

ASA RETIREMENT NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Greetings all,

Welcome to new ASA Retired Members! If you are newly retired, you may be receiving this biannual newsletter for the first time. All ASA Members who are in the Retired membership category are also members of the ASA Retirement Network (ASARN). We hope you will enjoy this way of keeping in touch with your colleagues and your profession. Please also use our ASARN listserv for announcements and notices, (contact listserv administrator Laura Kramer, lkramerphd@gmail.com).

ASARN is led by an elected advisory board of its members. It organizes programming and social events at the ASA Annual Meeting and throughout the year. See our ASARN [webpage](#) for more information.

In this issue:

- Engagement: Manuscript reviews, Social Security
- Later life through a sociological lens
- New books by Retirement Network members

Professional Engagement, Political Engagement

Manuscript Reviews: Decline or Accept?

Do you feel guilty when editors request a manuscript review? Two ASARN members have written opposing positions on the proposition below. They do this for purposes of argument only and may not wholly agree with the side.

“Resolved: Retired sociologists should decline requests for manuscript reviews for peer-reviewed journals, even if the manuscript is within one’s area of expertise.”

Pro (decline the request): Peer reviewers ensure the quality, accuracy and originality of books and articles. Recent revelations of plagiarism among prominent scholars and the 46,000 papers listed in Retraction Watch’s database challenge the legitimacy of academic publications at a time when people are concerned about ‘fake news.’ The demand for

reviewers has increased because there are more journals, estimated as 34,000 by Publishingslate.com. Long lag times between submission and acceptance are detrimental to young scholars.

Why then might a seasoned scholar, especially a retiree, turn down the opportunity to fulfill an important professional obligation?

Editors and reviewers offer several reasons why people are unwilling to review manuscripts: a lack of time, the poor quality of submissions, and the fact that reviewers' comments are sometimes ignored in authors' revisions and in editorial decisions. This is especially disheartening when a carefully crafted review is ignored in a revised version. In unusual cases, reviewers report that they received the same article, little changed, from a second journal. Some retired scholars question their competence to review a manuscript because they are not current on a topic. Others had the uncomfortable experience of being identified by an author.

The balance between the time commitment and the rewards of reviewing are different for senior scholars. Younger scholars benefit in several ways: reviewing counts as 'service' for tenure and promotion and might enhance a persons' visibility and reputation. Younger scholars gain exposure to important unpublished information and overlooked citations.

Research on volunteerism and socioemotional selectivity theory illuminate additional reasons why retired and senior scholars might turn down the opportunity to review an article. My study of trends in volunteerism over the course of American history discusses how volunteering occurs within social networks. A majority of those surveyed begin to volunteer after being asked by someone they know. In most cases, the request to review, coming from a stranger, does not have the same impact as one coming from a colleague. Reciprocity is also a major motivation; people 'give back' to organizations that have benefitted them, their friends or their families. The anonymity of journal reviewing even when reviewers are publicly acknowledged has a detrimental effect on recruitment.

Laura Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory is also illuminating. She and her coauthors point out that people choose between multiple goals throughout their lives. Because older people are more aware that their lifespan is finite, social and emotional goals become more important than their careers or the acquisition of knowledge. In a study comparing older and younger volunteers for Habitat for Humanity, Morris Okun and Amy Schultz confirmed the validity of socioemotional selectivity theory. They found that older people are more likely to volunteer in order to fulfill their social and emotional goals. Their findings confirm Arlene Kaplan Daniels' observation that volunteers are animated by the chance to have 'good times' while doing 'good works.' As an anonymous and solo activity, reviewing may not be a priority for some senior scholars.

Despite its importance in the publication of novel information and ideas, the rewards and benefits of peer reviewing change with age. Although turning down a request to do a review

means that a scholar is not living up to an important professional obligation, some senior scholars, especially retirees, may be motivated by the priorities that are common during that stage in the life course.

~ Susan M. Chambré, Professor Emerita of Sociology, Baruch College, City University of New York. Many thanks to the ASARN members who emailed ideas to me and to Laura Kramer for editorial comments.

Susan.Chambre@baruch.cuny.edu

Con (accept the request): Retired sociologists should accept requests for manuscript reviews for peer reviewed journals if they are within one's area of expertise. This expertise can include subspecialties such as economics, law, medicine, gerontology, and methodology. Manuscript review can be rewarding for retirees who want to continue to contribute to sociology and keep up with the literature. It can provide them with a sense of meaning and personal fulfillment. It can also be rewarding for the manuscript author to receive constructive criticism from a colleague with a broader background or experience in the area.

