Chapter 6

Conclusions and discussion

Summary of the results

In this dissertation I have investigated certain aspects of retirement experiences and early post-retirement lives of men and women in the Netherlands during the last two decades. The main research question was how the lives of Dutch men and women are influenced by retirement and shaped after retirement, and to what extent the changing social context has affected retirement experiences during these decades. Previous researchers on retirement experiences have questioned the extent to which findings apply to other points in historical time. Yet little was known about the influence of a changing social context on consequences of retirement, post-retirement life, and the way changes are perceived by retired men and women. This study investigated life domains that appear to be affected by the transition to retirement: work-related ties, financial satisfaction, post-retirement sport participation and post-retirement well-being. These topics were addressed in the previous four chapters. In this final chapter I summarize the results of the four empirical studies. Furthermore, I discuss the theoretical implications, methodological strengths and weaknesses, and societal relevance of these studies.

Changes in work-related ties following retirement

The question concerning the consequences of retirement for the continuation of work-related personal ties and the extent to which inclusion of these ties in personal networks has changed over a decade was addressed in Chapter 2. The results indicated that the predicted probability of identifying work-related ties in the personal network after retirement increased from .42 among retirees of the 1928-1937 cohort to .61 among retirees of the 1938-1947 cohort. Work-related personal ties were present more often in the networks of more recent retirees because they maintained or gained new work-related personal ties following retirement more often than did those in the previous cohort. Gender differences were not observed. Level of education was important in understanding individual differences in the continuation of work-related ties in the personal network after retirement. Retirees with higher levels of education were more likely to maintain work-related ties after retirement compared to those with lower levels of education. Moreover, retirees with large personal networks seemed to be more likely to have a diverse personal network that includes work-related ties.

The results indicated that either the nature of retirement or the nature of work-related personal ties has changed in the ten years that separate the two cohorts. Changes could
not be attributed to policy reforms aimed at increasing labor force participation, since (changed) work and retirement characteristics did not explain cohort differences. Furthermore, increases in educational level in the cohorts under investigation could not explain cohort differences in the continuation of work-related ties after retirement. This suggests that the meaning of work-related ties has changed. A combination of socio-economic changes, increasing individualization and loosening of ties to traditional sources of social embedding has resulted in greater freedom of choice in developing significant personal relationships. Scholars have argued that personal relationships like friendships that are based on personal choice have increased in importance as a source of support, companionship and confirmation of identity during the last decades (Allan, 2008; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). Work-related personal relationships, are based on personal choice, especially after retirement, because the work-context is no longer the binding factor, offering neither a reason for nor a setting for regular interaction.

We did not observe a gender difference in the likelihood of maintaining or gaining work-related personal ties after retirement. This finding is in line with results of previous research which demonstrates that men and women have on average an equal number of strong ties with co-workers (Dahlin et al., 2008). Both men and women seem to have benefited from the increased opportunities for developing and keeping work-related personal ties that continue to be important after retirement. Overall, the empirical study showed that the majority of retired men and women enters post-retirement phase of life with at least one work-related tie. In this sense retirement at the beginning of the 21st century does not imply an automatic loss of work-related personal ties and of the specific and valuable resources that they engender.

Changes in financial satisfaction following retirement

In Chapter 3, the focus was on consequences of retirement for satisfaction with one’s personal financial situation. The results demonstrate that a majority of the retirees were satisfied with the living standard that they attained on their income. However, those who retired between observations were less likely to be financially satisfied compared to those who continued working. Moreover, respondents from the 1938-1947 birth cohort (retirees as well as those who continued working) were less likely to be financially satisfied compared to respondents from the earlier 1928-1937 cohort. Income proved to be of importance; the higher one’s income, the more likely one was to be financially satisfied. This association was stronger among retirees than among those who continued working. There was no evidence of gender differences in financial satisfaction following retirement.

