

ASA RETIREMENT NETWORK NEWSLETTER

PostScripts

Greetings all,

All ASA members who are in the Retired membership category are also members of the ASA Retirement Network (ASARN). We intend this newsletter, PostScripts, as a way to keep in touch with your colleagues and your profession. Please also use our ASARN listserv for announcements and notices; for this, contact the listserv administrator Diane Pike, Co-chair, pike@augzburg.edu.

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.

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The Retirement Network at ASA in Montreal ... Chicago's next

At the ASA annual meeting in Montreal, our program featured the annual Life in Sociology lecture, this year delivered by [Barbara Katz Rothman](#) of the City University of New York. In her talk, **"Born a Sociologist,"** she wove her life story into her history as a sociologist. It was sociology, she said, that gave her language for her early experiences. She lost her father at the age of 8, leaving her and her siblings in a family considered unconventional in that era. Concepts like stigma, role models, and American family structure provided elucidating language, and brought her to change her academic focus from psychiatric social work to sociology. Sociology is a perspective, she said, allowing one to see that which is not otherwise visible.

Her extensive and pioneering research on childbirth, beginning with her first book, *In Labor: Women and Power in the Birthplace* (1982), brought sociological attention to this crucial aspect of women's experience and highlighted women's growing interest in midwifery. This work, like her later work on myriad other aspects of childbirth, was also an important contribution to the feminist women's health movement of the 1980s and beyond. She was particularly proud, she said, of her recent award for "Midwifing the Movement" from the Midwives Alliance of North America.

Our program also featured a panel: **"The Many Ways of Being a Sociologist After Retirement."** The four panelists have summarized their remarks below. Whereas the panelists might be doing more professional work than many retired sociologists, their approaches are inspiring.

"I'm supposed to be retired!"

Steven E. Barkan, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Maine. barkan@maine.edu

I retired in September 2020 at age 68 after letting my department and dean know a year earlier that I would be retiring then. I had pondered retirement for several years before that, and the birth of my first grandchild 3,000 miles away in September 2017 and ensuing difficulties in having the freedom to visit her because of my teaching responsibilities helped me finally to decide to retire when I did.

My last in-person class was in March 2020, when I had to switch to online teaching for the first time because of the pandemic. So retirement was rather anticlimactic in those circumstances, and several people later told me that I was lucky to have retired when I did due to the pandemic's disruption on teaching and other aspects of university life. Having now been retired four years and enjoying retirement immensely, I wish I had retired a year or two earlier than when I did.

Since I retired, my main activity as a sociologist is writing textbooks. I have nine active textbooks, and revising all of them and co-authoring a new one since I retired has kept me rather busy. I typically spend 3-5 hours a day on a textbook when I am at home and not visiting grandchildren. I really like working on textbooks but sometimes don't like the time I'm spending on them, which has prevented me from reading mystery books and other novels. Sometimes I say to myself, "I'm supposed to be retired!"

“Retirement is a process”

Christine E. Bose, Professor Emerita, Sociology and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University at Albany, SUNY. cbose@albany.edu

Because being a sociologist is not just a job for me, but part of who I am, I have maintained professional connections in various ways since my technical retirement. I have written and published articles, both previously planned and on new topics. I continue working on “leftover” dissertation committees, since commenting on graduate students’ work has been an excellent way to keep up with current research.

I remain active in regional and other professional associations, such as SWS, because of the sense of connection and community they provide, which has been important since I moved across the country (from Albany to Seattle). In addition, partially due to my previous employment, research and publications, I am affiliated with Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, and Sociology, at the University of Washington. Finally, as a form of public sociology, I do fund-raising or investment planning for professional and activist groups and have connected with local organizations to help raise money for gender and race-related projects.

Importantly, I now understand that retirement is a *process*, not a *single* thing. I modify my goals and projects with shifts in life and concerns; I can try anything that is of interest to see if it’s a good fit or not, sometimes finding new unexpected activities and, in other cases, continuing with my former favorite endeavors. For now, I think of myself as “semi-retired,” in a less demanding continuation of my professional career, but accompanied by travel for exploration and visiting family and friends, made possible by current good health and past employment in a unionized campus with excellent retirement benefits.

“My hobby is running Stata models.”