I recently completed a manuscript review for a public health journal analyzing data from a Medical Plan Survey conducted in an Asian country. I assumed that the journal sent the manuscript to two or three other reviewers, so I did not feel I had to be well informed on the Asian country, its health care system or the study's methodology. In fact, the journal's instructions asked if a statistician should also review the manuscript to which I answered YES.

To make it easier for myself to deal with newer computer programs, I began by printing out and reading the manuscript. I underlined items of interests and wrote questions in the margins like: Why was hospitalization relatively easy? I made a note to ask about private and public sector hospitals and a brief description of the origins and funding of the "National Health Insurance" in the Asian country.

I raised methodological problems within my training and experience. In one of the manuscript's tables, I found by my calculations that the n for one of the dependent variables was not 2185, but actually 2862. I recommended that the author check and correct the findings. I answered the journal's review questions in my own Word file before pasting them into the journal's review form. That way I avoided editing problems in the journal's form for review submission. Upon submission I received an email reply acknowledging my review submission with a copy of my review report.

In conclusion, retired sociologists are encouraged to accept requests from journals for manuscript reviews. By following the steps outlined above, reviewers may feel more confident in writing their review.

~ Harry Perlstadt, Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology, Michigan State University. hperlstadt@gmail.com

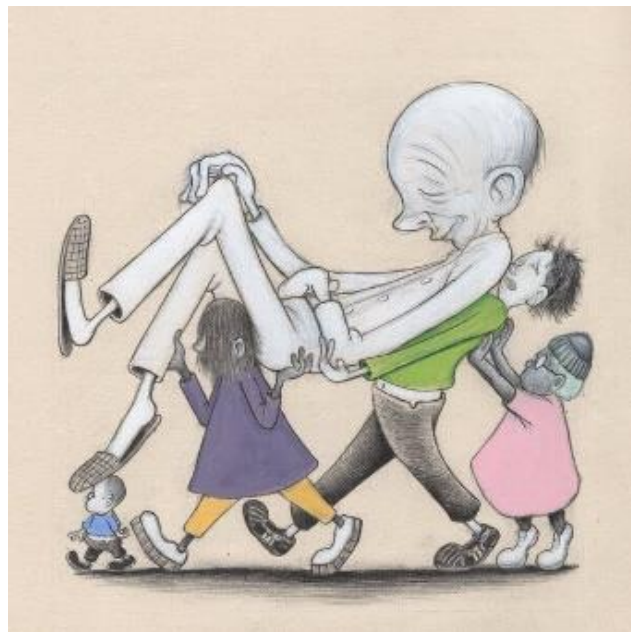
Social Security: When the Topic Comes Up

Generational warfare—it's back! The political opposition to Social Security is sometimes on the back burner and sometimes on the front, but it never goes away. Late in 2023, an unusual number of op-eds, articles, and think pieces appeared promoting the idea that older adults are prospering at the expense of younger generations.

Proposals to “save” or “fix” Social Security are premised on a hard fact. According to the program’s Trustees, in ten years “if no legislative change is enacted, scheduled tax revenues will be sufficient to pay only about three-fourths of the scheduled benefits.” Two basic solutions are possible: cut program benefits or raise its revenue. The former strategy is what has been on offer in recent op-eds, for example, by raising eligibility ages or privatization of the program.

Here are two recent articles that advocate cuts. The first appeared in Slate: [“Social Security Doesn’t Make Sense Anymore.”](#) It earned a spirited reply in the Los Angeles Times: [“An Exhaustive Debunking of the Dumbest Myths about Social Security.”](#)

The second article was an op-ed in the New York Times: [“For the Good of the Country, Older Americans Should Work More and Take Less,”](#) accompanied by this illustration:



This piece prompted these two replies, among others: [“NY Times Op-ed Attempts to Divide the Generations to Undermine Social Security & Medicare”](#) and [“Debunking the Latest Attack on Social Security.”](#)

Newsletter readers can review the point-counterpoint for themselves. When the future of Social Security and its presumed generational unfairness comes up in conversation, we should be able to speak confidently among family, friends, and colleagues. There is the chance, too, of moving conversation in a sociological direction, toward fundamental issues such as income inequality and policies that would enhance economic security at all stages of life.

