

AGING IN MASS SOCIETY

MYTHS & REALITIES

Jon Hendricks
& C. Davis Hendricks

THIRD EDITION

Aging

IN MASS SOCIETY

Myths and Realities

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Aging

IN MASS SOCIETY
Myths and Realities

For our Parents
and in memory of
Don Kent — *still*

PREFACE

In the nine years since our first edition appeared, the field of gerontology has undergone many changes. It no longer offers the heady promise of growth it did then — the political winds having shifted — nevertheless, the need for serious study and research remain. During the past decade gerontology has become considerably more sophisticated. It is our intent to communicate these changes, to offer a comprehensive review of the current state of the elderly, to sensitize our readers to the essence of aging in today's world, and to suggest prospects for the future.

At the time our second edition was published we noted that there still existed a number of myths about what it is like to grow old. Today these myths are mostly perpetuated by the popular press. The best way to stop the proliferation of misinformation is through education, specifically in courses on gerontology. While many students using this text may not enter the field as professionals, they will nonetheless supply a much needed corrective balance to uninformed views. It is to this goal that this book is dedicated. Take whatever lessons it has to teach into the world. Do not stand silent as the elderly or the process of growing old are subjected to the stereotypical thinking that seems to take place whenever events are not well understood.

The past few years have witnessed widespread acceptance of gerontology, even if political forces have not always been hospitable to its recommendations. As a result of the diversity of the aging population and because aging is a dynamic process involving the physiological, social, and psychological facets of our existence, generalizations about growing and being old are difficult to support. Often the answers offered to the multitude of questions raised are as varied as the questions themselves. There are no easy answers to why people age as they do, but what has become apparent is that some type of unifying conceptual framework enables students and researchers to make sense of the diversity of facts that underpin our lives.

The present edition is intended to provide a comprehensive description of the dimensions of aging. It takes as its point of departure the proposition that it is meaningless to talk about any element of aging without having a grasp of the others as well. Our goal is to provide a holistic view of aging and to point to the ways in which the personal, social, and structural levels of the process interact to shape our daily lives.

To appreciate the relative character of aging in modern mass societies, it is prudent if not essential to have some grasp of where the elderly stand in other places and in other times. This will also allow us to understand how the relationship of older persons to the rest of their society is colored by the society's internal structure and how in turn each society is affected by the principal powers influencing world affairs today.

Finally, to describe or interpret the assumed facts about aging, it is necessary to understand the conceptual frameworks employed in gathering those facts. It is only in this way that change or accommodation can be forthcoming. There is no denying that an interdisciplinary approach to the study of aging may be a monumental task: to recognize, collect, and collate all the loose ends. Although we know that our efforts cannot yield definitive conclusions, we hope they will encourage further inquiry.

This edition is markedly different from the two previous ones: there have been sizable deletions, much reorganization, and the addition of a new chapter. The vast majority of the material in the present text is new: four chapters have been combined into two and a new section on policy formation has been added (Chapter 11). We have given long and careful consideration to the diverse recommendations of users and reviewers and believe the suggestions we have incorporated have noticeably improved this edition. Moreover, the typeface and graphics have been redesigned to change the entire appearance of the text. The production staff at Little, Brown listened to the concerns of scholars and students and have provided the extremely competent assistance necessary to make the text more accessible to readers. We welcome the input of new or renewed readers; without their comments and support our task is immeasurably more difficult.

Part One, comprising the first three chapters, offers an introduction to the field of social gerontology and the necessary conceptual tools for interpreting what happens as people age. It furnishes a working vocabulary, some idea of the fluid boundaries of aging, an overview of the demographic facts of life, and an indication of the relative meaning we attach to growing old. Part Two, with its four chapters, summarizes what we know of the lifeworld of the aging person. It begins with explanatory frameworks in physiology and continues with an overview of the health-related declines accompanying aging (including the pattern of health care services) and what they mean. The focus then shifts to psychological factors of interest to gerontologists. Part Three contains a broader, societal view of aging: the ways social context affect the individual. A key component of this section is the relevance of policy issues for individual functioning. Part Four attempts to forecast the future, both for the elderly themselves and for those who might be interested in gerontology as a vocation.

The words set in **boldface** type in the text are terms used in a technical sense, and are listed in the glossary. The meaning of words in *italics*, while they may be used in a technical or special sense, should be clear from the context in which they appear in the chapter. At the end of each chapter is a list of pertinent readings.

Many friends and colleagues have aided our efforts over the years, and it is impossible to cite the numerous ways in which we are indebted to them. We hope it will be sufficient to say we recognize we are who we are because they have touched and reached us.

There are a number of individuals who gave invaluable assistance to this third edition. Leonard Cain, William Rakowski, Harold Sheppard, Joseph Tindale, and Wen-hui Tsai made initial suggestions for revisions, and in some instances they also commented on the working manuscript. While we did not follow all their suggestions, their insights and efforts made our job easier. At Little, Brown the production personnel, coordinated by Phyllis Mitzman, as well as the efforts of Carolita Deter and her staff are evident in the physical product you now read. Manuscript preparation at the University of Kentucky was done by Marlene Pettit, who continues to amaze us by her speed, concern, and ability to render textual hieroglyphics into legible copy. The instructor's manual was typed by Wendy Price. There are also three very special people who made inestimable contributions to this third edition. They are true professionals and valuable colleagues; they have treated this project as if it were their own, performing all manner of tasks willingly, quickly, and unflinchingly. Toni Calasanti has offered criticisms on two editions now, and as always, her editorial suggestions are right on target. Howard Turner helped keep everything in perspective and was always available for any task. Cynthia Leedham made substantial contributions from start to finish. Without the efforts and support of these colleagues, the end result would have suffered.

While we are sincerely grateful for the invaluable assistance we have been fortunate to have, any mistakes in this edition are our own. We remain convinced that you, the reader, are embarking on the study of a fascinating, provocative, and complex topic. Welcome to a most rewarding field.

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PART ONE

MAKING SENSE OF AGING IN THE MODERN WORLD

