

Jones, Ian et al (2010) “The Experience of Retirement in Second Modernity: Generational Habitus among Retired Senior Managers”, *Sociology*, Volume 44(1): 103–120

The idea of retirement has changed dramatically over the last quarter of a century. It has been transformed from being seen as a time of social redundancy and loneliness to being seen as a potentially positive part of the life course. This change has, in part, been driven by a movement away from fixed retirement ages (65 for men; 60 for women) to a situation where there is now a degree of flexibility about retirement age.

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In this research, Jones et al focused on the topic of age identity by examining the ways in which retirement, for some, is actively constructed as a lifestyle and cultural choice. Their study was based on 20 in-depth qualitative interviews with men and women from the UK. Respondents had previously worked in executive and higher management posts and had recently taken early retirement as a matter of choice. Their aims were to explore the experiences of retirement, changes in lifestyle and social roles, and the meanings associated with retirement.

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Jones et al undertook in-depth unstructured interviews with a sample of 20 early retirees. The purposive sample was recruited from the databases of organisations working with retired people who have management or professional skills. Access was gained with the help of advertising the research project in newsletters and distributing leaflets at early retirement seminars. Once they accessed a sample of respondents this way, the researchers also initiated a snowball sample by contacting other relevant retirees. The overall sample comprised 18 men and two women, with ages ranging from 52 to 66 and length of time since retiring ranging from less than one year to 10 years. Previous employment ranged from company directors in the private sector to retired head teachers.

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The in-depth unstructured interviews were undertaken in the individual’s home or at a place of their choice and lasted between one and a half to two hours. The aim was to encourage a conversation and to allow respondents to give their own account of retirement. Notes were written up immediately following interviews and tapes were transcribed and anonymised.

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Three main themes emerged. First, the respondents saw the fact that they had more choice in arranging their retirement as an indication of their higher status, compared to other retirees who did not have this choice:

Interviewer: *“When do you think you started really planning early retirement?”*

Respondent: *“Realistically, probably from about the age of 50. I was looking for what I might call the exit strategy from about the age of 50 – so about five years before I actually retired.”*
(Respondent 4)

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Second, the respondents described early retirement very positively as a time of creative renewal and freedom with opportunity to pursue new interests and challenges. This fits in with the idea of ‘third age’ lifestyles:

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“I was looking for the ability to do things when you want to do them; to be able to go out for the day on the day you wanted to, the day the sun was shining and not at the weekend when it was pouring with rain. (pause) I do enjoy writing, I enjoy lecturing and things like that, and workshops and things like that, so I was really looking at various things and my wife being a lecturer is also interested in those sort of things, and we work together on that.”

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(Respondent 16)

Finally, Jones et al found that the respondents were aware that they were fortunate in comparison to both past (their parents) and future (their children) generations who faced more unemployment, reduced pensions and insecurity:

“The pension I’ve got isn’t there for a lot of people now, it certainly won’t be there for my children’s generation, they’re gradually withdrawing all these schemes, so they won’t be there for them..... You can’t get these kids interested in a pension at 20.”

(Respondent 2)

In conclusion the respondents gave very positive responses of their retirement which is no longer seen as a time of loneliness and dependency but is a lifestyle choice. 50

Answer **all** questions.

- 1 Define the concept of status. Illustrate your answer with examples. [8]
- 2 Outline and explain **two** ways in which individuals experience social control. [16]
- 3 Explain and briefly evaluate the view that age identities are created through socialisation. [24]
- 4 Using the pre-release material and your wider sociological knowledge, explain and evaluate the use of unstructured interviews to study how retirement affects people’s age identities. [52]

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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