Later Life with a Sociological Lens

“Once a sociologist, always a sociologist” was Kenneth Land’s reflection for our Life in Sociology lecture at the 2023 ASA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Here are some reflections from ASARN members about experiences that are common in later life, but inevitably seen through a sociological lens.

Book club:

I don’t like my book club. I feel guilty saying that, since turning my monthly lunch with friends in the neighborhood into a book club was my idea. But I think I would like to go back to lunch and conversation about just about anything other than the book we were supposed to read. The main reason is that people often haven’t read the book, or can’t remember key things about it, which annoys me. And, they haven’t read reviews, or figured out any kind of analysis or issues to discuss. I like the members of my book club, and I don’t want to be annoyed by them, but I am.

The last book club I belonged to was also one that I created, but it was before I retired. It was composed of colleagues from the social sciences, discussing a new American History by Jill Lepore. Everyone read and presented their assigned portions for each meeting, and the discussions were lively. I miss that. In short, sometimes, as on Book Club Day here in Portland, I miss my job.

No, I don’t miss everything about it. I surely don’t miss commuting thirty miles each way to and from campus in the middle of winter in the Twin Cities. I don’t miss pumping gas in a blizzard and dodging huge potholes in the spring. And I don’t miss the mountains of grading. But I miss being able to bring my sociological self to book discussions with colleagues who will understand what I’m talking about. It’s not my neighbors’ fault that they aren’t sociologists. It just makes me miss my job.

My neighborhood book club has been reading novels. I have read a lot of novels since I retired four years ago, a luxury I didn’t have while I was working full-time. I have taken several memoir writing classes, and have read a lot of memoirs and books on how to write memoirs and prose poetry. I have chosen most of the novels that my book club has read over the last few months, novels I have really liked and would have liked to have discussed in much more depth.

I read a lot of sociology, too. When Contemporary Soc arrives, I am still excited to read the review essays and book reviews. I still read and underline passages when I read, as though I were going to discuss what I was reading with colleagues or students. In short, I guess I really miss my job sometimes.

I taught my last class in August, 2019, sold my house, and moved to Portland, Oregon, where my daughters and grandkids live, by October 19. I had just gotten my apartment set up and my dogs settled, when Covid struck. I was glad to be here, as my colleagues back home had to put all of their courses online, something I would have disliked doing. And I could be with my family here in Portland. However, adjusting to retirement has been tough. So, among other endeavors, I turned my lunch group into a book club. But I don't like my book club. In short, I would rather be in a book club with sociologists, especially in these times. Is anybody out there interested?

~ Jan Milner is retired from the Sociology Department at Century College in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, and currently living in Portland, Oregon. jannycl@yahoo.com

Hospice volunteer

Death. The ultimate role transition and role exit. I am a hospice volunteer with end-of-life doula training. I have spent considerable time with many patients in the months, weeks, days, and hours before they die. I have been struck with how much role theory informs my work and my thinking about my work. My sociological perspective helps shed light on the various role transitions people experience as they approach death. The sick role first articulated by Parsons has morphed into the chronic sick role with the rise in palliative care and then into the dying role with the rise in hospice care.

Partners of patients experience role expansion, role ambiguity, and role overload as they take on more caregiving responsibilities. They frequently experience role conflict between their roles as partner and caregiver. I help patients with role transition as they prepare for their final weeks and days. I sometimes help patients reexamine the various roles they have assumed throughout their lives as they take on the dying role, such as spouse, parent, worker, retiree, friend, veteran, and parishioner. Drama therapy, based on role theory, can assist with telling the stories of one's life. The dramaturgical perspective similarly affords insights into people's front stage and back stage behaviors. Hospice patients often lose the capability and opportunity to manage both stages and volunteers need to be mindful of and respond accordingly to this loss of control in patients' presentation of self. Volunteers enter patients' lives as strangers who are immediately exposed to the vulnerabilities of patients' very personal back stage situations, an encounter very unlike the typical initial encounters among strangers.

In my bereavement work, I assist survivors with taking on the new role of widow or widower and how to redefine their relationship with their deceased partner. I address role ambiguity with new volunteers to help them determine what their appropriate role is as a hospice

volunteer. For example, might they be considered a friend of or advocate for the patient? I recently spent time with a Hispanic grandmother in her final days. She simply wanted to be pushed up and down the hallways while she tried to teach me the Spanish words for various items. She knew she had little time to live and I was happy to enable these small pleasures as well as help her navigate her journey by talking about her life. At the end of my last visit with her, she took my hands and said “thank you for being my friend.” My patient clearly defined me as a friend, although I did not think of myself in that role. The experience did cause me to think more about my role.

