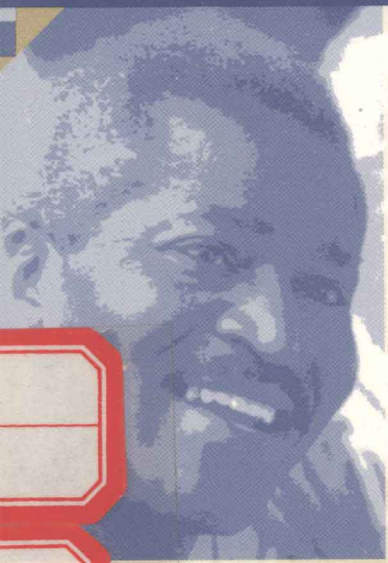




aging and diversity

An Active Learning Experience



Stephen B. Fried
Chandra M. Mehrotra

AGING AND DIVERSITY

An Active Learning Experience

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AGING AND DIVERSITY: An Active Learning Experience

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Dedication

To eight diverse elders: Janice Boswell, Surajo Devi, Dr. Humphrey Doermann, Carolyn Goodstein, Frances Lavine, Dr. M. Powell Lawton, Dr. C. Kermit Phelps, and Dorothy Rosenwald.

Foreword

I have read *Aging and Diversity: An Active Learning Experience* from multiple perspectives: as a teacher of college teachers, as a researcher in the area of student learning and college teaching, and as a former teacher of a course on the psychology of aging. From each of these perspectives I found that the authors, Stephen Fried and Chandra Mehrotra, provide exciting and worthwhile reading material.

As a teacher and as a researcher on learning and teaching, I was greatly impressed by the creative approaches the authors have used to ensure that students will learn, remember, and be able to use what is presented. The active learning exercises are among the most extensive of any book I have seen. They are both memorable and interesting. Any student who uses the opportunities provided will be helped to learn, understand, and retrieve what they need, whether for further learning or for applications in work dealing with diverse elders. The diversity theme illuminates the importance of culture and context in the behavior and experience of individuals as they grow older.

But I do not want my foreword to further delay your entry into the world of *Aging and Diversity*. Enjoy and learn!

W. J. McKeachie
Professor Emeritus
Department of Psychology
University of Michigan

Preface: Introduction for Instructors

As America continues to diversify, it is essential that gerontology students develop an understanding of how factors such as ethnicity, gender, social class, and religion affect aging. In order to better address the health and human service needs of a rapidly growing and more diversified segment of the population, education in gerontology needs to be provided from a multicultural perspective. An important factor complicating this need is the fact that there is a lack of research on the effects of diversity on a range of factors important to the study of aging. For example, with the exception of Black and Mexican American elders, the research data for ethnic elders are quite limited (Yeo, 1991). While this may, to some extent, be due to the limited support available for research in this area of inquiry, it may also be due to the special challenges faced by investigators interested in conducting research in ethnic communities. As Bengtson (1979) and Henderson (1994) remind us, this research is fraught with problems requiring special considerations, issues not usually treated in textbooks or courses in research methodology. For example, the perspective of the middle-class, White, Christian, nonimmigrant researcher or practitioner may be quite irrelevant to the life circumstances of ethnic elders, particularly those from minority racial backgrounds.

While in recent years we have witnessed increasing levels of interest in the topic of diversity, many college professors and in-service instructors teaching aging-related courses have had little or no formal preparation in diversity and aging. In addition, most educators have limited access to the instructional materials they can use to enhance the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of students and service providers on aging and diversity issues. Even when they are able to locate a relevant journal article or book, such sources seldom provide them with the guidance and support they need in designing classes that will engage students in developing the knowledge and attitudes essential for working with diverse elders. We have prepared this book to address these unmet needs.

Aging and Diversity: An Active Learning Experience can be used as a course text in gerontology, adult development and aging, gerontological nursing, social

work, health education, public health, allied health, family studies, and other subjects dealing with the aging process and older adults. The book may also be useful as a resource for instructors of undergraduate or graduate courses, for in-service staff in preparing classes and workshops, for instructors' professional development, or for students' self-development. Each chapter of the book presents the content in a focus area and provides activities to engage the student in active learning. Text chapters cover the following topics: an overview of diversity and aging, psychological aging, issues in health and sexuality, caregiving, work and retirement, religion and spirituality, and death, dying, and grieving. The book is not intended as a synthesis of all relevant research, nor does it cover all of the possible relevant topics. Instead, our intent is to present material appropriate for providing undergraduates and service providers with concepts to guide them in developing a broad comprehension of elements of diversity and their impact on the lives of older adults in the United States.

The following are some guidelines, assumptions, and principles that we use and that you may find helpful in teaching about diversity and aging:

1. ***Increase students' awareness of elements of their own diversity.*** Diverse factors, like gender, ethnicity, religion, and social class, apply to each of us. Therefore, it is essential for students to have a good understanding of their own cultural traditions. Increasing this understanding will assist them in developing greater awareness of the ways in which their values and behaviors could enhance or impede their work with the diverse population of older adults.

2. ***Broaden students' world view.*** Students should be encouraged to identify and become knowledgeable about the cultures that surround the geographical area where they work or the cultures of other students attending their college or university. Since some students may have grown up in relatively homogeneous environments, college provides them their first experience in dealing with persons from a variety of ethnic groups, religions, or income levels. Clearly, it is to their advantage to learn more about psychological concerns, health beliefs and practices, caregiving preferences, work and retirement behaviors, religious and spiritual perspectives, and death, dying, and grieving issues germane to diverse American elders.

