Επιθεώρηση Κοινωνικών Ερευνών

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Aging in the 1980s: Psychological Issues

This is the third volume in a series of publications on aging issued by the American Psychological Association (APA). The first volume on the Psychological Aspects of Aging, published in 1956 and edited by J.E. Anderson, summarized the literature existing at that time. The second one on the Psychology of Adult Development and Aging, published in 1973 and edited by Carl Eisdorfer and M. Powell Lawton, presented the recommendations of the task force which represented APA at the White House Conference on Aging in November 1971, together with in-depth reviews of the major areas of research on the psychology of aging.

Aging in the 1980s: Psychological Issues, edited by Leonard W. Poon, is a collection of 43 articles organized into nine major areas. These nine areas are: clinical issues, neuropsychological issues, psychopharmacological issues, cognitive issues, stress and coping, environmental issues, interpersonal relations and methodological issues. The book starts with a prologue and finishes with an epilogue and each of the nine sections is preceded by an introduction of the editor of the section. The volume has two major purposes: (a) to summarize and put into perspective selected issues on the psychology of aging and to establish research directions for the 1980s and (b) to identify what we now know and what we need to know about nine selected areas in the field of aging. In order to fulfill these purposes, the editor tried to present complementary and competing views from researchers and clinicians of different backgrounds. Selection of topics was based on a model in which psychological aging was considered from a systems perspective, with the person, the environment, health, and behavior interacting over time. The chapters examine the discrete effects of the environment, health and behavior, as well as the combined effects of all three, on the aging person.

Section 1: Clinical Issues

Chapter 1, the first of this section, reviews the medical, psychological, and sociological aspects of aging. The second chapter emphasizes the lack of valid norms for the elderly on standardized neuropsychological tests which create difficulties for the clinicians trying to interpret apparently pathological task performances in the aged.

The second chapter focuses on assessment. Current assessment procedures frequently used with the elderly are reviewed critically and specific directions are recommended for future research. The authors stress the need for evaluation of systematically obtained data from several different fields and careful integration of these data to formulate intervention programs.

The third chapter discusses psychopathology and treatment, both in the community and in the institution. Questions concerning process and outcome research design, as well as methodology, are also considered.

In summary, these three chapters discuss how well older adults have been served, examine the effectiveness of different assessment and therapeutic practices, and suggest what the 1980s will offer.

Section 2: Neuropsychological Issues

Chapter 7, the first of this section, reviews recent findings concerning the brainstem auditory evoked potentials (BAEPs) in the study of normal and abnormal aging. Event-related-potentials (ERPs) are the spatial-temporal pattern of brain electrical activity that is synchronized to the onset of an external stimulus or that follows an expected event as Harkins himself defines them.

Chapter 8 deals with age changes in the neurological and cognitive areas, as measured by ERPs. The authors review recent research and stress the relationship between brain and behavioral responses in the very health elderly.

Chapter 9 examines the feasibility of using a particular component of the auditory evoked potential as an objective means of evaluating cognitive functions in aging. The
authors conclude, that this component can be used to distinguish objectively between normal and abnormal changes in age-related cognitive functioning.

Finally, Chapter 10, the last in this section, describes the methodologies in the study of psychopharmacology. The authors present two chapters, one dealing with the use of psychosocial methods and the other with the use of pharmacological methods. The former chapter emphasizes the importance of the psychosocial environment in the development of cognitive aging. The latter chapter emphasizes the importance of pharmacological methods in the study of cognitive aging.

In summary, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in the field of cognitive aging. It covers a wide range of topics, from the biological and psychological aspects of aging to the social and environmental factors that influence cognitive function. The book is a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners interested in the study of cognitive aging.
rounded by it. It stresses that the person-environment interaction should be viewed as a dynamic process.

The last chapter in this section considers the effect of the intergenerational and family environment on the well-being of the aged. Section 8, on Interpersonal Relations, edited by Lillian E. Rovit, deals primarily with relationships encountered among family members. This section focuses on the qualitative aspects of the relationships such as the function they fulfill, communality of values, and feelings involved.

The first chapter in this section considers research and theory on the effects of parenting on parents within each of five parenting stages: (a) before becoming parents, (b) childbirth and postpartum, (c) early and middle years of parenting, (d) parenting with adolescents, and (e) parenting with adult children. Emphasis is placed on how parenting affects and interacts with other major role changes in adults' lives across stages. The authors stress the need for the generation of theoretical models addressed to issues of parenting.

