attend Religious Services (logistic regression)

Role behaviors	
Frequency of involvement with religious organizations	3.29**
Number of church/synagogue members talk to regularly	1.36*
Areas of life satisfaction	
Leisure	.17**
-2 log likelihood	51.9
<i>N</i>	60
Not significantly related to religious role identity	
Personal characteristics: gender, age, marital status	
Role behaviors: frequency of religious attendance, religious affiliation (Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, none)	
Areas of life satisfaction: family, community activities, religious involvement, friends	

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, continuing care retirement community (CCRC) sample 1997 (those who attend religious services).

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

attend services to choose the church/synagogue role identity (results not shown). Having leisure as an area of high life satisfaction (odds = .17) is associated with *less* likelihood of choosing the church/synagogue member role identity.

Table 5 shows that role satisfaction is most associated with choosing the identity of volunteer. Both current satisfaction with volunteering (odds = 1.27) and seeing community activities as having been an area of high life satisfaction (odds = 1.83) are associated with seeing oneself as a volunteer.

To summarize, our analyses thus far reveal important differences in the predictors of four social role identities among respondents who have moved to a CCRC. In general, current role behaviors and general satisfaction in a particular role area are not associated with two role identities in the private domain: those of parent and friend. Seeing oneself as a parent or friend may have more to do with personal definitions of what it means to be a parent or a friend, which may have as much to do with past or planned involvement as with current activities. By contrast, role current behaviors *are* associated with respondents' church/synagogue member identity, and both current and prior role satisfactions are associated with the volunteer identity. These more

TABLE 5  
 Odds of Choosing Volunteer Role Identity in 1997 by  
 Personal Characteristics, Volunteer Role Behaviors, and Areas of  
 Life Satisfaction, for Current Volunteers Only (logistic regression)

Role behaviors	
Satisfaction with volunteering	1.27**
Areas of life satisfaction	
Community activities	1.83**
-2 log likelihood	.46
<i>N</i>	59
Not significantly related to volunteer role identity	
Personal characteristics: gender, age, marital status	
Role behaviors: volunteer outside continuing care retirement community (CCRC), volunteer at CCRC, number of people seen at CCRC volunteer activity, number of volunteer hours at CCRC, number of people seen at outside volunteer activity, number of volunteer hours outside CCRC	
Areas of life satisfaction: leisure, friends, family, career, religious involvement	

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, CCRC sample volunteers 1997.

\*\* $p < .05$ .

institutionalized public role identities may be more formally defined and therefore more closely tied to current activities.

An alternative explanation is that role identity choices are associated simply with number of responses, with some individuals tending to respond with more answers than do others. To investigate this possibility, we examined other questions in the survey to which respondents could give as many answers as they wished. Two such questions related to the decision to move to the CCRC ("What were the main reasons for your decision to move from your primary residence?" and "What were the important considerations to you in looking for a new residence?"). Most individuals gave only a few responses, but some gave more than 10. The correlation between the number of reasons given for moving in 1995 and the number of roles at two points in time is positive but small (1995 roles, not significant; 1997 roles,  $r = .26$ ); the correlations between the number of important considerations for a new residence and the number of roles in both years are not significant. These results suggest that the number of roles chosen is not merely a function of level of responsiveness.

Because previous research has shown that physical changes have important consequences for the identity of older adults (Whitbourne and Primus 1996), we also examined the relationship between changes in health and function and the number of role identities. None of the

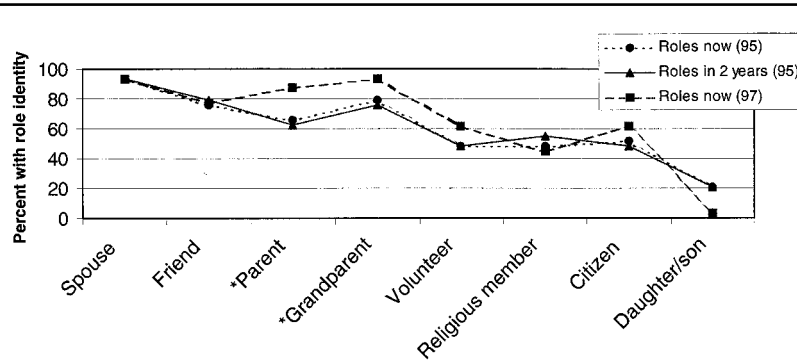
measures of health we tested (recent hospitalization, new illness, increase in functional limitations, change in perceived health) are related to a change in the number of roles.