The observed cohort differences could not be attributed to decreases in post-retirement income between the cohorts, or to an increase in the prevalence of chronic diseases and higher health costs as a result. Possibly changes in unobserved resources related to financial satisfaction are responsible for cohort differences. It is also possible that more recent retirees evaluate their financial situation differently than did those who retired in
the 1990s under rather different circumstances. Retirees from more recent birth cohorts may feel deprived or treated unfairly, because they contributed to early generous retirement arrangements for the previous cohort, while these have become less favorable in terms of age of eligibility and entitlement (Gebraad & Pfaff, 2012). Moreover, trust in pension arrangements has declined (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2005). Financial satisfaction in both cohorts was similar for men and women. Summarizing the results, the majority of men and women did not experience change in financial satisfaction after retirement. This is in line with previous research and the circumstance that replacement rates in the Netherlands are generally quite high. However, a decreased likelihood of financial satisfaction following retirement, especially among those with low post-retirement incomes suggests that the position of retirees during the last two decades can be characterized by increased financial uncertainty.

*Trends in sport participation*

Chapter 4 addressed trends in sport participation, one of the activities that enhance healthy aging and social interaction for retirees. The results indicated an increase in sport participation in retirees between 1983 and 2007. Not only were retirees increasingly more likely to take part in sport activities, they were also more likely to be a member of a sports club. Men and women were equally likely to be involved in sport activities and to be member of a sports club. In line with previous research women were less likely to participate in competitive sport activities compared to men. The observed trend of increased involvement in sports could partly be explained by increases in educational level, decline in physically strenuous work, and decline in physical limitations. Retirees with lower levels of education, former physically strenuous work, and physical limitations were less likely to participate in sport activities. Because of a rise in educational level, decreases in the number of physically strenuous jobs and increases in sedentary jobs, and a decline in the number of middle aged and older adults with physical limitations, increases in sport participation were expected, and also observed. Yet, changes in sport participation over time could not be explained fully by these developments.

These results suggest that new generations of retired men and women with characteristics supporting sport participation are replacing older generations. Awareness of the health benefits of physical activity including participation in sports in later life has become more widespread among older adults. In addition, involvement in sports has increasingly become a social norm in many layers of society. The results imply that new generations of retirees are becoming increasingly active. This trend has also been observed with respect to volunteering (Broese van Groenou & Deeg, 2010), maintaining friendships (Stevens & Van Tilburg, 2011), and various leisure activities (Agahi & Parker, 2005). It seems that men and women are affected in a similar way by these developments. Both men and women are increasingly more likely to participate in sport activities and to be a member of a sport club.
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*Trends in retirees’ well-being*

Chapter 5 focused on trends in retirees’ well-being between 1992 and 2009. Well-being has been assessed using four survey items that reflect satisfaction and happiness. In 1992 well-being of retired women was significantly lower than that of retired men. During the study period of 17 years, the likelihood for men of achieving the highest well-being score declined significantly from a predicted probability of .36 to a probability of .20. Among retired women no changes in the likelihood of achieving high levels of well-being were observed. Contrary to our expectations, these results could not be attributed to changes in the availability of resources. Several resources were identified that enhanced the likelihood of achieving high levels of well-being after retirement. Most important are personal resources such as feelings of mastery and self-esteem that provide retired men and women with the conviction that they are able to direct and control their lives. Having a partner has a positive influence on the achievement of high levels of well-being as does the absence of physical limitations. Rather surprising was that, large personal networks promoted man's well-being though it did not affect woman's well-being. Another study has demonstrated that having more close ties is associated with less happiness for women, due to the responsibilities and stress of the kinkeeper role (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998) and to women’s greater sensitivity to negative exchanges in social relationships (Schuster, Kessler, & Asletine, 1990).

Apparently, the availability of various resources related to well-being differ by gender and has changed over time, yet, these developments did not explain the observed change in well-being of men over time and the unchanged well-being of women. Possibly, the realization of well-being is dependent on the social context. Men seem to have benefited more from the “golden age of early retirement” than women resulting in higher well-being scores in the 1990s. Yet, men have been faced with a reality of decreasing opportunities for early retirement with ample resources to create a satisfying post-retirement life-style recently. This may explain the decrease in well-being.

