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Political Economy and Depression in Older Adults

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POLITICAL ECONOMY AND DEPRESSION IN OLDER ADULTS

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Abstract

In the United States, depression among older adults presents a significant health problem. To understand the meaning and experience of depression among older adults, I conducted a secondary analysis of open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 102 participants over age 65. The interviews were designed to elicit older adults' explanatory models for depression. I used a political economy lens to probe their perceptions and beliefs about depression. Productivity came to the fore as a common theme, clearly influencing respondents' self-perception and explanations of the disorder. Manifested in discussions about self-worth and depression, political economy issues including capitalism and macro-level forces have clearly penetrated cultural models at the societal and individual level.

Introduction

Depression among older adults presents a major public health problem in the United States; it is also one of the most common health issues in a primary care setting for the older population (deGruy 1996). Symptoms are generally described in terms of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th edition; *DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), for both major and non-major depression. Both types of depression in older adults often go unrecognized and thus untreated or under-treated in the primary care setting (Barg et al. 2006).

The interview data I use come from a secondary analysis of the Spectrum Study, a mixed-method approach to understanding depression in older adults. One of the study's aims is to uncover the disconnects between patient and physician understandings of depression, which have allowed it to remain undetected. One part of Spectrum engaged the qualitative paradigm, creating an active role for respondents to present their opinions and perceptions about depression in the context of aging (Hohmann 2002). This qualitative component involves the 'emic' perspective- to uncover a 'person-derived' definition of depression (Barg et al. 2006). The in-depth informant interviews are my data set, allowing me to discern themes prevalent in the cultural model of depression.

My analysis of these data through a political economy lens has revealed productivity as a theme in older adults' self-perception and beliefs about depression. The capitalist nature of society in the United States has pervaded the psyche of this generation. In discussing depression in later life, many older adults relate their own productivity to their self-worth, informing the experience of depression. Although this theme is pervasive, it presents as a gradation, from mild or normative, to moderate, to

severe or pathological. It is important to note though, older adults often describe

depression in these terms of productivity, including usefulness, and life events relating to

work or the capacity to work may have bearing on depression status.

Literature Review

To understand the relationships among perceptions about depression, aging and

productivity, it is important to understand productivity as an American cultural value.

Theories of political economy, the relationship between the individual and the state,

identity theory, and ideas about the Protestant work ethic and the value of work inform

our understanding of this phenomenon.

Political Economy

The body of literature on political economy in health does not present a unified

definition but rather various interpretations, which often respond to and comment on each

other. One 'complete' definition of the political economy health: it is "a macroanalytic,

critical, and historical perspective for analyzing disease distribution and health services

under a variety of economic systems, with particular emphasis on the effects of stratified

social, political, and economic relations within the world economic system" (Morgan

132).

There are various theoretical paradigms within the political economy of health;

different researchers engage different paradigms, though they all may take a general

political economy perspective (Morgan 132). According to one classification system,

three of the major paradigms include orthodox Marxism, cultural criticism, and

dependency theory. Orthodox Marxism draws on the relationship and similarities

between health and capitalism, whereas cultural critiques question biomedicine in

general, examining the issues of social control. Dependency theory approaches investigate underdevelopment and the unequal power relations that have led to differentials of developed and underdeveloped nations (Morgan 134).

Another perspective on the political economy of health recognizes the two major subareas as the political economy of illness and the political economy of healthcare (Baer 1982). Political economy of illness has developed into the study of the social origins of illness, positioning health issues within the context of society (Baer 2, Singer 129). Particularly relevant to my research, it has been further described as a perspective "that understands health issues in light of the larger political and economic forces that pattern human relationships, shape social behavior, and condition collective experience, including forces of institutional, national, and global scale" (Singer 128).

As a subsection of Critical Medical Anthropology, political economy relates to another subsection, Critical Interpretive Medical Anthropology (CIMA), an approach that presents "illness as a metaphor for internalized, somaticized exploitative social relations" (Morgan 135). Lock and Scheper-Hughes, who "exclude orthodox Marxist and world systems approaches," but do look at macro-level forces (135) engage the CIMA paradigm, emphasizing the importance of considering the personal and "the particular, subjective content of illness, suffering, and healing as *lived* events and experiences" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1986: 137, in Morgan 135).