Pamela Oliver, Professor Emerita of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
pamela.oliver@wisc.edu

I retired in 2019. As I have a good retirement pension, I feel good about not hoarding opportunities from the next generation, bowing out gracefully, and making space for someone else to have a job. A family medical emergency developed just as I was retiring, so I was grateful to be able to help.

I have often told people “My hobby is running Stata models.” I don’t knit, I’m not an artist, I don’t garden, I don’t cook. Writing and doing research are my creative outlets, my leisure activities. I like having a mellow schedule where I do not have to show up to lecture on a regular basis. As a friend said, a permanent sabbatical.

It is fun to do research without worrying about advancing a career. I have applied for and sometimes received NSF grants to support my research, especially helpful for paying graduate students. I enjoy continuing connections with graduate students via department workshops. I enjoy reaching out to younger scholars and seeking to support their research and career development.

I have increased my volunteer work with a community group working on advocacy in the criminal legal system, building on public advocacy work around racial disparities in incarceration I did in the 2000s. I have been able to keep my university email address, a smaller office, and most software. The main downside to retirement has been losing the campus Microsoft license; I finally sucked it up and paid for a personal license.

“Not just talk”

Wornie Reed, Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Africana Studies, Virginia Tech.
wornie@vt.edu

When I retired three years ago, I did so to have time to do more things on my to-do list. Truthfully, retirement eliminated only teaching and committee meetings, both of which were manageable. But I needed more time to research, write, and do community service. I also had a couple of unfinished book projects that I still want to get done.

I write a weekly column on race, social policy, sports, and culture for two newspapers. I also post these articles on a blog, which I am preparing to expand using Substack. Another writing project involves several papers we have submitted for publishing as a series that we call “Obstacles Against Police Accountability.” Here we look at issues that we consider instrumental in protecting police officers from prosecution or conviction for excessive use of force.

I have spent much of my time with the [Dialogue on Race](#), a nonprofit organization I helped to start 14 years ago. Its mission is to create a forum that examines racial issues articulated by the African American community in Montgomery County, Virginia, and then develop and implement solutions. Thus, “Dialogue on Race” is a misnomer. This organization works to identify and eliminate or reduce racist practices—not just talk about them. For example, we are currently analyzing data on traffic stops to see if we detect racial profiling or disproportionate stops of black motorists.

Recommendation: Community groups can use sociologists' help to collect and analyze data to support their activities. We have had several active academics help us in the Dialogue on Race. I suggest that retired sociologists consider providing similar help to community organizations.



On to Chicago for the ASA annual meeting in 2025. The Advisory Board is preparing a program that will include the annual Life in Sociology lecture, a panel, and a workshop. We hope to see you there. The ASA’s general call for submissions of all sorts is [here](#). Submissions will close on February 26, 2025.

Engagement: The Months Ahead

Across many fronts, sociologists will be following the implications for national programs and policies in the wake of the 2024 elections. To date, it has all been trial balloons and signaling, but proposals may soon move from talk to actual initiatives. Retirees will have a personal interest in changes to the programs that constitute the American retirement regime: Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid (support for long-term care). But these are more than so-called “old age programs” that confer “benefits.” They are pillars of the welfare state, affecting income security for workers and their dependents, the operations of the



U.S. health care system, and the conduct of intergenerational care.



Retired sociologists may want to keep abreast of proposals for these programs not only for their own information but also because, as professional academics, they are influential voices in their social circles and wider communities. In the months ahead, these are some sources (listed alphabetically) where

one might track policy directions and moves.

AARP. [AARP® Official Site - Join & Explore the Benefits](#) The site has top-row buttons for Social Security and Medicare. Clicking them gets “the latest news, expert claiming advice and answers to the most frequently asked questions about Social Security benefits” and Medicare “enrollment tips, benefits of coverage, and new legislation.”

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. [Homepage | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) A progressive think tank. Policy updates about budgets, taxes, and government assistance programs, including entitlement programs.

Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. [Center for Retirement Research](#) A go-to site for researchers, any serious legislative proposal for retirement or health programs would likely be evaluated here.

Families USA. [Home | Families USA](#) “Dedicated to achieving high-quality, affordable health care and improved health for all.” Website sections on the ACA, Medicare, and Medicaid.