#### A TYPOLOGY BASED ON SOCIAL ROLE IDENTITIES

Thus far we have investigated each role identity separately. However, it is likely that there are *patterns* of social role identities. A life-course formulation would suggest just such a patterning, with some individuals accumulating identities during their life course, whereas others have had a limited number of roles and, consequently, a more narrow conception of self. To examine this possibility, we performed a cluster analysis on the 1997 role identities ( $N = 90$ ). Discriminate function analysis shows that 97% of the cases are correctly classified in a three-cluster solution. Individuals in cluster 1 ( $n = 31$ ) see themselves as having many more role identities than other respondents ( $M = 5.6$  for cluster 1, 2.7 for cluster 2, 2.8 for cluster 3;  $p < .001$ ). Members in the first cluster hold multiple identities across role domains; most see themselves as spouse, parent, and grandparent, as well as friend, citizen, and volunteer, and half see themselves as religious members as well. In contrast to these *involved* respondents, those in cluster 2 ( $n = 20$ ) are most likely to define themselves as *friends*; virtually 100% of those in this cluster hold the role identity of friend. Those in cluster 3 ( $n = 39$ ) are most apt to see themselves as husbands and wives. In addition to the spouse identity, about 40% in this *family* cluster see themselves in other kin-related terms: as a daughter/son or parent.

These differences between identity clusters reflect some but not all differences in occupied roles (data not shown). All of the respondents in the *friends* identity cluster are unmarried. However, those in the *family* identity cluster are no more likely than the *involved* to be married or have children, and, in fact, they are less likely to have grandchildren.

This social role identity typology is also associated with differences in role identities, even within those actually occupying particular roles. For example, parents in the *involved* cluster are significantly more likely to choose the parent identity than are parents in the other two groups (89.7%, 46.2%, and 41.7%, respectively,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, all of the grandparents in the *involved* cluster chose the grandparent identity as opposed to only 18.2% of the grandparents in the



**Figure 1: Social Role Identity Profile for *Involved* Cluster**

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, continuing care retirement community sample 1995 and 1997.  $N = 31$ .

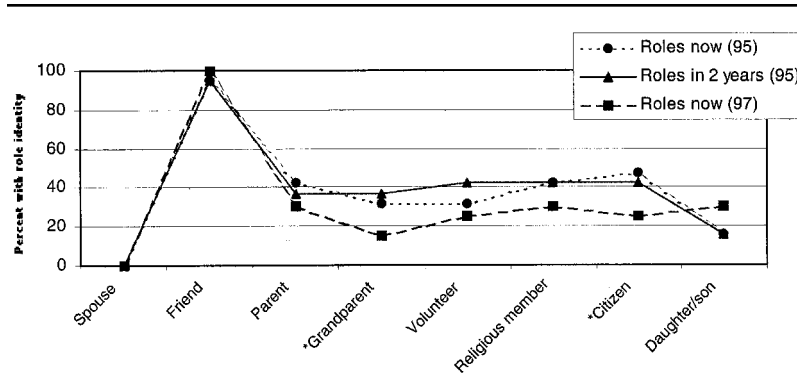
\* $p < .05$ .

*friends* cluster and 42.4% of the grandparents in the *family* cluster ( $p < .001$ ). Volunteers in the involved cluster were also more likely to choose the volunteer identity, compared with those in the friends and family clusters (67.9% vs. 33.3% and 31.0%,  $p < .01$ ).

These results suggest that there *is* a difference for these CCRC residents between those who identify with many of the roles they currently occupy (involved) and those who are less likely to identify with the roles they, in fact, occupy (friends and family).<sup>2</sup>

#### A DYNAMIC FOCUS ON ROLE IDENTITIES

Further analyses suggest that respondents in these three clusters may have experienced the transition to the CCRC in different ways. Figure 1 shows the role identity profile for the involved cluster (those respondents who tend to have more role identities and who are more likely to identify with the roles they occupy). For all clusters, we performed paired  $t$  tests to assess the significance of any differences between 1995 (actual and predicted) and 1997 role identities. The significant differences between 1995 role identities and 1997 role identities for these involved respondents are in a positive direction. Respondents in this cluster are significantly more likely to identify with the parent and grandparent role identities in 1997 (after the move to the CCRC) than in 1995 (both actual and predicted roles in 1995 before the move). Thus, respondents in the involved cluster see themselves as



**Figure 2: Social Role Identity Profile for Friend Cluster**

SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, continuing care retirement community sample 1995 and 1997.  $N = 20$ .