Socialization and Society

State and Society

In trying to understand why so many older adults perceive themselves in economic terms of productivity, one must consider a society-wide influence. This encourages an examination of the state- an institution that disseminates ideas to all citizens. One perspective on the state maintains that its "'project' is to produce citizens," those of which society consists (Smith 1999 qtd. in Vicencio 123). Thus, a degree of consensus about functions of the state and rules of society – including membership rules – will exist among the members, all informed by the same principles of 'production' (Vicencio123). This resulting consensus has been termed a "moral ethos" (Corrigan and Sayer 1985).

Along these lines, in discussing the nation state Habermas asserted that nation-states have legal institutions based on moral consensus (Habermas 1984 ctd. in Gupta 99). This moral consensus comes from the "root metaphors" of the nation-state; it creates an ideological climate that purposively indoctrinates and penetrates the beliefs of its citizens, producing those citizens (Gupta 99, Vicencio 124).

As a source for informing consensus within the nation-state, (Gupta 103), a root metaphor is an underlying association that affects how an individual comprehends a situation; a deep-seated assumption. In order to survive, a nation-state needs root metaphors whose corresponding attitudes are enacted in society. To produce new citizens and to regenerate the nation-sate, policy must reinforce the root metaphors and create connections between people, a consensus (Gupta 103). Thus, the nature of this underlying assumption influences how a nation-state functions, down to the beliefs of individual citizens; moreover, it is *necessary* to the success of the state that the basic assumption informs the ideas of the citizens.

Socialization- How root metaphors relate to the individual

Adrian Furnham, in writing about the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), discusses more generally social values:

> A system of beliefs concerned with such issues as competence and morality and which in large part are derived from societal demands….have a normativeness or oughtness quality about them and which function as criteria or frameworks against which present experience can be tested. Also it is argued that these act as general motives….It is argued that once a value is internalizes it consciously or unconsciously becomes: a standard criterion for guiding action; for justifying one's own and other's actions and attitude; for morally judging self and others (Furnham 45).

Relevant to my argument, studies have established the connection between a value system and its culture of origin (Feather 1975 ctd. in Furnham 47). Moreover, these value systems "serve as frames of reference that guide beliefs and behavior in many situations, such as work….Thus it may be expected that there are coherent and predictable links between one's general value system and specific work-related beliefs" (Feather 1985 ctd. in Furnham 47).

On the level of society, the origin, spread, and maintenance of value systems seem to be issues of sociology; but these matters do relate to the individual, affecting people on a personal, psychological level (Furnham 107). This begs the question of how individual people come to hold and value beliefs about work ethics. Important processes involved are those of socialization, including school and child-rearing patterns (Furnham 107). Child-rearing systems are informed by the 'maintenance system,' which consists of the "socio-economic and political basis of society regarded as the major influence in determining its mode of child rearing" (Jahoda 118). This idea of the 'maintenance system' relates to that of the root metaphor.

The process of socialization integrates individual psychology with sociological factors in a reciprocal interaction (Furnham 139, Jahoda 49). With child-rearing patterns in particular, a dominant method of child-rearing in one generation of parents may affect the psychology of the generation being raised. The personal experiences of how one was raised will be common to a whole generation, creating a larger sociological pattern (Furnham 139). Moreover, when "child rearing builds certain motives and dispositions into the person, then corresponding adult behaviors should result" (Jahoda 118). This has particular relevance when trying to understand an age cohort such as older adults.

Integral to childrearing and significant in their influence on children, parental figures communicate expectations for one's function in society, "to be something" (Neff 188-9 ctd. in Furnham 146-7). Also, society at large, through the media and the public sphere, imparts information about social correctness and expectations of citizens (Neff 188-9 ctd. in Furnham 146-7).

What is more, school creates a model for work, teaching one to meet standards, to be responsible and productive. Accordingly, "certain basic components of the work personality appear to be laid down in the early school years – the ability to concentrate on a task for extended periods of time...the meanings and values associated with work, the rewards and sanctions for achievement and non-achievement, the affects (both positive and negative) which become associated with being productive (Neff 188-9 ctd. in Furnham 146-7). All of these factors, school, parents, and society, influence a child's development and shape beliefs about work, a central life activity for which a person is prepared.

Capitalism and the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE)

Marx and Weber perceived of capitalism as the 'spirit of the times' (Furnham 2). Weber contended that "Puritan asceticism" motivated people to capitalism; success in a career and accumulation of goods were signs of being one of God's elect (Weber ctd. in Furnham 2). Thus, the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) can be explained as such: "a universal taboo is placed on idleness, and industriousness is considered a religious ideal; waste is a vice, and frugality a virtue" (Oates 1971 ctd. in Furnham 13). However, the PWE was secularized in 'Industrial America,' 1850-1920'; work rhetoric achieved many political objectives (Furnham 5).

