An Analysis of the Factors That Influence
Older African-American Men and Women
to Self-Define as Retired

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(ABSTRACT)

Research that examines gender and retirement has given us insights on the ways in which gender structures the work and retirement experience primarily for white men and women. At the same time, a small but growing body of research on race-ethnicity and retirement reveals that race-ethnicity also serves as a context that structures the work and retirement experience. However, research that examines the intersections of race-ethnicity and gender in relation to retirement is almost non-existent. Our subsequent knowledge of how race-ethnicity and gender serve as contexts defining the retirement experience is severely limited. One result is that it is difficult to make generalizations or draw reliable conclusions concerning non-dominant populations. To address this gap, I conducted an exploratory investigation on the general topic of race, gender, and retirement, specifically focusing on how the process of self-definition as retired occurs among African-American men and women.

Using data from Wave I of the Americans' Changing Lives Survey, this investigation identified the gender-and class-specific paid and unpaid productive activities that African-Americans ages fifty-five and older perform. Since unpaid activities are gender-specific, examining them, along with measures of income, income sources, education, marital status, age, and disabled status would help reveal the extent to which gender interacts with race-ethnicity to structure self-definition for Black men and women.

These findings suggest that for older African-Americans, gender significantly impacts the decision to self-define as retired. However, when considering the impact of gender-specific unpaid productive activities, the above finding is not true. It is only in relation to the receipt of Social Security income, disabled status, and work status that gender significantly interacts with race-ethnicity to structure the decision to self-define as retired. In general, these findings substantiate pre-existing research on race, gender, and retirement. Importantly, they prompt further development of scholarly literature in this area of research, as this body of literature is still largely underexplored and inconclusive.

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