*Retirement: a transition in transition*

This dissertation shows that retirement experiences have undergone gradual, significant change with respect to the four investigated domains during the last two decades. It demonstrates that retirement experiences are influenced by the social context to an important extent. This social context is often not recognized as an important aspect in the theoretical frameworks used in retirement research. The life-course perspective forms an exception and does point out the importance of the social context, yet, few concrete hypotheses can be drawn based on this perspective. Wang (2007) proposes in his study on adjustment patterns of retirees, that multiple theoretical frameworks are often necessary to account for diversity in retirement experiences. Moreover, a resource perspective is recommended as a more integrated retirement theory (Wang, 2007). According to this resource perspective, the availability of resources for retirees is
influenced by the retirement context. This context has an individual level component, an organizational level component (e.g. organizational climate), and a macro-level component. On the macro-level changes in the labor market and societal norms, for example, affect the availability of resources and subsequent retirement experiences. The study on well-being in Chapter 5, however, demonstrated that the availability of specific resources could not account for the observed decline in well-being among successive cohorts of retirees. It seems that the social context and a changing social context cannot be solely captured by differences and changes in resources, i.e., the resources that are included in the current study.

The predictive power of theories may change over time because of a changing social context. The study on work-related ties (Chapter 2) illustrates that the predictive power of role-theory in today’s social context needs to be reconsidered. In previous retirement research the emphasis is on role exit, stressing the negative or positive consequences of the loss of the work role for well-being (e.g. Kim & Moen, 2002; Wang, 2007). Results from Chapter 2 demonstrate that role theory helps to understand the loss of work-related ties for retirees of a cohort born between 1928-1937 who retired around 1994. Upon retirement, a majority of the retirees lost work-related personal ties. However, for a more recent cohort, born between 1938-1947 and retired around 2004, leaving the work setting did not prevent a majority from continuing relationships related to the former work-role. In a society that is increasingly characterized by autonomy and choice regarding life styles and construction of social networks, personal relationships seem to become less role-based (Allan, 2008). Work has become the “new neighborhood,” a major source of congenial interaction (Dahlin, Kelly, & Moen, 2008). As a result, relationships at work that were initially role-based seem more likely to develop into personal relationships that continue to be important after retirement in contemporary times. Thus a strong relation between role attachment and the maintenance of personal relationships is less self-evident. In retrospect, this dissertation shows that considering retirement as a role-transition from employment to retirement that has severe consequences for one’s social life is a traditional perspective that is less applicable. The transition from employment to retirement is still a role-transition, yet the roles of working and of retired men or women have less meaning for the maintenance of one’s social life than they previously had.

The majority of the studies published on retirement transitions and post-retirement life from the 1990s and early years of the 21st century focused on an abrupt and total transition (e.g. Kim & Moen, 2002; Mein et al., 2003; Reitzes, Mutran, & Fernandez, 1996; Wheaton, 1990). Yet, pathways into retirement have become diverse and complex. To an increasing extent, the transition to retirement can be characterized as a process that takes months or even years in which one gradually withdraws from the labor market (Henkens, Van Dalen & Van Solinge, 2009; McDonald & Donahue, 2011; Shultz & Wang, 2011). Another recent phenomenon is the return to the labor market in order to start a new career after initial retirement (Henkens, Van Dalen & Van Solinge, 2009; McDonald & Donahue, 2011). Consequently, post-retirement life and the retiree-role, today, have many variations (Shultz & Henkens, 2010). Although the approach in this
dissertation does not always do justice to this complex and changing reality of retirement experiences, it demonstrates that the retirement transition of the 1980s and 1990s that was characterized as the “golden age of (early) retirement” no longer exists. The position of retirees in society has changed. Future research may benefit from findings presented in this study by focusing on the influence of the social context on retirement trajectories along with investigation of the retirement transition as an increasing complex and diverse life event.