In regard to the nation-state, its relationship with capitalism is "mutually advantageous and supportive" (Gupta 95). Moreover, "the entrenchment of the nation-state metaphors gradually grows with the development of capitalism, which over time either effaces diversities or presents them as alternatives that exist within territorial borders" (Gupta 97). Thus, capitalism acts as a 'directing force,' that influences everyday life and individual identities (Higgs 5, 7).

Identity, Work, and Retirement

Work and Identity

Various psychological discussions of work present its interconnection with identity. Notably, Freud (1967) discussed its importance for mental health because it allows "discharge of libidinal impulses" and is "indispensable for subsistence and justifies existence in society" (Freud 34 ctd. in Furnham 146). Moreover, other experts in the field of psychology have proposed the meaning and functions of work, which often relate to identity. First, Fineman (1987) contends that the work of the middle-class is: "a

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key source of identity, self-respect, and social status; the most central activity in life, more important than leisure; difficult to separate from other aspects of life..." (Fineman 1987 ctd. in Furnham 148). Furthermore, summaries of the main functions of work include: a source of identity- where work serves to classify people, regarding class, status, influence, and to provide a niche within a hierarchy; and, as a source of 'sense of purpose'- creating goals and allowing a person to achieve them, while providing an arena for social interaction. (Fagin and Little 1984 ctd. in Furnham 148-9). The significance of work for people is consequential on many levels, including individual, organization, and social (Furnham 149).

An alternate perspective on identity is that it currently relates more to consumption than work (Higgs 23). Though the Marxist position holds that identity is created "through socially useful labor," post-modernists, like Baudrillard, assert that identity has become a commodity, created by consumption patterns (Higgs 24, 31).

Retirement

-In Theory

According to Talcott Parsons, a sociologist who engaged in the first real analysis of retirement, it comprises the loss of a person's role and subsequent disconnection from society (Higgs 12). This idea prompted the development of Cummings' theory of disengagement, which emphasized that retirement, disengagement from society, has positive effects on both society and older people; it is mutually beneficial (Higgs 12). In this view, later life was distinguished by the "gradual, but necessary, shedding of all forms of social identity" (Higgs 32). However, structured dependency theory positions retirement negatively; it is a dependent social position created by social policy of the

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government (Higgs 14). Dependency theorists see retirement as a way to create situations of economic dependency on the state by extracting people from meaningful roles in society (Higgs 32). Moreover, "It] enforce[s] a social idleness and a loss of role and thereby contribute[s] to the very aging to which it was supposed to be a response" (Higgs 32). Though the theories of disengagement and structured dependency have different connotations, positive and negative respectively, they both acknowledge an older adult's shift to "a less socially valued identity" (Higgs 32).

Considering the assertions that work has 'latent functions', deprivation theory conjectures that a lack of work creates psychological distress (Jahoda 1982 ctd. in Furnham 150). Work roles can provide people with a means to be 'useful' as well as ways to interact with and give to the community; for many people though, work is the "most central role," so when deprived of work, people describe feeling worthless, missing a sense of purpose (Jahoda, 1979, p.313, ctd. in Furnham 150). Furthermore, as a source of personal status and identity, loss of employment equates to loss of status and identity. Understandably, people often have reduced self-esteem (Furnham 151). This 'deprivation theory,' though explained in the context of unemployment and not retirement in particular, is indeed relevant to many individuals' experiences during retirement.

-In Practice

In regards to the reality of retirement, social research presents a changing perception. In the past, researchers believed retirement to be an extremely important milestone in one's life, resulting in turmoil on emotional and personal levels (Higgs 31). However, new studies suggest that it does not have the impact once thought, but rather

other conditions, like poor health, have a greater effect. Proponents of some perspectives assert that in consumer society, retirement is no longer forced because of a need to drive older people out of the workforce, but rather is more of a personal choice related to lifestyle (Higgs 23). For many people though, this is not the case.

Responses to and beliefs about retirement vary widely, from the desire to continue meaningful work until death, to contentment with performing menial work. A study by Hooker and Ventis (1984) showed that the "least satisfied retirees were those with high PWE beliefs who did not perceive their activities as useful" (ctd. in Furnham 186). Thus, for people who value work and for whom it is central to their life and identity, the transition to retirement may be more difficult if it is forced, a matter of circumstance and not desire.

