From Hero to Zero

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Abstract

This article discusses the identity processes involved in the transition to retirement for emergency service workers, which includes police officers, fire fighters, and emergency medical personnel. The author conducted a study using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) to determine what helped, hindered and might have helped emergency service workers in making decisions regarding retirement. One of the factors participants identified as hindering their ability to retire was the loss of their professional identity. This loss was discussed and compared to theories that explain the processes of identity role assimilation and identity role salience. Theory and research regarding the accumulation, maintenance and narrowing of the number of identity roles is discussed. The tendency of emergency service workers to narrow their identity role to the singular professional role is examined for its impact on coping and for its subsequent impact on retirement. Future directions in research and practice are suggested. There's some that have offed themselves.

There's some that just wither and die. I'm at a very high level of influence and all of a sudden you go from a hero to a zero. So you think about those things too. You should. (57-year old firefighter)

The preceding quote captures the sentiment of a firefighter discussing his reasons for not retiring from emergency services. His concerns were echoed by police and emergency medical personnel in a Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009; Flanagan, 1954) study conducted by the author examining the factors older emergency service personnel consider in making decisions regarding retirement. The author conducted a semi-structured interview with police, fire, and emergency medical personnel in the Vancouver Lower Mainland area of British Columbia regarding their decision to continue working despite having reached eligibility status for retirement. The study participants included seven police officers, three firefighters, and three emergency medical personnel and consisted of 11 males and 2 females. The average age of the participants was 57 and the average number of years of experience was 27. The excerpts included in this article represent a portion of the data from this study. They are included here to illustrate a salient aspect that emerged from the data. A full report of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded study (Grant #410-2009-0952) being conducted by Dr. William Borgen, Dr. Norm Amundson and Dr. Lee Butterfield study will be provided in a publication that is under development.* (*Contact the first author for questions regarding this study.)

The concept of assimilating the police, fire, or emergency medical role has been well-documented in emergency services (Gilmartin, 2002; Kirschman, 1983, 1997, 2004; Paton, Violanti, Burke & Gehrke, 2009) and in work roles in general (Bandura, 1977; Becker & Carper, 1956; Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978; Hill 1992). Yet very little research has been directed at how the process of separating from emergency service work impacts the identity of the worker. To go from *hero to zero* by retiring from the profession appears to require the assimilation of the retiree role, which seems to have a strong negative connotation in the profession. The retiree role appears to have been equated with the absence of meaning due to a lack of other identity roles that give the worker a sense of meaning. An emerging body of research demonstrates that there is a tendency over time for emergency service workers to narrow their identities to the singular role of police officer, firefighter, or paramedic (Gilmartin, 2002). Other roles that would ordinarily comprise the worker's identity and, consequently, add to the worker's sense of meaning are diminished by the functional role of the profession. One (identity role) minus one (identity role) equals zero. As evidenced by the opening quote, this can be a very problematic occurrence. Violanti (1995; 1997) has found that suicide risk is ele-

vated for those who separate from emergency service work. Therefore, based on the reasons outlined above (the assimilation of the role, the lack of other roles, the unique nature of emergency work, and the life-threatening quality of this transition for some), the process of transitioning from the emergency service worker identity role to the retiree role merits examination.

This purpose of this article is to discuss foundational literature pertaining to professional identity, apply this knowledge to the emergency service profession, and discuss potential implications from this application. This article will begin by familiarizing readers with commonly-used terms such as identity, role and professional identity followed by a discussion of theories relating to the salience of identity roles and the social processes of role assimilation. Thoits' (1983) *identity accumulation hypothesis* is discussed next as a resilience factor in a section regarding the tendency for emergency service workers to constrict their role identities. The next section concerns the difficulties emergency service workers experience in the transition from work to retirement. The article concludes with practical implications and suggestions for possible future research to further explore emergency service workers' retirement concerns.

Role and Identity

It is important to delineate between role and identity and to discuss the relationship between the two. Burke and Tully (1977) refer to role as the interactional setting where the identity is enacted. They refer to role and identity as role/identity because they propose the relationship between the two concepts renders them inseparable, stating "We may think of role/identities as the meanings a person attrib-

utes to the self as an object in a social situation or social role" (Burke & Tully, 1977, p. 883). Thoits (1995) proposes a definition for identity that echoes the social aspect proposed by Burke and Tully, stating that identities are "positions occupied in the social structure, which are enacted in role relationships with others *and* viewed as descriptive of oneself" (p. 72). Role-identity is part of the self-concept because it is self-descriptive and internalized by individuals, informing how they operate in their everyday lives, especially in their social lives (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010). Identity also includes personal characteristics that the individual displays, such as race, gender, and age (Gecas, 1982).