Gender similarities and differences in retirement experiences

An interesting finding of this dissertation relates to retirement experiences of women, who were often not represented in previous retirement research and the observed small or even absent gender differences. Women were as likely as men to maintain or gain work-related ties in their personal network after retirement (Chapter 2). Women were somewhat less likely than men to lose these ties after retirement. Although women had, on average, lower incomes, they were as likely as men to be satisfied with their income and their living standard after retirement (Chapter 3). Moreover, the likelihood of involvement in sports and sport club membership was similar for retired men and women (Chapter 4). How can one understand the gender similarity in these three domains? Some have claimed that women have an advantage over men when it comes to the retirement transition and the establishment of a satisfactory post-retirement life-style. Due to their less stable employment careers related to childbearing and rearing, women are presumably more experienced in coping with changing roles, which in turn enhances their adaptation to retirement (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Price, 2003). Others have suggested the opposite, i.e. that women are disadvantaged when it comes to retirement. The situation of women in terms of the availability of human capital, their health, and psychological resources is often less favorable than that of men (Slevin & Wingrove, 1995). For example, working women are characterized by lower educational attainment, lower wages, and lower pensions, partially due to unstable careers. These disadvantages might make it more difficult for women to establish a satisfactory post-retirement life-style since they often have fewer resources than men do for this task. Yet, no signs of an advantage or disadvantage of women over men were observed in three studies reported here.

One explanation is that selection effects account for some of the observed gender similarities. The women studied in this dissertation, especially those of the earlier birth cohorts, were not representative for the population. They were more often unmarried and more highly educated compared to women of the same age who did not retire because they had never worked or had left the labor market earlier in their life course (Van Solinge & Fokkema, 2000). The women in these studies probably have many characteristics in common with men regarding employment careers, the attachment to work, and the availability of resources.
An alternative explanation for the small or even absent gender differences in outcomes of retirement might be found in the specific situation of the Netherlands. The Netherlands has often been described as a country with a culture characterized by more egalitarian gender roles, than for example, the United States or the United Kingdom (Costa et al., 2001; Hofstede, 2001; Williams & Best, 1990). This can be illustrated by the way men and women organize their personal relationships. Stevens and Westerhof (2006) observed less differentiation in the way Dutch men and women organize their social relationships in the second half of life than is usually reported in the United States. This is in accordance with similarities in the continuation of work-related ties after retirement observed in Chapter 2.

In this dissertation three specific life domains have been examined; personal relationships, satisfaction with financial resources and sport participation. If domains had been chosen in which gender differences are more pronounced, gender differences in retirement experiences would more likely have been evident. For example, domains where status or competition play a role often show more gender differentiation because these are seen as masculine attributes (Hofstede, 2001). In this dissertation gender differences were observed in involvement in competition in sports (Chapter 4). Competition is a typical example of a masculine aspect of sport participation, more than the other two aspects of sport participation that were studied and where no gender differences were observed. Previous research has shown that older men are more likely than older women to volunteer in the Netherlands, although differences have declined between 1992 and 2002 (Broese van Groenou & Deeg, 2010). It has been suggested that these men more often serve on a board of governors, participate in administrative work, or join committees of social clubs than women do (Broese van Groenou & Deeg, 2010). These are activities that are more status related. Investigating volunteering after retirement in successive cohorts of retired men and women could be an interesting topic to elaborate our knowledge of gender differences in retirement experiences.