Social Commentary

In her 1970 book, *The Coming of Age*, Simone de Beauvoir comments on retirement and the place of older people in society. Though not a scientific study, her writings reflect popular sentiments, relevant to the 'emic' perspective. She says of retirement:

> in the immense majority of cases, being suddenly flung from the active into the inactive category, being classed as old, and undergoing a frightening drop in income and standard of living is a tragedy that has serious psychological and spiritual consequences....It brings a radical break into a man's life; he is entirely cut off from his past and he has to adapt himself to a new status" (de Beauvoir 261).

She continues by addressing the circumstances surrounding retirement: "generally speaking the worker stops working because he is obliged to do so, either because his employer has dismissed him, or for reasons of health and infirmity. He has not really wished for this new condition...." (de Beauvoir 265). De Beauvoir also generalizes about

how some retired people feel: "most elderly people have a feeling that their value has declined, and this is far worse in the retired....A man defines his identity by his calling and his pay: by retiring he loses his identity...It therefore means losing one's place in society, one's dignity, and almost one's reality" (266). On this note she contends, "the anxieties produced by retirement sometimes end in a lasting state of depression" (de Beauvoir 269).

Speaking of the societal level de Beauvoir says, "In the capitalist democracies, the ageing of the population has raised new difficulties....Not only are there many more aged people than there were, but they no longer spontaneously integrate with the community... Old age has become the object of a policy" (de Beauvoir).

Family

Older adults often perceive family relationships and responsibilities as signs of productivity, much like a job or a career. Thus, family influences peoples' perceptions of their own identities, especially in later life (Higgs 51). On this note, many studies demonstrate the significance of family relationships in sustaining a positive sense of self (Coleman 1984 ctd. in Higgs 51). More specifically, the role of grandparent is unique to older adults, often creating the opportunity for them be "transgenerational resources" for their family. Also, identities within the family tend to be more personal and flexible (Higgs 51).

Another perspective on family, there are arguments in the evolutionary vein about the about productivity of older women, grandmothers in particular. In brief, the "grandmother hypothesis" asserts that menopause is not 'premature reproductive senescence,' but rather an evolutionary adaptation that allows women to live longer and

tend to their young (Angier 237). As supported by the Hadza people of northern Tanzania, relatives profit from the knowledge of older relatives, and the older women impact the nutritional status of *all* younger relatives (Angier 239, 247). Thus, older women have evolved to continue to be productive within the family, past childbearing age. However, a concession to the argument, the typical way of life in the West does not facilitate as successfully the extensive connections between older and younger generations of women (Angier 256).

Writing in the 1960s, Simone de Beauvoir briefly assessed the difference in family roles between men and women. She asserted that retirement affects men more than women, because for women, in "running the home, work and life merge into one another…no decree from without suddenly cuts her activity short" (de Beauvoir 261). She continues: "retirement brings a radical break into a man's life; he is entirely cut off from his past, he has to adapt himself to his new status…. [But] women…they have a part to play in their homes and families that allows them remain active and retain their identity…. [There are] problems when children leave…but that still does not throw her into total idleness" (de Beauvoir 262). Since times have changed, more women have careers outside the home now. Other issues affect both men and women: families now live farther apart and divorce has grown more common, changing family relationships for both genders of older adults. De Beauvoir cited a French sociologist, "Retirement, combined with the falling apart of the family unit, renders the state of the aged person lonely, useless, and gloomy" (de Beauvoir 272).

Methodology

My research into the political economy of depression in the older US population is based on a secondary analysis of a dataset from two linked National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funded studies called the Spectrum Studies (MH62210-01, MH62210-01SI, and MH67077-01). In this section, I will describe first the data collection and data management procedures for the Spectrum Studies and then I will describe the data reduction and data analysis that I conducted from "raw data" collected for the Spectrum studies, using a Political Economy framework.

Study Overview

The Spectrum Studies, comprised of Spectrum I and Spectrum II, mix qualitative and quantitative methods in the research design, interview strategy, analysis, and inference (Barg et al. 2006) in order to examine the "spectrum" of depression among people recently seen by their primary care doctor. Structured, fixed choice survey data from Spectrum I, the "Spectrum of Depression in Late Life", informed the creation of the Spectrum II study, the "Sociocultural Context of Depression" (Barg et al. 2006).