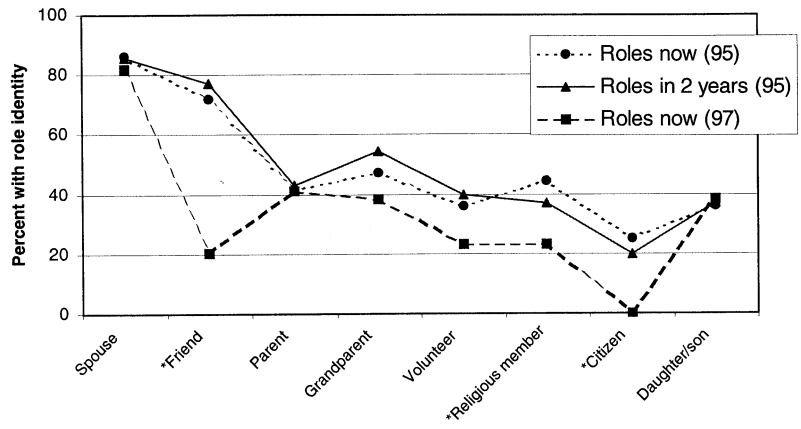
\* $p < .05$ .

having more role identities than they had expected to prior to moving to the CCRC.

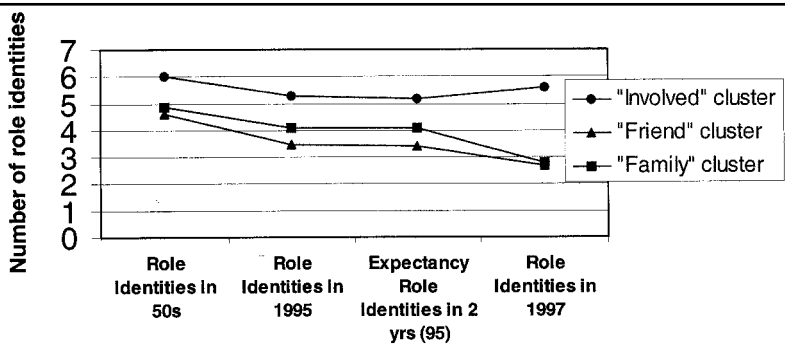
By contrast, consider the social role identities of individuals in the friend cluster before and after the move to the CCRC (see Figure 2). Where there are differences in role identities before and after the move to the CCRC, they are in the negative direction. Respondents in the friend cluster are less likely to identify in 1997 with the citizen and grandparent roles than they were in 1995. Although these unmarried respondents expected to identify less with the citizen role after the move, the difference between the percentage who expected to identify with the grandparent role and the percentage who actually did identify with it in 1997 is significant.

Similarly, social role identities after the move (1997) for respondents in the family cluster do not exceed or even meet prior (1995) expectations (see Figure 3). In 1997, respondents in the family cluster are less likely to identify with the friend, citizen, and church/synagogue member roles. Differences between predicted (1995) and actual role identities in 1997 are also significant for the friend and citizen roles, and in a negative direction. The decline in identification with the friend role is particularly steep—almost 80% of respondents in the family cluster predicted (in 1995) that the friend role would be important to them in 1997 (after their move to the CCRC), but only 20% of respondents actually chose the friend role identity in 1997.

These differences in social role identities across the transition to the CCRC are reflected in the total number of “most important” role



**Figure 3: Social Role Identity Profile for Family Cluster**  
 SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, continuing care retirement community (CCRC) sample 1995 and 1997. *N* = 39.  
 \**p* < .05.



**Figure 4: Number of Social Role Identities by Role Identity Clusters Across the Transition to the Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC)**  
 SOURCE: Pathways to Life Quality, CCRC sample 1995 and 1997. *N* = 90.

identities chosen over time (see Figure 4). All three groups reported a decrease in number of role identities from their 50s to 1995 and predicted that they would have about the same number of important role identities after the move. But as shown in Figures 1 through 3, the respondents in the involved cluster chose more role identities in 1997 than they had predicted, whereas respondents in the friend and family clusters chose fewer role identities, on average, than they had predicted before the move.