3. ***Enhance culturally relevant skills and programs.*** While the services available for older persons have increased dramatically in the past 20 years, little consideration is typically given to approaches that would be particularly effective for ethnic and minority elders. Therefore, students in academic and continuing education programs should be taught culturally relevant skills in order to develop competencies essential for designing, implementing, and evaluating effective programs for a diverse array of older adults.

4. ***Promote an understanding of the life course perspective.*** A life course perspective is essential for developing an understanding of the process of aging. Students need to learn that cohort, class, gender, ethnicity, and other elements of diversity influence an individual's life course. As an example, because of the influence of the group on the individual, the salience of the ethnicity variable is

evident in the many ways in which it impinges on life course components, whether physiological, social, or cultural (Barresi, 1987). In short, both college students and service providers should be aware of the necessity of approaching the unique world of diverse elders from a perspective that provides them a broad level of understanding of these factors and their interaction with each other.

5. *Foster a multiethnic perspective.* While it is important to present an in-depth examination of a specific ethnic group, such an approach ignores the reality of a pluralistic society. Providing instruction in diversity and aging that crosses racial and ethnic groups has a better chance of achieving its objective because it allows participants to develop an understanding of both commonalities and differences among diverse groups. A major emphasis of educational programs should be to help students discover the varied coping mechanisms that grow out of different traditions and learn how to mobilize them in service to older adults (Giordano, 1992). Participants need to be aware of how positive ethnic identity can contribute to higher self-esteem. It is critical that these positive aspects not be romanticized or neglected in discussion of the special problems of each diverse group. Instead, it is helpful to create an appropriate climate and to guide the participants to be more conscious of aspects of diversity that help older adults view themselves positively and enable them to cope effectively with the problems they face.

6. *Provide activity-based learning experiences.* Students engaging in learning about diversity and aging are themselves from diverse groups in terms of ethnicity, age, language, and so forth. Since different "people learn in different ways" (Meyers & Jones, 1993, p. 10), active learning strategies may prove to be extremely helpful in strengthening their education in diversity and aging. The following are among the salient characteristics of active learning: (a) More emphasis is placed on developing learners' skills than on simply transmitting information (Meyers & Jones, 1993); (b) students engage in higher order thinking (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) (Meyers & Jones, 1993); (c) students participate in activities such as case studies, simulations, and small-group problem-solving discussions (Fried, 1988; Fried & Mehrotra, 1994; Fried, Van Booven, & MacQuarrie, 1993); and (d) increased focus is placed on students' exploration of personal values and attitudes (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

In order to encourage active learning, we have included a number of individual and small-group exercises and assignments as well as comprehension tests throughout the book. Each chapter includes (a) a preview with orienting questions, (b) a narrative that includes an introduction and summary, (c) a number of learning activities and a quiz, and (d) suggested readings. For each of the active learning vehicles, we include the following: (a) purpose and desired learning outcomes; (b) approximate time required to complete the activity, which will vary from student to student; (c) procedure; and (d) the actual learning activity. Forms of experiential learning activities include interviews, role plays, case studies, and an assortment of other exercises to be completed in class or as homework assignments. Also, we include, as an Appendix, an evaluation form

that can be used with any of the learning experiences. Some instructors may wish to have their students complete all of the activities, while others may decide to choose those activities that most particularly fit with their own teaching style and learning objectives. All of the experiences can be completed as part of a program of independent study or as self-development for instructors, practitioners, or students.

Instructors may find that certain active learning experiences are not suitable for some classes or for particular students, and they need to be sensitive to the fact that some students may be uncomfortable engaging in activities related to various topics (e.g., death and dying, family customs, sexuality, and so forth). Students' values and need for privacy should be respected. Also, some of the activities involve students in interviewing community or family members. Principles of confidentiality and informed consent should be shared with students before they initiate these activities. Instructors may wish to submit learning activities to their institutional review boards if doing so conforms with institutional policy.

We wish you great success in designing and implementing educational experiences for students, service providers, and others interested in learning about diversity and aging. We are interested in receiving your feedback about your experiences in using this book. The subject of diversity and aging is most exciting, and we hope that you and your students find it as stimulating, engaging, and enjoyable as we do!

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Our families offered us encouragement and assistance in so many ways. Stephen Fried wishes to acknowledge Connie Boswell, his wife and best friend.

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We dedicate this book to eight diverse elders who have shown us, through the ways in which they conduct their lives, how to age successfully.

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An Introduction to Aging and Diversity

OVERVIEW

Demographics of American Elders

- What is the demographic composition of American elders?
- What percentage of the older population is composed of women and minorities?
- What will be the composition of the older population in the future?

The Elements of Diversity

- How can elements of diversity have physical, psychological, and social consequences?
- What are some important elements of diversity?
- Why are race and ethnicity primarily social constructs?
- What is the interactional nature between elements of diversity and aging?

Why Should We Focus on Diversity and Aging?

- Why will the number of minority elders continue to increase?
- Why does the relationship between ethnicity and aging vary across different groups and within the same group?
- What are some implications of the fact that older people from different groups may have different needs?
- Why is ethnicity not a fixed entity?
- How do elements of diversity affect life course and role transitions?

Diversity and Acculturation

- What is the acculturation continuum?
- What effect does English-language proficiency have on the acculturation of ethnic minorities?
- How is acculturation influenced by the cohort effect?