Spectrum I

This initial study, started in 2002, intended to "describe depression in late life that may not meet standard criteria for MDD" (Barg et al. 2006; Bogner et al. 2004; Gallo et al., 2005). The study investigators attempted to identify how depression in older adults differs from depression in younger adults. To develop the initial study sample, the researchers identified older adults with and without depression by collecting general health information for 2,560 older adults (65 years of age and older) in primary care settings in the Baltimore, Maryland area. From the 773 adults who met the general

screening criteria, and were asked to participate in the study, 355 people agreed to take part in the Spectrum I Studies.

Spectrum I participants were interviewed over the course of one year using standard assessment measures for depression, anxiety, hopelessness, daily functioning, cognition, medical conditions, and personality (Table 1) (Barg et al. 2006). These interviews took place at baseline, in home, at 3 months, over the phone, and then at 12 months, in home. After the initial two to three hour in-home interview, participants were asked if they had anything else to add about depression in older adults. More than half of the respondents added information about depression that they found particularly relevant but had not been sufficiently addressed in the interview. The research team was fascinated by the strong interest that respondents had to have their "voices heard" about their experiences with depression. Thus, they created Spectrum II to address this issue; it provided a forum for participants to present their ideas about depression, and to relate them to the structured questions of Spectrum I (Barg et al. 2006)

Spectrum II

This part of the Spectrum Study, informed by results from Spectrum I, began in 2003 (Spectrum 2006). At the completion of Spectrum I, all participants were asked if they would like to participate in future research. All respondents who said "yes" were eligible to participate in open-ended, semi-structured interviews about their physical and mental health. Of these, 102 older adults actually participated in Spectrum II. A purposive sampling strategy was used (Barg et al. 2006).Respondents were chosen based upon a number of selection criteria including ethnicity, depression and anxiety status,

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general health, history of mental illness in the family, and advanced age. (Barg et al. 2006).

Spectrum Data Collection

Spectrum II interviews began with freelists for cultural consensus analysis and were followed by semi-structured interviews (Barg et al. 2006). The semi-structured interviews of Spectrum II are the source of data for my own research. Participants responded to "vignettes about depression and open-ended questions designed" to reveal the person's explanatory model for depression, as described by Kleinman (Kleinman 1980). These interviews, conducted in-home by one of four professionally trained interviewers, were recorded and transcribed verbatim, without identifying information (Barg et al. 2006). Data were stored in a qualitative software package (QSR N6) and coded for analysis.

Data Management and Analysis in Spectrum

For all of the interviews, two team members reviewed them in entirety and created "within-case" summaries to be discussed by the study team (Barg et al. 2006). Reviewers coded the transcripts to identify answers to four questions related to Kleinman's notion of an explanatory model (Kleinman 1980): (a) What is the cause of depression? (b) What is it like to be depressed? (c) What should you do for depression? and (d) How will the depression turn out? Other team members reviewed the coded transcript sections and assigned more detailed codes to the text (Barg et al. 2006).

My Data Analysis

To begin my research, I attended project meetings to hear and participate in team discussions about the raw data. I immersed myself in the data by reading randomly

selected transcripts of the semi-structured Spectrum II interviews in entirety, in order to investigate common themes. I used the constant comparative method to move between text and themes that emerged from the text (Boeije 2002). One theme that I noticed in regards to the coded question, "What is the cause of depression?", was that of action, or rather inaction contributing to depression in some way, either as a cause, exacerbating it, or preventing treatment.. Upon closer inspection, the interviews referencing inaction pertained to issues of idleness, in opposition to productivity. I decided to pursue this idea in detail. I extracted all data coded at "What is the cause of depression" and reviewed and coded these data. After recognizing productivity as a theme to explore further, I used the database to find relevant coding nodes. I then used grounded theory to explore this idea in depth for 19 participants (Glaser 1967). I used a Political Economy theoretical framework to guide my understanding of the data (Singer 1995).

Results

The older adults who participated in this study related depression to the overall theme of productivity. The nature of this theme, however, is multi-dimensional- not all informants/interviewees regard it with the same sense of gravitas. At one end of the continuum, people attribute depression to not being productive in the sense of simply not doing *something*, any activity or hobby. This group does not emphasize meaningful production in an economic sense. In contrast, the other end of the spectrum reveals an association of depression with being 'useless' or 'worthless.' These people use economic terms as they describe themselves and their relationship to depression. They equate economic worth with self-worth. Along this spectrum, people vary in states of mental

health and strength of beliefs about productivity. A useful way to discuss the varying emphasis on productivity, and degree of productivity, is to examine different sub-themes.