It may be that differences in social role identities between the clusters are explained partly by an accumulation of advantage in identity formation throughout the life course. Some may see the move to the CCRC as an opportunity to become involved in a community with others, expanding their role identities. Others may feel ambivalent about facing future health declines and death and disengage from previously held role identities once they move to the CCRC. The idea of disengagement has a long history in gerontology (Cumming 1963; Cumming 1975; Cumming and Henry 1961). Although current gerontological theory no longer sees disengagement as a normative and universal process, some individuals may use the move as a way of disengaging from role identities that are stressful or no longer satisfying (Streib and Schneider 1971).

#### *Discussion and Conclusion*

Rosow (1967) holds that the later years of adulthood are a time of rolelessness, having broad implications for self-concept and social integration. But it is not clear whether role loss is equivalent to identity loss. To promote the understanding of role identities in old age, in this study, we draw on a sample of individuals moving into a CCRC. Although these individuals constitute an advantaged segment of the older population, and live in a homogeneous environment, this controls for the context and the social structural location of respondents, considerations which also may shape social role identities. Despite their similarity in socioeconomic status and residential environment, we find considerable variation in their social role identities. These variations are related to both current role enactments as well as retrospective life satisfaction in different domains, but they may also be capturing a certain cumulation of advantage/disadvantage in the formation of the self.

First, almost all married individuals in our CCRC sample see themselves as husbands or wives (spouse identity), whereas for most other roles only about half of those who currently occupy a role also identify with it. Second, both current role behaviors and life satisfaction predict role identity for two public roles (church/synagogue member and volunteer), whereas they do not predict two more private roles—those of parent and friend. These private identities may depend more on

individual meaning and biography, whereas the public identities may be more formally defined. Third, we see a clear typology emerge from a cluster analysis of role identities. One group, the involved cluster, holds many more social role identities than other respondents and is also more likely to be currently occupying more roles as well as identifying with them. By contrast, individuals in the other two groups (the friends and family clusters) identify with fewer roles; they are also less likely to identify with the roles they currently occupy. These differences do not seem to be related to overall responsiveness in the interview but may well reflect differences in self-concept developed during the life course or in “identity styles” (Whitbourne 1996).

These results are somewhat supportive of the hypotheses drawn from both identity and life-course theoretical frames. Identity theory suggests a close correspondence between role behaviors, role satisfaction, and role identities (hypotheses 1a and 1b). However, we found this to be true only for the institutionalized (public) roles of church/synagogue member and volunteer. Current role behaviors and satisfaction with the role had little to do with choosing the parent and friend role identities, suggesting support for the life-course proposition that past experiences continue to shape private role identities (hypothesis 2). Moreover, past experiences appear to shape the ways social role identities change following a move into the CCRC; our results show evidence of cumulation of advantage in role identities across this major transition (hypothesis 3).

The longitudinal study of a sample moving into a CCRC in upstate New York documents that social role identities are not fixed in stone but change across this major life transition. Moreover, whereas social role identities are related to actual role involvements, role *identity* is not isomorphic with role *behavior*. Previous research on multiple roles suggests that greater role involvement is associated with better health and psychological well-being, particularly participation in organizations and formal volunteering for those not engaged in paid work (Moen, Dempster-McClain, and Williams 1992; Moen et al. in press). This may be because participation in the broader community is more likely to lead to a greater public recognition and, hence, to a strong role identity. Role identities may, in fact, *moderate* the relationship between role occupancy and well-being. The results reported here point to the importance of (1) distinguishing between roles and identities, (2) considering both public and private roles and role identities, and (3)

incorporating time and especially key transitions (cf. Settersten 1999). The dynamics links between role behavior and role identities at various stages of the life course are clearly worthy of systematic investigation into research and theory on identity.

## NOTES

1. A similar result holds for 1995 parent role identity.
2. However, this difference is not a difference in interview responsiveness; neither the number of responses to the decision to move questions nor the interviewer observations of alertness, cooperation, or enjoyment are significantly different between clusters. Nor is this difference related solely to differences in gender, marital status, or parenting status (as the *involved* and *family* clusters are similar in these respects). It may be that differences in social role identities between the clusters are explained partly by an accumulation of advantage in identity formation throughout the life course.

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