Professional Identity

Another concept that requires elaboration is *professional identity*. "Professional identity refers to one's sense of his or her professional role, and the message he or she conveys about herself to others" (Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom & Svensson, 2006, p. 585). Professional identity may be differentiated from the emergency service worker's workplace identity where they identify more with being a police officer, firefighter, emergency medical technician or paramedic instead of assuming their identity from the agency they work for. This differentiation has been noted in other careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Weick, 1996). The differentiation between professional identity and work place identity may make it even more difficult for the emergency service worker to retire because they may leave the agency through retirement but maintain their professional identity as a police officer, firefighter, or emergency medical technician or paramedic.

Khapova and colleagues

proposed a relationship between professional identity and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior states that human behavior is guided by considerations of 1) beliefs about the likely consequences of a behavior, 2) beliefs about the expectations of other people, and 3) beliefs about the presence of factors that may further or hinder performance of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Professional identity was predicted to moderate the strength of the relationship between the three factors of Ajzen' theory and the worker's intent toward career change (Khapova, et al., 2006). Khapova and colleagues found that professional identity and career self-efficacy were significantly related to career change intention. They conducted additional analyses, using professional identity as a predictor instead of as a moderator, and found it to be the only significant predictor of intention to change careers. They pointed to research that proposed self-efficacy as a component of identity (Svejenova, 2005) or suggested that identity and self-efficacy were interdependent concepts (Sargent, Allen, & Bradley, 2005). These findings might explain the study participants' responses regarding their thoughts about retiring. Participants spoke of their loss of identity and also reported varying degrees of career self-efficacy. The mandatory retirement age in emergency service professions has been contested with varying degrees of success. One participant stated he did not want to retire at 60 years of age but would be required to due to mandatory retirement at his agency. Some indicated that they felt they had developed a skill set that allowed them to continue to contribute at work, while others lamented that they did not feel that they were able to do the same tasks they could when joining the profession. Still

others felt their skill set restricted their options to their current employment. One officer talked about feeling she did not have other career options, stating

> I don't think that I'm that marketable. It just looks crazy to apply for jobs now, the kind of information that you need and what's expected and the courses and the competition and the interviewing. I think I'm a bit scared to go out into the job market and feel like I'm very ill prepared.

Identity Salience

Identity theories also seek to explain how and when various identities are activated. According to Stryker's Identity Theory, individuals organize their identities into a salience structure. Identity salience is based on two elements: interactional commitment and affective commitment (1968, 1980). Interactional commitment involves the extent of interactions individuals have with their social network in the particular identity category. Emergency service workers have constant interaction with members of their crew/squad/shift, elevating the interactional commitment to this identity. The second element, affective commitment, refers to individuals' emotional investments in relationships in this identity. The connectivity of relationships in emergency services can be quite intense due to the nature of the work, oftentimes referred to as the "trauma membrane" (Lindy, Grace & Green, 1981). Relationships with others in this profession are built upon trust because oftentimes their lives are literally in the hands of those with whom they work.

Similar to Stryker's theory, McCall and Simmons' Role-Identity Theory proposes a hierarchy of roles

within individuals' identities (1978). Roles that are considered more valuable to individuals' self-concepts, that promote their self-esteem, are more prominent in defining individuals' identities. In addition to the individuals' valuation of their roles, the valuation of others also contributes to role-identity prominence. Lastly, the rewards that accompany a given role also promote its salience. The firefighter referred to his professional identity as a "hero" in the opening quote. One paramedic who participated in the study relayed

> I often say to my fiancé, even if we won $30 million dollars, I'd still want to be something. I wouldn't want to be that guy that won the lottery or that retired guy. I'd still want to be a paramedic.

Emergency service work is typically also publicly regarded as an honorable profession. The high regard for these professions can be deduced from the prevalence of toys such as fire trucks, ambulances, and police cars for children who dream of being a hero when they grow up. These professions also come with a high degree of authority. Few professions grant people the right to drive at high speed, run red lights, carry a weapon, take away people's freedom, and make emergency decisions about people's medical care without their consent. The same paramedic relayed his feelings about his professional identity:

> It's quite gratifying. I don't have to do anything and I'd stand out. I wear my uniform or I drive in my ambulance and I stand out, so it's a rather shallow ego thing where itfeels good to be you.

