

Book Review

Silver, M. P. (2018). *Retirement and its discontents: Why we won't stop working, even if we can*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

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A great book title; counter to conventional wisdom and practice, and timely for me in that I am currently evaluating this choice (i.e., retire or continue working). While acknowledging many in society do not have this luxury of choice, Michelle Pannor Silver, Ph.D., MPP, provides an interesting, readable accounting of this “discontentment” with a well-researched book that relies on qualitative investigation.

Professor Silver holds joint appointments at the University of Toronto Scarborough (department of sociology and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Health and Society) and cross appointments at the University of Toronto (Dalla Lana School of Public Health and the Institute for Life Course and Aging). She has received numerous grants to support her research agenda, which focuses on (1) work, aging, and retirement and (2) perceptions about aging and health.

A qualitative study with multiple interviews, this “narrative gerontology” explores the personal narratives of five doctors, five chief executive officers, four athletes, five professors, and four homemakers who “self-identified as retired.” These semi-structured interviews benefited from the researcher’s five larger retirement studies that she led from 2012 through 2016. The author provides a thorough explanation of her methodology and includes the interview questions used.

In exploring retirement and choices, Silver focuses on the mismatch between “idealized and actual

retirement.” The notion of retirement is undergoing significant challenges and revisions as work, fulfillment, sense of identity, and contentment are sometimes radically redefined as the lifespan extends.

In this environment, Durkheim’s “anomie,” seems even more appropriate: Our society provides little or no moral guidance for individuals who rely on outdated equivalents of retirement and therefore fails to acknowledge or purposefully engage in addressing one’s loss of purpose and sense of identity as a result of retirement.

Discontentment is not a viable, societal response; Silver provides an important first step in acknowledging the need to reconsider the purpose and rewards of work and to further examine the role and impact of retirement on the well-being and productivity of citizens whose life-expectancy ranges far beyond past experience and constraints.

I would recommend this book as a resource for anyone interested in aging, work and identity, and retirement choices/decisions.