In contrast to the observed gender similarities in the three domain specific studies the study on post-retirement well-being (Chapter 5) did demonstrate gender differences and changes in gender differences in the period we studied. In the early 1990s, retired women were less likely to report high levels of well-being than men. Since then women’s well-being did not change significantly whereas men’s well-being declined. In the 1990s men profited more than women from generous early retirement arrangements and pension entitlements in general. There was much emphasis on the apparently extensive opportunities for establishing an enjoyable post-retirement life-style in the media (e.g. in the “Zwitserlevengevoel” campaign of a Dutch insurance company with images of a luxurious life style of leisure). I assume that these opportunities had a positive influence of well-being among retirees. It may have led to high expectations among successive cohorts of men, in particular. However, men were ultimately faced by declining opportunities regarding the timing of retirement and generosity of early pensions. Thus later cohorts may have felt disappointed in the actual opportunities regarding their own retirement in less prosperous times. As a consequence the well-
being of male retirees has declined in the first decade of the 21st century. Women benefited less from the generous (early) retirement regulations in the 1990s, because they often were no longer employed, or had had jobs with absent or poor pensions. They may have never had high expectations of their pensions and would therefore be less disappointed when expectations on early retirement and high pensions had to be adjusted. We assume that, as a consequence, their levels of well-being did not decline between 1992 and 2009. It seems that the traditional male retirement transition with extensive early retirement opportunities and the apparent extensive opportunities of retirement life has lost its dominance. Careers of women have always been more complex than the careers of men, increasingly careers of men are becoming complex too. This suggests that men have lost an advantage over women, which is reflected in similar post-retirement well-being levels in more recent cohorts of retirees. Yet, the results do not imply that the retirement experience in all facets is similar for men and women.

The observed gender similarities and differences demonstrate that various processes and developments influence retirement experiences of men and women. We have just begun to examine these gender issues in a changing societal context. Our interpretations and conclusions are therefore tentative and should be tested in future research.

**Methodological strengths and limitations**

This study is based on data from two different sources. Using different data sources allowed me to address various aspects of the retirement transition and post-retirement life. Moreover, it allowed me to deploy different designs. Both, datasets and methods applied have their strengths and limitations.

The first data source deployed in this dissertation is the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam (LASA). The longitudinal design and the inclusion of multiple birth (and retirement) cohorts of men and women in LASA made it possible to investigate consequences of retirement in two successive cohorts of retirees (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). The applied cohort sequential design takes into account pre and post-retirement characteristics as well as background characteristics of the respondents. In Chapter 5 the data of six observations of the LASA were pooled to investigate trends in well-being in retired men and women over a period of 17 years. Because of the richness of the LASA data including information on background characteristics such as educational level, health, employment, partner status, personal network, and psychological resources, the studies provide a broad perspective on retirement experiences. The second data source deployed in this dissertation is the Amenities and Services Utilization Survey (AVO). Using the AVO trends in sports participation in retirees were investigated over a period of 24 years (Chapter 4). Detailed information of different aspects of sports participation that are important for retirees’ health and well-being was available as well as factors explaining sport participation. Using this data set changes in sport participation as a post-
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retirement activity could be examined in retired men and women over a long period taking into account changes in predictors that explain sport participation.

Determining the occurrence of the retirement transition is not as straightforward as it seems at first glance. In the past the transition to retirement was often marked by an event between two days: the last day that one was employed and the first day that one was retired. This was an “once in a life time” event. However the transition has become part of a dynamic process. Current older workers often reduce their working hours gradually before leaving the labor market, and in some cases they start a new career after initial retirement (Ekerdt, 2010; Henkens, 2010; McDonald & Donahue, 2011). In LASA and AVO different operationalizations of retirement have been used. In LASA data was provided on paid employment, hours worked, and date of leaving the labor market, in case of (partial) early retirement. Based on these data the retirement transition was assessed as the transition from full-time or part-time employment at $T_1$ to no paid employment or employment for less than eight hours weekly at $T_2$ (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). In Chapter 5 retirement status was determined as not having a paid job for eight hours or more per week. In this dissertation working for at least eight hours per week is considered as a sufficient amount of time to be engaged in the labor market. This is in line with the definition for working population used by Statistics Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2012c). It deviates slightly from the definition for labor force; here the line is drawn at 12 hours per week (Statistics Netherlands, 2012c).