As evidenced from these quotes, and the literature demonstrating the in-

ternal and external valuation of and authority that comes with these professions, the emergency service worker identity may appreciate a high degree of salience.

Assimilation of the Emergency Service Role-Identity

Entrance to the policing profession has been referred to as a "process of abrupt resocialization" (Paton, Violanti, Burke & Gehrke, 2009). A similar process occurs with firefighters and emergency medical workers (Kirschman, 2004. Gilmartin (2002) suggests a physiological and social dependency on the police role, called the "*brotherhood of biochemistry*." Van der Kolk (1987) also suggested a physiological dependence on the police role due to the physiological "high" that tends to accompany their exposure to traumatic events. Adherence to the emergency services role is encouraged by emergency service agencies to promote conformity in the paramilitary structure (Paton, et al., 2009). Harris (1973) contended that police officers' identities are constricted because they are forced to behave in ways that may be contrary to their true feelings and identities, a concept referred to as *false personalization*. The organizational culture is transmitted to the emergency service worker throughout the hiring, training, and daily work processes and affects the worker's beliefs and behaviours, which are key aspects of the worker's identity (Paton, et al., 2009).

Fine (1996) noted a variation in how people construct a sense of self in a role, referring to it as *situated differentiation*. Variations in role acquisition are due to historical, organizational, and personal factors. In emergency service work, *situated differentiation* could be understood as the varying influence on role acquisition that would occur due to

being assigned to various ranks and/or assignments, department size, and the impact of historical events. For instance, newly-hired emergency service workers in New York City around the time of the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 would likely have a different experience of assimilating into their emergency services worker roles than those who started working ten years earlier. This differentiation concept may explain the difference noted by some of the participants who related that younger workers' attitudes regarding their obligations to work are different. In regards to these differences in younger officers, one police officer participant relayed that

> . . .the expectations and the sense of entitlement in some of the younger people. (They) are going "Well, I've worked a year and a half on shift work. I need a day shift job now" and I'm going "You've got to be kidding me!"

Ibarra (1999) suggested that the process of role assimilation is experimenting with *provisional selves*. Provisional selves evolve into a professional identity, which she contends are more mutable early in one's career. Ibarra states "These 'provisional selves' are temporary solutions people use to bridge the gap between their current capacities and self-conceptions and the representations they hold about what attitudes and behaviors are expected in the new role" (1999, p. 765). The evolution into the new role is not fully understood but involves negotiated adaptations of their existing identity to accommodate the new role demands and expectations.

Constriction of Role-Identities

Gilmartin (2002) proposes that, over time, police officers fall

prey to what he refers to as the "*I Usta" Syndrome*", where they notice that they *used* to participate in more activities than they do now. Gilmartin suggests

> The nonpolice dimensions of officer's lives, such as spirituality, cultural and ethnic identification, core values, family, friends, hobbies, and other perceptual sets or ways of viewing the world, reduce if not disappear. . . Because of the "I usta" syndrome, officers can begin distancing themselves from core aspects of their sense of self. The officer's identity becomes tied only to the police role (p. 73).

This tendency to narrow one's identity and reduce interaction with others is problematic for emergency service workers for two primary reasons: 1) it narrows their social support network and 2) they do not have autonomous control over their work identity. They may be forced out of this role, and consequently the source of their identity, through injury or voluntary or involuntary resignation. Gilmartin (2002) warns "As some force outside of their control affects the cop role, officers who overidentify with the police role find the impact on their personal lives not far behind. The sense of self also takes a hit" (p. 83). Gilmartin (2002) suggests that the once-powerful officer becomes more of a victim due to the loss of control. One police officer spoke about how his social circle had narrowed, stating

> Well, a huge portion of my life revolves around policing and my associates and my friends and everything else revolve around policing. A lot of people probably, once the door hits my ass, won't remember who I was. The contact sometimes after you leave a job or not even a long-term job,

any job, the friendships and things you've developed along… are not always gonna' stay intact once you leave the job or retire. Other people that I've worked with have retired and our contact is not as good as it could be.

The accumulation of multiple identities is suggested to promote individual well-being (Gilmartin, 2002; Thoits, 1983, 1986; Paton et al., 2009). Thoits' (1983, 1986) *identity accumulation hypothesis*, a reformulation of Faris'(1934) *social isolation hypothesis*, proposes that psychological well-being is related to multiple identities through identity enactment. Identity enactment takes place through the interplay of role relationships. According to Thoits (1983),

> Role relationships are governed by behavioural expectations; the rights and duties of each interactant are normatively prescribed. Thus, if one knows who one is (in a social sense), then one knows how to behave. Role requirements give purpose, meaning, direction and guidance to one's life. The greater the number of identities held, the stronger one's sense of meaningful, guided existence. The more identities, the more "existential security", so to speak (p. 175).