Not a day goes by when doing my volunteer work that I am not struck by how much my sociological background has helped me to both understand and execute my role as a hospice volunteer and end-of-life doula. Role theory helps to understand the impact of roles on the social interactions and behaviors patients and their loved ones experience in hospice organizations.

I am a much better and more introspective volunteer as a result and have been able to lead training for new volunteers and do workshops based on both my training and my experiences. My experiences have also helped me to better understand and navigate my role as a retiree.

~ Theodore C. Wagenaar, Professor Emeritus, Miami University, Ohio.
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Intergenerational wealth transfer

As sociologists, we often grapple with nuanced dilemmas that demand a delicate balance between personal choices and a broader societal perspective. Intergenerational wealth transfers, extensively explored by sociologists and economists, compel us to contemplate the complexities of our accumulated wealth, its implications for social structure, and the real-life conditions that we, as retired sociologists, may be facing.

The conflict lies in the tension between maintaining accumulated wealth for potential future health and aging-related expenses, such as long-term care, and concerns about perpetuating existing social inequalities if the wealth is not spent and passed on to our heirs. Reducing barriers to intergenerational mobility aligns with the ethos of our discipline. However, as sociologists, we are concerned about the broader societal impact of our financial decisions. The inner dialogue resonates with a sociological lens: "If I don't use it, the wealth will be passed on to my heirs. They are already solidly middle class, so they may not really need the inheritance. If they inherit my wealth, they will get another advantage in life that further solidifies the social structure and likely reduces the chance of mobility for others."

Sociology is committed to understanding social structures and their impact, and this dilemma highlights the ongoing tension between the choices we make and the possible societal consequences of them. As seasoned researchers, we understand the power dynamics underlying wealth distribution and its repercussions. This internal conflict reminds us of our responsibility to critically examine not only the immediate outcomes of our actions but also their potential ramifications for society. Is there an alternative that aligns my personal financial prudence with my belief that we should contribute to a more equitable social order?

~ John Kennedy with some editorial help from ChatGPT, Center for Survey Research, Indiana University. kennedyj@indiana.edu

A volunteer career

I am a gerontologist/sociologist, specializing in evaluation research, mental health and aging. For 30 years I was Adjunct Associate Professor in Sociology at UCSF (University of California, San Francisco.) Board service for charitable organizations was a promotion requirement. Before retirement, I sat on the Board of SF Suicide Prevention. I've done political, and person-to-person volunteering for San Francisco Village (connections, mutual aid for older people.)

I met the aging services community in San Francisco through doing program evaluation research, mandated by Federal funding; first, a day program at the San Francisco Jewish Home for the Aged; and then an innovative day health center, On Lok Senior Health Services (now Lifeways) in San Francisco, serving very poor elders. The On Lok Executive Director (ED) and the Board Chair were initially hostile to evaluation. They "knew" that creating a day health center was the right problem solution. Belief that you fully understand the problem and best potential solutions is the norm required of EDs and board members of nonprofits (later including myself.) Belief is not academic or empirical research, requiring measurable differences in results to demonstrate effectiveness.

Through On Lok I began to know the aging services agencies in San Francisco (SF).

My final research project, before retirement, was to draw a sample for a needs assessment, write the interviews, and train the interviewers for a new agency in SF, Planning for Elders in the Central City (PECC) which was to serve a poor area with many older people. After completion, the ED of PECC asked me to sit on the Board. I eventually became President, overseeing the agency, political advocacy work, and obtaining money, using my skills in grant writing, fundraisers, and donation campaigns. A less pleasant aspect, as previously at Suicide Prevention, was protecting the ED from a vengeful Board member who sought to oust her. I never enjoyed some agencies' internal politics, sometimes personally vicious.

The ED eventually left PECC to found the Community Living Campaign (CLC.) She again invited me to serve on the board, and again I eventually became President. Once more my initial concern was raising support money through grant writing, mail, and organizing fundraisers. Today CLC is prominent in SF, providing direct services and advocacy for older adults and people with disabilities; I'm proud of my initial contributions.