In AVO - used in Chapter 4 on sport participation - retirement was identified by asking the question “What is your current employment status?” The category “retired (early)” was one possible answer, along with categories for being employed, disabled, unemployed, housewife/men, and attending school. When comparing the group of retirees defined in Chapters 2, 3, and 5 with the group of retirees in defined in Chapter 4, one should bear in mind that the selection of retirees in Chapter 4 is relatively healthy, because of the exclusion of disabled respondents. In order to account for retirement pathways via unemployment or disability, controls for receiving a disability pension or being registered at an unemployment office were included (Chapters 2, 3, and 5).

By assessing the retirement transition in these ways I had a fairly rough approach to the actual process. I therefore might have not fully taken into account the increasing complexity of the retirement transition in recent decades. Because, the focus of this dissertation is on the changing position of retirees in society, I assume that the lack of detailed information on the precise timing of retirement and on the pathway into retirement is of less importance than it is in studies that focus on the actual adaptation process during retirement.

Both cohort and period effects are assumed to play a role in the changing nature of retirement experiences and position of retirees. Cohort changes refer to differences between birth cohorts, or differences between people who retired in different years. For example, educational level is attained early in the life course and its differences are
attributable to having been born in different years. Opportunities to retire early vary across cohorts of retirees and particularly reflect the circumstances in a specific period of time. Because I have studied people within a limited age range in specific periods, disentangling effects of belonging to a specific birth cohort, to a specific cohort of retirees, or attributable to a specific period in time, was not of importance for the design of the analyses. Moreover, I assumed that some of the mechanisms that underlie the observed changes in resources, post-retirement activities, and well-being are changing over longer periods of time, thereby limiting the necessity of pointing to time-specific markers of individual transitions and of societal changes. The presumed societal changes have affected cohorts of retirees in the current studies and presumably will affect retirement experiences of future cohorts of retirees as well. Along with the more gradual societal developments, I have addressed changes that have taken place at a marked point in time. An example is the economic recession in the beginning of the 21st century that followed a period of unprecedented growth and wealth. Future studies might profit from data that will become available pertaining to more birth cohorts over longer periods of time.

In this dissertation I assumed that the observed changes following retirement (Chapter 2 and 3) were related to the transition to retirement. It is self-evident that other life events also have influenced changes in, for example, the availability of work-related ties in the network and financial satisfaction, which were studied in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Retirees may have moved, their health may have declined, and some may have been widowed during the study period. Co-occurrence of retirement and other life events in a period of three years (the average interval between the LASA observations), however, was rare (Bloem, Van Tilburg & Thomese, 2008). In the trend studies (Chapter 4 and 5) no conclusions can be drawn about changes related to the retirement transition, because the design did not include longitudinal observations of the same persons before and after retirement. In these two studies we also lacked a comparison with persons who did not retire. It is possible, or even likely, that an increase in sport participation can also be observed among age peers who are still working. Likewise, it is possible that well-being among older working men has declined as well as among retirees, because they too are affected by the described developments in society.

A strength of both data sets is that the samples are fairly representative for the Netherlands. Because the national context of retirement regulations and retirement behavior vary widely and has a profound impact on retirement experiences, generalization of the results to other countries should be made with great caution. A further advantage of the two data sets was that they provided information on both men and women. Because the number of women in LASA, especially in the 1928-1937 birth cohort, was limited, the statistical power of the analyses of the studies in Chapter 2 and 3 was limited. Yet, this dissertation is one of a first studies that examines the retirement transition for women based on nationally representative data in the Netherlands.
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Societal relevance: the position of retirees in society today