Productivity and Depression- Nature/Degree of Association

Mild or Normative

-Theme- Nothing to do, dull life, lack of activities

This group represents the normative end of the spectrum, where people do relate productivity to depression, but are not concerned with meaningful (economic) production. For instance, a female informant says of a character in an interview vignette: "He doesn't seem to have any hobbies to keep him busy. He just needs to do something as far as I'm concerned" (012631). Similarly, one man says of the cause of depression, "[it's a] Lack of keeping your mind on something, doing things" (100205).

-Theme- Retiring

Another theme relating productivity to depression is that of retiring, the ending of formal productivity. Within this theme the respondents hold a variety of beliefs, all along the spectrum, but there are demonstrations of mild associations. The nature of these beliefs is that though you must be productive in some way and you must *do* something with your time, it doesn't have to be meaningful in terms of contributing to society.

One man says, "after you retire if you don't pick up on something new, something else, it can lead to...Idleness will lead to depression I would say" (100205). In this case it is would be acceptable to start a hobby, something to keep you busy; there is no need to contribute to society on a grander scale.

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In a different case, a woman discusses her husband's depression, "He was used to working all the time...my husband always was a working man and always was busy until he retired and I think it has something to do with it" (041119).

Furthermore, in responding to a freelist scenario, one woman said:

I think he may regret he retired or because he had to retire. I know when I retired and which I didn't want to – woke up one morning has said 'What in the world am I going to do?' So I think that has a lot of bearing on you, when you retire, especially when you want to keep working [063207].

Another older man talks with an interviewer, telling about his experiences with keeping busy and finding ways to be productive:

> Respondent: ...Pick up the bible and start reading. That's what I do. I'm in a state – I mean, you can get that way when you get old, 'cause you got so much time on your hands. You can't get out and work...it can catch up with you....But after I get finished with you I'm going over there for a couple of hours – and I spend a couple of hours with her every day.
> Interviewer: You told me that you go to the nursing home, ...
> R: And it helps her and it helps me. And I talk, move her around....
> I: And you know they always say if you haven't found your purpose in life, be of service, be of service...
> R: That's right, go do something...And that takes up a bit of my time.
>
>
> R: Retirement, that can lead to laziness.
> I: It sure can, I guess....
> R: That's right, 'cause I have been retired awhile. But for my regular position my brother had a – when I retired he had a business that I helped him out with.
> ...He has a supermarket....Even when I was working I'd help him out when I was off [100205].

He continues, explaining the relation to depression: "Well, it's a change in lifestyle and if you – after you retire don't pick up on something new, something else, it can lead to – idleness will lead to depression I would say" (100205)

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Moderate

-Theme- Aging (Upsetting - out of one's control, but does not reflect self-worth)

The sub-theme about aging is associated with a moderate connection between productivity beliefs and depression. Though the respondents express frustration, are upset about age-related physical decline and the loss of bodily control, they do not find the drop in productive abilities to be indicative of their self-worth.

One woman relates, "I would think that you…would become more depressed being an older person, because there are certain things you can't do. You can't get through it or you can't do things or anything about it. So naturally, you get frustrated and can't do anything about it and then you are depressed" (041173).

Likewise, another woman says of getting older, "I think it's a pain in the butt…Both, the emotions about getting older, that you can't do what you want to do. You are physically not able to do it, you don't have the energy or the strength" (020016).

An older man says, "That's why I get frustrated too with myself because I can't do a lot of the things I used to do…. Like sitting around the house – I like to do lawns, flower beds…I can't" (100205). Again, this man vents frustration at his inability to do chores and work around the house.

Similarly, another man asserts, "If you can't do physical things – this is the one thing that makes me mad. There are things – I love to tinker with my car and I can't do it anymore. That really upsets me….Yeah. And even work around here – I have a riding mower – that's about all I do. I cut the grass but I can't hand trim it anymore" (150316). Another confession of frustration, this man settles for being less productive than he once was- still able to cut the grass, but not as effectively as in the past.

Severe, Extreme, or Pathological

-Theme- Feeling worthless or useless

Another theme presents a more extreme attitude about the importance of productivity, 'What causes depression? Feeling worthless or useless.' These older adults make moral judgments of a person's worth based on level of productivity:

A depressed woman says, "Most people that are depressed really they feel unloved...or they feel as though they are useless and like 'well I can't – I'm no more use to you any more so you just let me go'"(042086).

Another man says of depression, "Well, you lose part of your life...your longevity is going on but you being set in a different category. You're not a young person – you've outgrown that - you've outgrown your usefulness and life becomes a battlement" (180887).