The CLC ED nominated me for a position on the Advisory Council to the Commission on Aging, which oversees the Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS) service plan. In this position I oversaw DAS's needs assessment and annual service plans for older adults and adults with disabilities. I also served on a related council overseeing an additional allocation. I served on both councils for 10 years. The rewards included serving with ethnically-, SES- and gender-diverse boards; feeling proud of DAS's services; and knowledge of the workings of parts of SF's government, including SF's Board of Supervisors.

The frustrations were bureaucratic: every legislative advocacy letter I/we would write required the approval of many city bureaucracies, often preventing timely action. Service plans also had to be reviewed by these bureaucracies, leading to 5-month delays before actual monetary allocations. My own project on pedestrian safety revealed fragmentation in problem solving—multiple stakeholder agencies, no coordination.

After 10 years, I felt I had done enough. I retired with lovely letters from the Council, committee chairs, and the DAS Director. My volunteer career added meaning, and identity continuity, to my pleasant recreational retirement.

~ Elinore E. Lurie, Retired Adjunct Associate Professor, Sociology, University of California, San Francisco. elinore.lurie@gmail.com

Recent Books by ASARN Members

Unwrapping Racism: Dealing with Differences, by Chuck Grose, Vernon Press, 2023. [More.](#)

The Centrality of Sociality: Responses to Michael E. Brown's The Concept of the Social in Uniting the Social Sciences and the Humanities, by Jeffrey A. Halley & Harry F. Dahms, Eds., Emerald Publishing, 2022. [More.](#)

Inequality and Violence in the United States: Casualties of Capitalism (3rd ed.), by Barbara Chasin, Lexington Press, 2022. [More.](#)

Crafting Ethnographic Fieldwork: Sites, Selves, and Social Worlds, by Amir B. Marvasti & Jaber F. Gubrium, Eds., Routledge, 2023. [More.](#)

Ascension: The Sociology of an African American Family's Generational Journey, by Lois Benjamin, University of North Carolina Press, 2024. [More](#).

Constructive Conflicts: From Emergence to Transformation (6th ed.), by Bruce W. Dayton & Louis Kriesberg, Rowman & Littlefield, 2022. [More](#).

Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America, by Louis Kriesberg, Oxford University Press, 2022. [More](#).

Higher Education Policy in Developing and Western Nations: Contemporary and Emerging Trends in Local and Global Contexts, by Beverly Lindsay, Routledge, 2022. [More](#).

Biosocial Evolutionary Analysis: Reconciling Biology, Psychology, and Sociology, by Jonathan H. Turner & Alexandra Maryanski, Edward Elgar, 2024. [More](#).

Fixing Broken Meetings: A Manual on Meeting Rotten-osity, Deleterious Decisions, and Ineffective Implementation, by John Tropman, Daniel Madaj & Carolyn Gier, Cognella, 2024. [More](#). [PDF](#)

Resisting Redemption at the Georgia Polls: White Supremacy versus Democracy in the Elections of 1868-1880, by Richard Hogan, McFarland Books, 2024. [More](#).

Polar Expeditions: Discovering Rituals of Success within Hazardous Ventures, by David Knottnerus, Routledge, 2024. [More](#).

Moving From the Margins: Life Histories on Transforming the Study of Racism, by Margaret L. Andersen & Maxine Baca Zinn (Eds.), Stanford University Press, 2024. [More](#).

Applied Regression Models in the Social Sciences, by Dudley L. Poston, Jr., Eugenia Conde & Layton M. Field, Cambridge University Press, 2023. [More](#).

Thinking about Thinking: America's Yeomanry and Cognoscenti, by Thomas Christ, Defiance Press, 2023. [More](#).

On Wars, by Michael Mann, Yale University Press, 2023. [More](#).

Not So Weird After All: The Changing Relationship Between Status and Fertility, by Rosemary L. Hopcroft, Martin Fieder & Susanne Huber, Routledge, 2024. [More](#).

The Handbook of Sex Differences: Vol. I, Basic Biology; Vol. II, Cognitive Variables; Vol III, Behavioral Variables; Vol. IV, Identifying Universal Sex Differences, by Lee Ellis, Craig T. Palmer, Rosemary Hopcroft & Anthony W. Hoskin, Routledge, 2023. [More](#).

Cops on Campus: Rethinking Safety and Confronting Police Violence, by Yalile Suriel, Grace Watkins, Jude Paul Matias Dizon, & John Joseph Sloan III, (Eds.), University of Washington Press, 2024. [More](#).

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