KKF (formerly the Kaiser Family Foundation). [KFF | The independent source for health policy research, polling, and news](#) A menu icon in the upper left corner links to Medicare and Medicaid content. For example, “[What President-Elect Trump’s 2024 Victory Means for Medicaid.](#)”

LCAO (Leadership Council of Aging Organizations). [Home - LCAO](#) See the “Our Members” listing, among whom are “national nonprofit organizations concerned with the well-being of America’s older population and committed to representing their interests in the policy-making arena.” The advocacy sections of their member websites will be attuned to policy changes in the year ahead.

The Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement (WISER). [home - Wiser Women](#) WISER “creates a variety of consumer publications including fact sheets, resource guides and newsletters that explain in easy-to-understand language the complex financial issues surrounding Social Security, pay equity, retirement plans and pensions, savings and investments, caregiving, divorce and widowhood, health and long-term care, and financial elder abuse.”

Later Life with a Sociological Lens

Here are new reflections from ASARN members about experiences that are common in later life, but inevitably seen through a sociological lens.

The subculture of total knee replacement:

Experiencing total knee replacement (TKR) surgery introduced me to a subculture I never knew existed. The TKR subculture has specific norms, priorities, and objects, and members of this subculture gladly inform newbies about all of this when conversing in an elevator, a

doctor's waiting room, at physical therapy, in a pre-surgical class, in social media support groups, and out in public. Relatives also enthusiastically share their own experiences.

The norms involved with being a TKR patient include limping (before surgery), using a cane or walker, and wearing sweatpants or shorts. Patients are told to prepare their homes by removing any trip hazards, making sure they have a chair that has arms and does not rock/recline/swivel, and somehow training their pet(s) to not get in the way. Until fully recovered, patients likely choose to sit in chairs that have arms to use for leverage when getting up; they may arrange their leg with the "new" knee to be stretched out while sitting. Holding doors open for other TKR patients is also a norm.

The priorities among TKR patients include **NOT FALLING** (emphasized repeatedly by all healthcare providers), walking slowly and carefully, keeping items within reach, doing the recommended exercises, having access to transportation until driving is allowed, and understanding health insurance coverage for everything involved with TKR. Who has time to think about pain?

The recommended objects for TKR patients include walkers/canes, toilet safety rails, a toilet seat riser (which one patient described as "the most comfortable seat in the house"), shower grab bars, antibacterial soap, a grabber, a sock-puller, a strap for lifting one's leg onto and off the bed, ice packs, and a compression sock. A passive motion machine that bends and straightens the knee can also be rented. (Keep these in mind as possible gifts for the TKR patient in your life.)

For those lucky enough to be invited, a pre-surgical class provides information about preparing for and recovering from surgery, and assorted medical tests are administered. In my class there was a mix of knee, hip, and shoulder patients and, instead of names, we were referred to by our joint du jour. It was a great chance to socialize with other TKRers and solidify my membership in the subculture. Maybe I'll get an "Ask Me About My TKR" bumper sticker.

~ Liz Hoisington, Retired Professor of Sociology, Heartland Community College,
Normal IL. lizhcatcatcat@gmail.com

The oldest guy in the room:

About a year ago, I signed up for an improv class. The next day I got a call from the instructor. He said a local TV station was doing a story about the benefits of improv for "older folks." The class roster showed that at 72, I was the oldest person in the class. So he invited me to join him for the interview.

Despite my age, I rarely think of myself as "old." Most cultural images of seniors don't resonate with me so it's not a salient reference group. That made the invitation feel like a bit like typecasting but I accepted.

What struck me is that the interviewers were trying so hard to dispel myths and stereotypes about “older folks” that they may have reinforced them instead. The fact that I was interested in doing improv at my age was presented as a rare and notable aspiration meant to inspire others of my generation.

You don’t have to take my word for it. Check out the five minute segment from December 2023 here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rv2UsYtvVmc>.

I then took a series of classes over nine months. My cohort of fifteen people quickly became a tight ensemble with a strong collective identity. The formal class has ended, but we still meet informally to practice our craft.

Playing with this welcoming group has taught me I’m “old.” The median age is under 40 so we’re two generations apart, and I’m often reminded of the cultural and generational chasm between us. They don’t get my improv prompts (who’s Humphrey Bogart?) just as I don’t get theirs (who’s Dua Lipa?).