Accordingly, if one lacks an identity or loses his or her identity, the prescribed behaviours are also lost. The process has been likened to Durkheim's views on egoistic and anomic suicide (Thoits, 1983). Durkheim (1951) proposed that members embedded in groups are given a sense of purpose, norms, and stability. Therefore, members who are accepted and enacting in their roles are psychologically protected.

Paton et al (2009) suggest that when officers retire, the structure of work is lost which may lead to more difficulties. Furthermore, they contend that police officers who retire and withdraw their emotional investment in their work but do not reinvest it in their retired lives may soon experience depression. This is troubling as Violanti et al (2008) found depression and suicidal ideation to be correlated in police officers. For each standard deviation increase in depressive symptoms reported the prevalence ratio of suicidal ideation was increased 73% for female officers and 67% for male officers.

Thoits (1983) contends that the relationship between the accumulation of identities and well-being is not additive but may be curvilinear. Having too many identities may result in role conflict or role strain while having too few will not promote well-being through having an integrated identity. In addition to the number of identities, several other factors must be considered when weighing the interplay between identities and well-being. Identity salience is one factor that must be considered. Thoits (1983) contended that roles are differentially valued and those that are valued more will have more impact if they are lost or gained. Thoits also theorized that the more identities one has the commitment levels to any one identity will decrease. Conversely, the fewer identities one has the commitment levels to the remaining few identities will increase. Thoits (1983) suggested the terms "isolated" and "integrated" refer to those with few identities and those with many identities, respectively. An isolated individual who loses an identity is believed to suffer more, as he or she has likely been very invested in the lost role and does not have another identity to turn to. An isolated person who acquires an identity should also have a stronger

gain than an integrated person, since the isolated person will perceive a new sense of purpose. To apply the concepts of isolated and integrated roles to emergency service workers would be to say that an integrated hero would still have value in retirement because the individual would turn to other roles. On the other hand, an isolated hero, upon retirement, would lack value because there were no or few other roles to turn to, essentially becoming a "zero."

Another argument for multiple identity roles can be made in the research regarding career transitions and *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yost, Strube, & Bailey, 1992). Ibarra (1999) found in a study of work role socialization that the availability of diverse models for observation resulted in workers generating a broader set of possible selves and an increased chance of gaining self and role knowledge. These gains, in turn, resulted in broader repertoires and, consequently, more opportunities for innovations. These findings seem quite consistent with Thoit's contention that maintaining a broad identity allows for more resources for coping with trauma.

Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977) also proposed that multiple roles conferred more energy and resources to individuals Marks'(1977) energy-expansion theory suggests that time and energy are resources that can be shared, integrated, and expanded using creative strategies employed across multiple roles. Sieber (1974) contended that having multiple identity roles offered four benefits: 1) role privileges, 2) overall status security, 3) resources for status enhancement, and 4) enrichment of the personality and ego gratification. These benefits, Sieber suggested, might outweigh the stress of managing multiple roles.

Separating from Emergency Services (From Hero to Zero)

Ibarra (1999) contends that career transitions provide opportunities for renegotiating one's identity. As individuals face a career transition, such as retirement, there is a consideration of what one might become, would like to become, or would fear becoming. This process has been referred to as considering *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yost, Strube, & Bailey, 1992). In approaching retirement emergency service workers, like all workers, consider who they will be following separation from their work. It is clear from the study conducted by the author that many of the participants feared a possible self without meaning. Another participant, a police officer, relayed concern regarding identity upon separating from police work

> You lose a little bit of your identity I suppose. You're just a regular person again, you're not a police officer, you're not carrying a badge. People aren't really interested in how many times you had to cut your lawn last month. Everybody likes to hear the stories of cops.

