

Behavior and Adaptation in Late Life

second edition

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Second Edition

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Preface to the Second Edition

Since its original publication in 1969, *Behavior and Adaptation in Late Life* has enjoyed a degree of use and acceptance that has been extremely gratifying to its editors and publisher alike. Its greatest use has come from two quarters: practitioners dealing with the elderly, and teachers and students of gerontology at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The book, originally published in hard covers, soon had to be made available as a less expensive paperback. It has gone through four printings and been offered by several book clubs in the health care and behavioral science field.

But the field of aging does not stand still. Demographic, social, economic, and political facts about the aging change, and so do scientific findings and theories regarding aging. When it became apparent that a second edition was needed, the task of updating was begun. It is a real credit to the contributors of this volume that all of them accepted the invitation to participate in this work again. In addition, we are extremely gratified that our long-time colleague, Dr. George L. Maddox, out of the country on a sabbatical at the time the first edition was written, has joined us in this edition as the coauthor of the chapter on the sociological aspects of aging.

The reader will note that considerable variation exists in the progress reported in the differing disciplines in gerontology included in this book. These differences reflect in part the rapidity of change of circumstances. But it also reflects to no small degree the variation in support received for new research on different aspects of the overall aging picture. Major progress has been made in some areas of the field. Relatively less progress can be recorded in other areas. This observation is testimony to the need for continued stable support for research into a broad range of aspects of the entire aging experience.

The editors wish to express their thanks to the many readers who have given them encouragement and who, through their highly intelligent questions, have made a real contribution to the shaping of the second edition.

The editors also wish to acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to Mrs. Lin Richter, Editor of the Medical Division of Little, Brown and Company, who originally approached us with the idea for a book on behavior and adaptation in late life and who has given us encourage-

ment, guidance, and counsel over the past eight years during which we have collaborated. Without her skillful efforts, neither the first nor the second edition of this volume would have been possible.

E. W. B.

E. P.

Preface to the First Edition

In this book we have tried to bring together basic information which has a bearing on how people adapt to growing old. We feel that no single discipline, whether it be psychiatry, sociology, biology, or economics, can claim to offer a comprehensive explanation of how aged people act, think, and feel, or what the multiple determinants of their behavior are. Moreover, we feel that a mere collection of unrelated essays by experts from differing fields is not satisfactory, but that instead an integration of the diverse contributions is needed. We have sought to accomplish this integration in several ways. First, we invited as contributors to this volume investigators and clinicians who, as members of a common faculty, or as members of the Duke Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development, or through shared committee and organization work over a period of years, had come to know each other's work and point of view. Second, at the start of the project we made available to all contributors an overall outline of the proposed volume, thus allowing each of them to see how his or her chapter fitted into the entire scheme of the book. Third, we continued to refine the goal and scope of the book in weekly discussion sessions in which drafts of chapters were read and discussed, criticized, rewritten, and discussed again. These sessions were attended by many of the authors; but other staff members of the Duke Center also participated and contributed immeasurably to the final product presented here.

The deluge of new information about the aging process and the rapid obsolescence of present skills and knowledge have, in our opinion, demanded that a determined effort be made to present under a single cover a broad range of material. We further felt that we had to do so succinctly and in understandable terms so that the book might be useful to a wide spectrum of people.

This book is written for those with an interest in any of a number of aspects of aging, with the anticipation that their understanding of their own area of interest will be enhanced by an awareness of other forces also impinging on aged persons. It is our hope that the book will prove useful to psychiatrists who see aged persons in their practice, and to internists and general practitioners who do likewise. We feel the book contains information relevant to health planners, social welfare workers, and state and local health and welfare administrators. We hope this book will also be read by gerontologists from a variety of disciplines—sociolo-

gists, anthropologists, economists, psychologists, biologists—in short, all professionals whose topic of investigation is the aging process. College undergraduates or graduate students studying human development or normal or abnormal psychology, as well as their teachers, may find this a useful summary of present knowledge in this field. Furthermore, the book is relatively nontechnical so that it can be read by the general reader who wants to know more about aging, especially if he has aged parents whom he may need to care for or whom he at least wishes to understand. Finally, we feel that the aged themselves may obtain from this book a broader perspective of what they are experiencing.

We are indebted to many persons for their help with this project. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the help of Dr. Carl Eisdorfer, Dr. Walter Obrist, and Dr. Erdman Palmore, who in many ways assisted us in determining editorial policy. We are also extremely grateful to all those who participated in our discussion sessions, including Dr. Kurt Back, Dr. Daniel Gianturco, Mrs. Dorothy Heyman, Miss Frances Jeffers, Dr. Jesse McNeil, Dr. John Nowlin, Dr. Larry Thompson, Dr. Adriaan Verwoerd, Dr. H.-Shan Wang, Dr. A. D. Whanger, and Mrs. Frances Wilkie.