The aim of this dissertation was to enhance insights in the retirement transition and the position of retired men and women in a changing social context. The results show that the consequences of retirement and the conditions for the establishment of a satisfactory post-retirement life have changed. Some of the observed changes can be marked as positive others can be marked as negative. The increase in retirees who maintain relationships with former co-workers and other work-related ties, and the increase in sports participation can be considered a positive development. Recent retirees are thus better able to maintain this continuity and diversity in their personal networks and have become more active than were previous cohorts of retirees (Chapters 2 and 5). The decreasing likelihood of achieving high levels of financial satisfaction following retirement among more recent cohorts of retired men and women along with the decline in well-being among retired men can be considered as negative developments. These changes are not attributable to changes in the availability of the resources that were included in this study. Therefore, it might be that the changed socio-economic context from prosperity to stagnation and eventually decline has caused a context for feelings of financial insecurity. Overall, for a majority of retirees today, retirement experiences related to the four investigated domains seem to be not, or only slightly, disturbing. The position of many retirees in society today can be characterized by continued involvement in work-related ties, sports participation, and relative high levels of financial satisfaction and well-being.

The group of retirees in the Netherlands has been growing steadily during the last two decades to more than three million by the end of 2011. For the first time in history almost one in five persons in the Netherlands is retired (Statistics Netherlands, 2012d). This is a substantial group that cannot be overlooked. There are various actors interested in this group, the retirement transition and the position of these persons in society. The government is an important actor who is currently mainly concerned with high costs of old age pensions and labor shortages. Both topics concern the number of retirees relative to the population in the labor force. With the graying of society, retirees, especially the younger ones, are often seen as a burden on society (Komp, Van Tilburg, & Broese van Groenou, 2009). Consequently, the main focus in policy debates about retirement is on increasing the labor force participation among adults in their fifties and sixties, increasing the age of retirement, and increasing the sustainability of public pensions for future cohorts of older people. To achieve higher participation rates and postponement of retirement several measures have been taken already. As a result, the responsibility to arrange ones retirement (financially) has shifted more and more from the state to the individual. Therefore, it is important that middle aged and older workers are able to make sound decisions about the timing of retirement and to prepare themselves financially on time. A government can aid in this process by providing people with information early in their life course about their rights, obligations, and possibilities for retirement (AFM, 2010).
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This study also yields some interesting findings for actors that aim to ease the retirement transition for persons who are about to retire. Many companies in the Netherlands offer a preparation for retirement course for their older workers. These courses focus on aspects such as expectations of post-retirement life, starting new routines and activities after retirement, maintaining social relationships, and on financial circumstances of retirees. They aim to offer older workers a thorough preparation for their retirement. Changes in retirement experiences during the last decades that have been demonstrated in this dissertation offer knowledge that can aid these initiatives and current and future cohorts of retirees to better prepare themselves for the retirement phase. I will give two examples. First, extending the support given to future retirees to deal with the responsibilities regarding financial aspects of retirement, may help future retirees feel more secure. At the same time, information and instruction about possibilities and rights will help persons to benefit from the increased opportunities to design their retirement transition and post-retirement life as they please, unrestricted by prescribed roles and regulations. Yet this support has to start earlier in the life course, because for older workers who are close to retirement it is too late to change their pension arrangements. Second, it is becoming increasingly important to remain connected after retirement. Feelings of uselessness after leaving the labor market or an identity crisis are possible threats which can lead to depression (Knipscheer, 2006). There is the possibility of continuing to work, thanks to employment agencies for those 65 and older. Another option is the provision of childcare for adult children (Geurts, Poortman, Van Tilburg, 2012). Moreover, stimulating persons to think about maintaining ties with former colleagues on an informal or personal basis can help retirees to preserve an identity that is less strongly confirmed by family and friends. These connections that are more easy to maintain in the current social context can help against an identity crisis.

Overall Conclusion

As a result of significant changes in the Dutch society, the retirement transition is a distinct experience for those who recently retired compared to those who retired a decade ago. Not only have retirees grown up under different circumstances affecting their life course and the way they perceive and handle retirement, the conditions under which people retire have changed as well. Most of these changes have affected men and women in similar ways. Some of the observed changes seem to have made retirement less disruptive, other developments seem to have a negative impact on the establishment of a satisfactory post-retirement life style.