A similar lesson arose from a joke format called 185. Others provide a prompt; the improviser provides the punchline. Here’s mine with the prompt “carpenters.”

185 carpenters walk into a bar. The bartender says, “I’m sorry, we don’t serve carpenters.” The carpenters say, “that’s OK, we’re just looking for Karen.” Funny if you’re old enough to remember or somehow know the Carpenters circa 1972, but my joke was met with uncomprehending silence by my younger classmates.

Despite these challenges, the magic of improv has allowed us to bridge this generational chasm even as this newfound reference group has made me acutely aware that I am indeed “the oldest guy in the room.”

~ Steve Buechler, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Minnesota State University, Mankato. steve.buechler@mnsu.edu

Pickleball:

The sociological term that comes to mind is anomie. Pickleball is wildly popular sport that has taken over rec centers and such. My sister, having retired and moved back to a house she owned in Phoenix, was suffering from anomie and decided to meet new people through pickleball. She was a tennis player in her youth and thought it should be fairly easy. Instead during her first lesson, she tore a tendon in her foot and couldn’t walk for the next 6 months. So pickleball would not be her ticket to comradery and new friends. So it’s not as easy as it looks, and is [known for generating many injuries](#) among the not-so-young people taking it up. Her orthopedist chortled; it’s been a boon for the specialty. Yet she laments she can’t play because they welcomed her and pointed out pick-up games if she didn’t have her own crew. So pickleball could have curbed her anomie.

My second observation is that it is highly competitive and could increase the anomie of those taking it up. I taught senior exercise classes at our rec center for many years before COVID, at 9 a.m. Pickleball was scheduled in the same gym at 10. It eventually had to be moved to 10:30 because the players were invading our class of old people finishing their stretching and breathing, pushing people aside to set up their nets and metal stanchions. Even 10:15 wouldn't work, they were so aggressive in their disdain for mere senior aerobics participants. I even knew some of these pickleball people and yet they were mean to us. "Get out of our way!" they shouted. The rec center officials confessed to me that the pickleballers were paying, while our class was free and the teachers volunteers. So they had priority, money talks.

But what about pickleballers who were not superior athletes and just wanted to have fun and play a genial aerobic game? Well, they were discouraged. I suppose there might be some places that have amateur recreational players, but I haven't heard of any. It's now commercialized.

Pickleball is not the answer so far for anomie.

~Susan Chizeck, Senior Lecturer Emerita – retired, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Texas at Dallas. chizeck@utdallas.edu

Whether to stop working:

As an undergraduate I read books like *Invitation to Sociology* and *The Sociological Imagination*. I was fascinated by the mystery of social order. For me, that is both the burden and the reward of being a sociologist.

With my PhD in sociology, in 1977 I was hired to teach at a small college in New York. I enjoyed teaching, but when I was awarded a federal grant, I realized that the college did not have the infrastructure to support research. Teaching was my job; research was the work I wanted to do. I was offered and accepted a research position.

The Division of Criminal Justice Services was a NYS agency that collected, and stored on a mainframe computer, data for operational purposes from all police, prosecution, courts, and corrections agencies in the State. The Governor established an Office to exploit that data to produce statistics, do research, and inform policy. My job was to lead research teams. I spent more than a decade, mostly working in collaboration with researchers at NDRI, an Institute in NYC funded to conduct studies of the relationship between drugs, crime, and violence.

Following my interests and opportunities, I have conducted research in a variety of settings: colleges and universities, government agencies, and independent research organizations and institutes. For example, I worked at the University of Baltimore, the National Institute of Justice, Abt Associates, NORC at the University of Chicago, VCU, and

WVU. Throughout, I studied the social experience of people who lived their lives near, or beyond, the normative boundaries of legitimized social order.

Consequently, I have had extraordinary opportunities to study social order. I have interviewed drug dealers, other drug law offenders, prison inmates sentenced for violence, and law enforcement agents whose job was to control drug use and dealing. At NIJ, I directed a national data collection program that annually interviewed and collected urine samples from 35,000 arrestees in 35 counties across the US to learn about the relationship between offending and drugs. While I no longer feel the need to do the job of being a PI, these days I am working on two funded studies relevant to my research interests.

The dictionary defines retirement as withdrawing from a job or from active work. But while my jobs and the settings have changed, my work has remained the same. I have learned much, but I still do not understand how social order is possible. Now is not the time to stop working.