Furthermore, a man asks rhetorically, "What good am I to anybody?" (120626). His concise question epitomizes the extreme side of beliefs about productivity- if a person is no longer productive in a meaningful way, contributing to capitalist production or society, he has no worth.

-Theme- Retiring

This theme pervades the spectrum because it is a major life event for many people. Though some people hold normative ideas, others create a pathological association between retirement and self-worth.

Indicative of extreme perceptions of productivity, one woman asserts that her depression, starting from the time she stopped working, "is normal...normal with [her] age" (012174). That depression is deemed normal after one's productive life is over

reveals the centrality of productivity in a person's life. On this note, many other people make striking claims about life after retirement and the end of their productivity.

One man says, "I had planned to work that additional year so I guess I was in a depression over that, because of the life change, you know, suddenly not working – it's kind of scary" (100061). Because work and productivity are so central to a person's life, and sense of self, cessation of production can literally scare people; it is a new context in which to think about oneself.

On a similar note, a woman reflects on her changing role:

> All my life as I told you I was a volunteer and I did everything, I mean I was room mother and PTA presidents and Chairman of the....And now I'm nothing and that frays on my mind – I have to keep reminding myself of all that I did in my other life and I don't take too much comfort from it because I'm not doing anything now....I feel badly that I can't do things. The one thing I can do, I knit, so I knit blankets for a group called The Linus Project and they bring these blankets to hospitals for children [150315].

Moreover, another extreme or pathological association between productivity and the self is evidenced when a man says, "Like a friend of mine didn't want to retire and he came home and about three days later he passed away. And I thought it was just a lack of work or too much leisure on your hands. They say the minute you retire you die – that's just a saying" (180887). Obviously extreme, this interviewee connects the end of productivity with death; this is a seemingly literal appropriation of a production model, discarding worn out parts or inputs.

Finally, another male subject seems to understand a potential underlying reason for such extreme ideas about productivity and depression; he says, "I think maybe some people begin to think when they get old that they are worthless because they are old,

because they are not working, contributing in some way....especially since people are so tied up with their occupations and their identity is tied up with their occupations" (012222). An idea vital to understanding the relation between productivity and depression in the elderly is that of identity, especially in that it is tied to what people *do*.

Family Roles and Productivity

An interesting sub theme that arose within the concept of productivity is that of family roles. Though a person's position and responsibilities in a family go beyond simply economic concerns, many people relate productivity to *doing* for relatives, their roles within the family. Some informants discuss family along the same lines as a job, in terms of being useful. Thus, family situation can affect one's sense of self in the same way a job can. This may have implications for the connection between depression and marital status.

One man says about depression, "What good am I to anybody? Especially it could happen to somebody in my position...I don't have any children to please; I mean, I might as well say I don't have any to please or no grandchildren to play and teach" (120262). In this instance, the lack of a family for which to do things is similar to lack of a job- the man essentially deems himself useless.

On this note, another man responds to the question, "What do you do to feel better when you are feeling depressed?" He says, "I get out of the house. In fact, I go for a drive, go over and see my grandkids" (150316). Though seeing grandkids creates a social environment and wards off isolation, it also gives him a job to do- he leaves his house in

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order to accomplish it, and he may feel like he is doing something for his grandkids, as the other man said, teaching them or playing with them.

In many cases, the male and female beliefs about family and productivity may differ because of a different pattern of family dynamic in the past. An older man explains, "I raised my children the way they should have been raised. My wife never went to work. She stayed home. I – that's a different age today. That's against the family" (100205). This comment presents the very typical occurrence of a woman's career as raising children and overseeing the house, directly connecting family relationships and roles with productivity.

One woman's story, recounting several stages of her life, evidences a female perspective, rooted in the past norm of housewifery.

First, in response to a vignette, she says:

> She's depressed…. It was always 'the other half.' We didn't have careers – most of us didn't have careers in those days unless we had to – you know, we married somebody to take care of us and we raised the kids and that's what she did. And now the kids are gone and doesn't have the grandchildren around her….. I thought I'd have all them around me and I'd be in the kitchen bustling and getting the family dinners together….As much as they love me, I know, they don't need me because they got grandmother and grandfather and aunts and uncles and cousins [013104].

This woman laments her lack of productivity, her usefulness, to her own family.