Chapter 33, the next in this section, examines the course of sibling relationships throughout adulthood and old age. It points to a recognition of different sibling roles, at least by sex, with sisters having an effect different from that of brothers. It also suggests that the nature of sibling interaction—rivalry and affection—changes with time.

Chapter 34 focuses on the transition of midlife which is usually accompanied by predictable shifts in interpersonal relationships. The authors review recent research and theory on midlife development and midlife transition and conclude by proposing a series of research, methodological, and theoretical questions that can be searched and, hopefully, answered during the 1980s.

The last chapter of this section deals with grandparenting, and more specifically with the grandparent-grandchild relationship. A review of the literature to date, by the author, leads to the conclusion that grandparent-grandchild interchanges are usually peripheral in the lives of both. However, more recent focus on this relationship suggests that it has more importance than was originally thought. This relationship may provide a clue to family integration and may also reflect coming shifts in family dynamics, such as those resulting from divorce and remarriage.

In summary, then, Section 8 examines the relations between the stresses encountered and the coping mechanisms adopted over time.

The last part of this volume, Section 9, on Methodological Issues, edited by John R. Nezlek and Stephen W. Harkins, includes eight chapters and examines methodological issues, such as between-and within-subject research design, mathematical models of the aging processes, and the application of modern psychophysical techniques in aging research.

According to the editors of this section, the chapters included can be divided into three parts: (1) the first part which includes the first three chapters of this section, deals with design, measurement, and analysis of intellectual abilities and personality in relation to normal aging. Chapter 36, the first in this part, deals with measurement issues. Chapter 37, on statistical modeling procedures and methods in aging research, examines the benefits that modeling offers to scientific theorizing and data evaluation but also some of the weaknesses of this approach. The last chapter of the first part in this section, deals with between- and within-group comparisons in aging research. The author gives special attention to the study of variability exhibited by older adults.

(2) The second part of this section, focusing on the value of sensoriperceptual studies (which utilize modern psychophysical techniques) in psychological gerontology, includes four chapters. More specifically, Chapter 39 reviews briefly the sensory-perceptual studies that have investigated age differences in response bias. Chapter 40, deals with the nature of the receiver operating characteristic (ROC), that is distributional effects on between group comparisons.

Chapter 41 treats in depth the application of Signal Detection Theory (SDT) procedures to the study of psychological aging. The last chapter in the second part of this section, deals with the measurement of sensation in the aged. While admitting to the validity of SDT for evaluating sensory and associated cognitive changes that take place with age and its contribution to understanding differences in sensitivity and response bias, the authors point also to its weaknesses in accounting for all changes in sensory functioning. They propose a new scaling method, called magnitude matching, for measuring sensation magnitude.

(3) The third, and last part of this section, concerns the complex impact of physical health on studies in psychological aging. Chapter 43, the only one in this part, reviews issues related to the assessment of health and behavior and their interaction with the psychology of aging. The authors point to the practical difficulty in the measurement of health status in psychological gerontology.

In summary, then, this section on methodological issues, emphasizes techniques and methods that appear to be promising for the study of behavioral aging.

This volume on Aging in the 1980s concludes with an epilogue including some thoughts on how the research progressed from the editor, A.T. Welford; and a last word by the editor, Leonard W. Poons. In order to set some goals for the future of aging research one must look first of all at the progress that has been made up to now. The author sees progression along four dimensions: (a) from observation through the induction of unifying concepts to the formulation of models of process; (b) from studies of experience and behavior alone to their integration with data from other biological sciences; (c) from qualitative classification to quantitative measures; and (d) a to-and-fro progression between pure theory and application. Some thoughts are given on the research potential for development in any or all of these dimensions.

In the last word of this volume, the editor attempts to establish continuity between what has been accomplished and what lies ahead.

Any individual interested in gerontological research must read and study this volume. It is well-organized and very informative providing many interesting thoughts for future study and research. Although every aspect of psychological aging could not be covered in any one volume, nevertheless, the information included here is representative of what we now know in the nine areas covered by the sections of this book.

I believe that the major objectives of this volume have been achieved. Its success will of course be judged by the new thinking and research it will stimulate and the effects of which will be evident at the end of this decade.

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