Assimilation into emergency services work roles is facilitated by an abundance of role models who provide opportunities for observational learning and external evaluation feedback. Retirement, on the other hand, typically does not offer role models to assist emergency service retirees in developing a guide for behaviours and making sense of their retirement status. They tend to be "out of the loop" if they are not working shift rotations with their colleagues and tend to lose regular contact. Fear of this loss was communicated by several study participants. Ordinarily, an individual

entering retirement could use age peers retiring from various professions as a reference for comparison. Comparison with others of non-emergency service professions would prove rather difficult for the emergency service worker based upon a pervasive culture of "us and them" that divides them from the general public. This dilemma is exacerbated by the documented tendency for emergency service workers to exclude non-emergency service workers from their social group during their career (Gilmartin, 2002; Kirschman, 1997, 2004; Paton, et al., 2009).

Retiring emergency service workers who have narrowed their identity and, consequently, their social group, will lose their sources of external evaluation, which is also their support network. Emergency service workers who have maintained a broad identity and diverse social group will be less likely to return to the workplace because they will be engaged in various activities related to their other roles. As such they will not be role models for what a positive retirement experience looks like. This would limit the variety of models that workers observe to those who are not doing well with retirement. One police officer participant relayed her sentiment regarding her exposure to a retiree who was not doing well

There's one guy who worked in traffic and he found it very difficult, because he so identified with this job. He'd been a police officer since he was like 19 and when he went to retire, he was having a really hard time with it, because he said "I don't know how to do anything else and I don't want to do anything else" and I was like "That's kind of sad."

Ibarra (1999) found that individuals rely on external and internal evaluations to determine which possible selves to keep and which ones to discard. Internal evaluations are the individuals' determination of the match between their self-concept and beliefs and how they present themselves through their actions. Paton et al (2009) suggest that officers may have difficulty understanding their new role as a civilian. Rafaeli and Sutton (1989) suggested that emotive dissonance occurs when individuals experience discrepancies between what they feel and what they must display as an occupant of their role. The author noted emotive dissonance throughout her research interviews as participants expressed their discomfort with the idea of becoming a retiree. Many of the participants relayed that they did not feel like they were psychologically ready to accept the role of a retiree. One police officer in the study stated

Retirement seems like an old person thing. I can't believe how time has flown and I'm at that point where I have to think about retiring. I guess I thought when you retired you   would feel old and tired. I got to sip my cup of tea in a rocking chair and I certainly do not feel anything remotely like that. I still feel like I have a lot of energy and a lot to contribute.

Emotive dissonance is well-documented in the emergency services field (Gilmartin, 2002; Kirschman, 1997, 2004; Paton et al., 2009) and may explain why so many continue to work until they are forced out of the profession due to injury or mandatory retirement policies. Mandatory retirement policies are complex and relate to the concept of *bona fide occupational requirements* where the employer

must demonstrate 1) a rational connection to the performance of the job, 2) an honest and good faith belief that the requirement or standard is necessary and 3) the reasonable necessity of the standard (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2003). Therefore, the option to remain working is not always available, depending on each agency's ability to demonstrate bona fide occupational requirements for the job.

External evaluation of the retiree role also influences individuals' negotiated possible selves. Ibarra (1999) suggests that one's identity is shaped in interaction with external evaluation sources in two primary ways: by validation (or failure to endorse) new behaviours and through feedback on how to improve. When individuals receive positive feedback regarding their new role behaviours they tend to repeat these behaviours. The impact of negative feedback is a more complicated process. Negative feedback involves more identification processes and depends on the affective bond between the person receiving the feedback and the person giving the feedback (Foote, 1951; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For instance, if the person receiving feedback does not identify with or respect the person giving feedback, he or she will be less likely to accept the feedback and make changes based upon it.

Two additional concepts that may explain the difficulty of shedding the emergency service worker identity is the concept of *self-verification* (Burke & Stets, 1999) and *self-categorization* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wethrell, 1987). Self-verification appears to promote self-esteem and self-efficacy (Burke & Stets, 1999) and may be motivated by the person's desire for self-consistency and self-regulation (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999; Stets, 1997). Transitioning to the

new role of retiree may disrupt the emergency service worker's sense of self-consistency, lowering his or her self-esteem and self-efficacy as a retiree. According to social identity theory, the process of seeing the self reflexively whereby one categorizes, classifies, and name itself is referred to as *self-categorization* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). There is an awareness that one belongs to a social category or a group. An increase in self-worth from receiving the group's acceptance may be a motivating factor to maintain the group-based identity (Ellison, 1993). Transitioning from the group of "us" to the group of "them" may threaten the emergency service worker's desire for group acceptance.

Implications for Emergency Service Personnel

Several implications can be drawn from the application of our knowledge on professional identity to emergency service personnel. These implication can be divided into individual and organizational changes.