We are especially appreciative of the two authors not on the Duke faculty who joined our Duke colleagues in this venture and added their highly specialized knowledge. We also wish to express regret that several distinguished members of the Center research staff were unable to collaborate with us on this volume because of previous commitments on their time, and we are sorry that we did not have the total benefit of their combined experience and wisdom. Readers familiar with the structure of the Center will notice, however, the frequency with which reference is made to their work throughout the book.

Special recognition is due Mrs. Rosa Absalom and Mrs. Ann Rimmer for their coordination of the entire editorial and production effort as well as for efficient handling of editorial correspondence. Finally, our gratitude must be expressed to all our contributors who worked diligently to maintain the original writing and production schedule.

Ewald W. Busse
Eric Pfeiffer
Durham, N.C.
June 1969

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1. Introduction

Ewald W. Busse and Eric Pfeiffer

This book is the result of both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary labor. The terms *multidisciplinary* and *interdisciplinary* are often used interchangeably and, we believe, erroneously [3]. For instance, multidisciplinary research is a type of *group* research involving investigators from several distinct scientific disciplines working in parallel with one another. The investigators are identified as a group because they work in proximity to one another and because their research deals with a common topic. The group usually plans to maximize communication among the various investigators, hoping to increase the breadth and potential of their work.

Interdisciplinary research, on the other hand, is a team effort by two or more persons representing different scientific disciplines. Because of their particular skills and interests, the investigators have accepted responsibility for certain segments of a jointly defined research goal. The meaning of the prefix *inter-* is "mutual," not merely "among" or "between."

A glance at the great variety of scientific disciplines represented by the contributors makes it clear that the entire volume must be viewed as a multidisciplinary product, although many of its sections are of an interdisciplinary nature. All the authors share a common concern with the processes of aging and the problems of the aged. This does not mean, however, that each necessarily agrees with the approach used or the conclusions reached by the other authors. And while the editors hold themselves principally responsible for the selection of topics included in this book, the particular points of view expressed in each chapter are those of the individual contributors.

Estimates of the Older Population

As of 1975, approximately 10.3 percent of the population of the United States are 65 years of age or over. This is an increase of approximately 0.5 percent from 1970, when 20.2 million (9.8 percent) of the 204.8 million persons in the United States were in this age group. This is a remarkable change when one considers that in 1870 the total population of the United States was 40 million, of whom only 1.2 million (less than 3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. According to Brotman [1], the 20 million Americans who in 1970 were 65 years of age or over were equal in numbers to the total population of 21 of the smallest states.

Are the Elderly a Minority Group?

Since the elderly constitute such a sizable fraction of the entire population, it may at first be somewhat surprising that the question of the elderly as a minority group should be raised at all. But numbers alone do not determine minority status, as can be seen by comparing the elderly with a more clearly defined minority group in this country, namely, blacks. In 1967 the elderly accounted for 9.9 percent of the population, while blacks accounted for 11.2 percent [6]. Yet the latter clearly constitute a minority group in our society. In any case the question whether or not the elderly are a minority group has been raised, at times only subtly. Sometimes it has been answered in the affirmative; occasionally it has been answered negatively. The status of the aged as a deprived minority group is substantiated by the observations of several of the contributors to this volume. They believe that retired persons rarely share in the advantages enjoyed by the majority of our society and that prejudices restrict opportunities for the elderly to achieve personal satisfaction and participation in the entire range of activities open to other members of the society.

The Nature of Minority Groups

Minority groups will always exist in any sizable group of human beings. How minority groups are defined and recognized is complicated. They can be distinguished by such factors as their expressed beliefs and behavior, their physical appearance, their characteristic dress, eating habits, religious expression, social behavior, or fixed and recognizable patterns of handling such experiences as insecurity, fear, grief, and aggression. At certain points in the history of a nation, minority groups are more easily recognized and are seen as more deviant than at other times. Minority groups often become less visible as they gradually alter their own patterns or effect changes in the majority so that distinctions between the majority and the minority become increasingly blurred. There is still considerable fluctuation in the degree to which the aged are regarded as a minority group in this country. This is reflected in the rapidly changing and often contradictory public policies with regard to many aspects of the lives of the elderly.

Taking the point of view for the moment that any definable group of people who share specific characteristics is in effect a minority group,