~Henry H. Brownstein, Distinguished Research Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, West Virginia University. henry.brownstein@mail.wvu.edu

Moving into a retirement community:

It's a situation that calls for ethnographic research. Retired adults have many reasons for choosing to age in place or move to a new location. An inclusive retirement community (IRC) where you live in your own apartment or cottage, but eat and socialize communally, is one option. Early in your residence, walking into the dining room at an IRC is a little like the first night of a cruise or group tour. You will end up at a table or on a bus with random people. It's not like a party where you can leave early if you aren't comfortable; you will have to interact with the people, perhaps for the rest of your life. The experience is best described as anomic.

You are a retired person, but so is everyone else, so that isn't your role. You may need a mobility aid such as a cane or walker, but so do many others, so mobility-impaired is not your role. Like others, you may even have some cognitive or sensory impairment, but that doesn't define you. You may end up being identified by your former role, e.g., Dr. R, the surgeon, Pastor L, the music minister, or Col. D, USMC, Ret. Your role may be to share your experience like N, who knows the history of local institutions, or B, who has lived at the IRC for the longest time. You may be identified by your eccentricities like F, who turns up in unexpected places drink in hand, or S who always looks dressed for lunch at the Club, or by your contributions to the Resident Council. You may even play the stereotyped role of little old lady or grumpy old man.

How do you learn the norms? What is the dress code? How do you identify the cliques and find your people? When can conversation go beyond the weather or last night's game to share political perspectives or make comments on social issues? How do you know when

to respond to an offensive remark and when to keep quiet? How do you decide when a question is too personal or when a person shares too much? Sometimes there are clues. You know that you, the retired professor, have been lecturing when the person who asked you a question says, “I won’t be able to remember that much!”

~ Marcia Texler Segal, Professor of Sociology & Dean for Research Emerita, Indiana University Southeast. msegal@iu.edu

Recent Books by ASARN Members

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

Institutional Racism and Restorative Justice: Oppression and Privilege in America (2nd ed.) by Diane Carpenter Emling, Routledge, 2024. [More.](#)

Passionate Work: Choreographing a Dance Career by Ruth Horowitz, Stanford University Press, 2024. [More.](#)

America After Empire: The Vision for a New America in the 21st Century by Berch Berberoglu, Routledge, 2023. [More.](#)

Class and Inequality in the United States by Berch Berberoglu, Emerald Publishing, 2024. [More.](#)

Retiring: Creating a Life That Works for You by Teresa M. Amabile, Lotte Bailyn, Marcy Crary, Douglas T. Hall, and Kathy E. Kram, Routledge, 2025. [More.](#)

Anti-Semitism Without Jews in Germany, France, and the U.S.: Phantom Enemies by William I. Brustein and Luke Gramith, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. [More.](#)

The Treachery of Realities: Safeguarding Truth in the Age of Science Denial by Sal Restivo, De Gruyter Brill, 2025. [More.](#)

Letting Go: Parenting Teens and Young Adults in a Time of Uncertainty by Demie Kurz, Oxford University Press, 2025. [More.](#)

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

Interviews as Activated Storytelling: Contexts and Subjectivities by Amir B. Marvasti and Jaber F. Gubrium (Eds.), Routledge, 2025. [More.](#)

Sociology Meets Memoir: An Exploration of Narrative and Method by Margaret K. Nelson, New York University Press, 2024. [More.](#)

Jewish Options: Pluralistic Identities in 21st Century America by Arnold Dashefsky, Ira M. Sheskin, and J. A. Winter, Springer Nature, 2024. [More](#).

Advisory Board for 2024-2025:

Judith A. Howard, Co-chair, jhoward@uw.edu

Diane Pike, Co-chair, pike@augsborg.edu

Linda Breytspraak, breytspraakl@umkc.edu

Daniel Chambliss, dchambli@hamilton.edu

Carol Conell, carol.conell@gmail.com

Diane Emling, dkcemling@gmail.com

Mary Lou Finley, mfinley@antioch.edu

John M. Kennedy, kennedyj@indiana.edu

Jack Nusan Porter, porter_jack@comcast.net

The Retirement Network Newsletter is edited by David Ekerdt, dekerdt@ku.edu