Individual changes. At the individual level, emergency service personnel could greatly benefit from having positive role models for their career life as well as their retirement life. Emergency service personnel might find it helpful to have a senior peer to observe as they are developing their professional identity through consideration of their *possible selves*. This might be accomplished by developing a mentor-mentee program where new employees can be paired with senior employees who have demonstrated successful work-life balance.

Just as emergency services workers need role models for assimilating their role, meaning making, and identifying appropriate behaviours, they also need role models that portray what successful retirement from emergency services looks like. One firefighter spoke of the cultural shift in transitioning to the retiree role, stating

> It's a cultural change. You're looked at differently and you can't come back. So, basically, are you ready for that change? There's not enough information, so you're just seeing what you see at a retirement dinner. The other retirees show up and you're thinking "Do I want to do that?"

One possible option for providing positive role models in retirement is a retiree peer support team. Typically, peer support teams members are active-duty police, fire, and emergency medical workers that offer support services to other active-duty emergency service workers. These services tend to end when the worker leaves the department. Some departments have added a peer support team specifically for retirees comprised of and for retired employees. For instance, the author participated in a peer support team for a police agency that had three separate teams: one for police officers, one for police retirees, and one for police family members. All three teams work in concert to support officers in their work and thereafter. This is a win-win situation because the retirees can serve as positive role models for other workers who are transitioning into retirement. The valuable career experience of retired peer support team members is not lost when they retire, but is able to be shared with those still working. A retiree peer support team also helps retired peer members and retiring workers to maintain their social network, and, if desired, ease the transition of retiring workers into full retirement.

Having a peer support team for family members also contributes to the employees' ability to maintain multiple identity roles as it can reduce friction between work and family roles by facilitating behaviours such as better communication and understanding of worker and non-worker roles. Creating a family peer support team can highlight the importance of a life outside of the job. A team sanctioned by the organization signifies the importance of employees' roles as family members, and contributes to their social resources.

Organizational changes. Promoting the maintenance of a multiple identity roles also calls for a widespread cultural change in the emergency service profession. Currently, emergency service organizations promote unwavering dedication to the job by rewarding promotions and desirable assignments to employees who do not use their annual vacation leave or sick time. Making matters worse, overtime is rarely restricted and is even regarded as evidence of employees' commitment to their work. If, instead, the organization made annual vacation leave compulsory, and limited the amount of overtime allowed per employee, hopefully this would contribute to their employees' abilities to build and enjoy their personal lives.

Shift work is an unavoidable part of the emergency service profession. However, there are ways shift work can be coordinated to be more accommodating to employees and their families. For instance, several agencies rotate shifts weekly. The constant rotation of shifts prevents employees from participating in sporting teams, volunteer opportunities, and other regularly-scheduled activities outside of work due to varying hours and days off. When employees can-

not participate in these activities outside of work, it serves to disconnect them from social networks outside of their profession.

Organizations can also offer education regarding the psychological aspects of the work and how maintaining multiple life roles can benefit employees in mitigating the negative psychological impact. Beginning in the academy, emergency service personnel could learn about the tendency to narrow their life roles by excluding friends, interests, and activities located outside of their profession. Employees could learn to monitor for the signs of identity constriction and take proactive measures to counter this tendency as it is occurring, instead of working to reverse this trend after it has already happened. During a mandatory annual health check-up employees could be challenged to perform an annual review of their lifestyle and health.

The study participants also indicated that they wished that early in their careers their agencies had provided them with information regarding the psychological aspect of retiring. They reported receiving information regarding the financial aspect of retirement in the beginning of their career and they neared their retirement date. They felt that it would have been helpful if they had been encouraged and supported in maintaining interests and hobbies outside of work. Participants stated that they felt this would have better prepared them for the difficulties they were facing as they prepared to leave their professions.

Future Directions

It is important to examine the circumstances that lead some emergency service workers to maintain multiple identities despite the documented tendency to narrow identities. Studying those who have maintained multiple identity roles may aid in generating strategies to promote identity maintenance in all emergency service workers. It might also reveal personality characteristics that could be used in the hiring process for emergency service workers. The influence of culture on the maintenance of multiple identity roles should also be explored. For instance, do those from a collectivist culture maintain identity roles differently than persons from an individualistic culture? How do gender roles affect identity role maintenance? These are important questions that may generate explanations for variations in role maintenance observed in emergency service workers.

Emergency service workers give so much throughout their careers, putting their lives on the line in the service of their communities. They deserve to retire as heroes, not zeroes.

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