Then, she discusses her role in the family after divorce:

> Later on we became amicable and I nursed him after surgery, brought him over here to my house and took care of him…were amicable, friendly, until he died. But adjusting to that new single life, that was really, really hard for me. Then I got into my real estate career and that served my needs as a family and I adjusted to that being alone and having these boys to raise so….
> 	Only been depressed in the last four years….Yeah, since the end of my career came shortly before he died and I didn't prepare for either one….He came along at a time when I was thinking about retiring…phased out of my business. I

didn't ever deal with retiring because he was a full time job, because he was not very well and he had a lot of doctor's appointments.... He was a full time job....I cooked for him and everything else so I was busy and occupied and doing for someone the same way I had done in real estate, helping people. I think it came after he died and I found out I didn't have a career either. I wasn't working either. I lost...grieving for his loss and the loss of my job [013104].

As just compared literally, caring for a family becomes a job, and doing that job classifies someone as productive.

Finally, she deliberates on aging, "It's like the end of an era, like the end of your career or your life, your job....As I was saying I really thought I was going to have all these boys married and bunches of grandchildren around the house all the time....family dinners, that's the way I thought it was going to be" (013104). Equating the end of your job with the end of your life demonstrates extreme beliefs about productivity, but in this case productivity relates to ones part in the family.

Discussion

The older adults in the Spectrum study, through their interviews, described the relationship of productivity to the experience of depression. Beliefs about the connection of productivity and depression are vocalized as a reflection of self-worth; these associations range from mild to extreme, and diverge into sub-themes. Some of the key sub-themes through which people discuss productivity include retirement, aging, and family roles. Retirement is a major life transition for many people, signaling an end to formal productivity or economic contribution to society. Aging often comes with loss of function or poor health, preventing people from being productive and doing what they need or want to do. Also, for many people, a position within the family provides a person

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with a sense of productivity or usefulness apart from their careers or economics- 'doing' for one's family is deemed productive.

The study shows that the root metaphor of the nation state, promoting and valuing productivity, is also a central metaphor in perceptions of self worth in older adults. The ideas about productivity and economic worth have been valorized, and thus inculcated into a person's identity. The research asserts that values such as these are indeed influenced by a person's culture, and determine beliefs and behaviors in many situations (Feather ctd. in Furnham 47). Thus, the values of the state become the values of the individual, affecting one's outlook on all aspects of life.

That capitalism has been called the 'spirit of the times' by Weber and Marx gives insight into how productivity as a root metaphor infiltrated the socialization of citizens. Because capitalism has been integral to the success of the state, entrenched in politics and policy, the work ethic has become secular, influencing not just Protestants, but all citizens. This infiltration has succeeded through multiple factors, including socialization in schools and child rearing-practices, which also reflect the consensus of the root metaphor in a society.

With productivity and economic success as beacons in the socialization process, these concepts have become central in many peoples' lives, associated with their identity and self worth. Retirement thus takes on a very serious meaning; because stopping work halts productivity it can have an enormous impact on one's identity. However, productivity is not only seen in terms of a career, especially for women of this cohort; family roles are also considered to be productive roles, for both men and women who's job it was to raise a family. So, in addition to many references to retirement and

depression, there are likewise responses about the loss of family roles that fit the

paradigm of lost productivity.

Appendix

Table 1 Standardized questionnaires used in Spectrum I

	Initial in-office Contact	Baseline in-home assessment	3-month telephone assessment	12-month in-home assessment
Depressive symptoms				
CES-D, Revised	X	X	X	x
CIDI Depression Section		X		x
Somatic illness and function				
Medicines and medical conditions		X	X	x
MOS SF-36		X	X	x
Cognitive responses				
Beck Anxiety Scale **Beck Hopelessness Scale**		X		x
Cognition				
Mini-Mental State Examination		X		x
Executive functioning **FAS fluency** **Trails A and B** **Clock Drawing** **Digit Symbol Substitution**		X		x
TICS-m			X	
Brief Test of Attention		X		x
Hopkins Verbal Learning Test		X		x
Self-rated cognition				
Memory Functioning Questionnaire		X		x
Personality				
NEO-FFI		X		
Other measures				
Demographic information	X			
Living arrangements	X			x
Alcohol, CAGE Questionnaire		X		x
Use of health care services		X	X	x
Life events		X	X	x
Social network and support		X		
Family history of dementia/depression		X		
APOE genotyping		X		
Abbreviation key: **CES-D, Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; CIDI, Composite International Diagnostic Interview; SF-36, Medical Outcomes Study short form-36; TICS-m, Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status-modified; NEO-FFI, NEO Five Factor Inventory**				

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