

M E M B E R S I N T H E N E W S

The Psycho-Social Aspects of Retirement

Gail S. Eisen, trained as a social gerontologist, is a consultant in older workforce issues and preretirement planning who specializes in the psycho-social aspects of the retirement process.

"The concerns of preretirees and recent retirees are diverse and extend well beyond questions of finance," Eisen told **Perspectives on**

productivity and keeping busy at all costs."

Since 1989, Eisen has been consulting for companies and universities in the newly evolving field of industrial gerontology. She has provided seminars for Fortune 500 companies, labor unions, the American Association of Retired Persons and mental health agencies. Eisen is experienced with all

'Many people have questions about how to redefine themselves in retirement, especially after a lifetime of social messages encouraging productivity and keeping busy at all costs.'

Retirement. "Individuals also come to retirement seminars with concerns about how to live in harmony with their spouses, how to cope with possible feelings of role loss or the feelings of grief that sometimes accompany a loss, and how to replace work with a new set of meaningful activities in retirement. Many people have questions about how to redefine themselves in retirement, especially after a lifetime of social messages encouraging

levels of the workforce, from assembly-line workers to managerial and executive-level staff and is often asked to provide training for employee assistance professionals and human resources representatives who work with older employees. Frequently, she is asked to speak about the subject of marital relationships in the retirement years, a topic she explored in detail during the course of her doctoral research at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Eisen's research focused on changes in the marital relationship and life at home among 112 recent retirees. The study included extensive interviews with husbands and wives who reflected with candor on the changes in their lives and relationships in this new stage of life. Eisen has presented at ISRP and ASA conferences on this subject and has been interviewed by the media about the gender differences suggested by her study.

THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE

She is also sensitive to the effect of culture on shaping attitudes toward retirement, having spent much time overseas and more than seven years designing and teaching cross-cultural training workshops for Michigan's international student population.

"I try to encourage preretirees to think carefully about the cultural context in which they have grown to maturity and to examine the core values that have helped to mold their attitudes about retirement and about their own personal aging," she said.

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Formerly an assistant professor of psychology at California State University, Eisen uses an interdisciplinary approach in her corporate seminars and lectures, integrating materials from the fields of anthropology, sociology, literature and psychology. "One of my favorite quotations," she offered, "is John Muir's remi-

niscence on the essential unity of life and knowledge: 'When one tugs at a single thing in nature, one finds it attached to the rest of the world.' All disciplines are interrelated, and I believe that the very best teachers constantly strive to bridge artificial academic barriers between disciplines."

COMBATting STEREOTYPES

Eisen has many years of experience teaching gerontology. The first course in gerontology she designed was for gifted youngsters and entitled, "Old Friends: An Introduction to Gerontology." Many of her students had little personal contact with grandparents or nonrelated elders.

"At that time, the course was viewed as a partial antidote to the age-segregation so common in the lives of these young students," she said. "It was a novel concept at the time and provided an opportunity for kids with negative stereotypes about older people to develop more realistic attitudes and more compassionate behaviors." ■

In addition to serving as a gerontology resource specialist for the Los Angeles City Schools, Gail S. Eisen has also worked as an intern with the American Association of Retired Persons' Program Department in Washington, D.C. Now based in Ann Arbor, Mich., she continues to teach courses for the University of California at Los Angeles several times a year and is an active member of both ASA and ISRP.