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AUTHOR Marcus, Edward E.
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ABSTRACT

Four background papers for a social psychological approach to the continuing education of older-aged (those over 50) persons are provided. In the first paper, "Social Impacts on Aging in American Culture," evidence derived from certain empirical studies is adduced to support a view that external elements--social values and age-norms, status patterns, and gross social system characteristics--produce much of the distinctive behavior and problems of old age. The second paper, "The Educational Plight of Today's Elderly," endeavors to summarize, in a way that escapes the bias of the professional educational view, some recent claims and developments related to the social change and demands of the present era that place special stress on the education of the older person. "Problem Solving and Complex Learning Behavior in Old Age," the third paper, includes a far from exhaustive review of a number of reports and writings about learning "decrement" in aging. The final paper, "Educational Interests of the Elderly as Motives to Seek Out Organized Instruction," concerns studies of the interests of the elderly, with regard to their usefulness to the educational planner. Each of the papers has its own list of references. (Author/DB)

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FACTORS AFFECTING THE SELF-IMAGE OF THE OLDER-AGED LEARNER

by

Edward E. Marcus

The University of Chicago

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INTRODUCTION

The four papers in this set were written to serve several different purposes at the same time. Together, they constitute a group of background papers for a social psychological approach to the continuing education of older-aged persons (roughly defined as those over fifty). Their thrust is exploratory, not comprehensive. They do not purport to be a systematic review of literature but were for use primarily as personal "position" papers for study by a steering committee of senior citizens about to discuss plans for a conference on teaching and training the aged. On this account, an element of advocacy is clearly apparent in their content. The writer also submitted them, with appropriate modifications, for credit in a graduate level course in adult development and aging and to his academic adviser as evidence of progress toward defining for himself an area of research specialization.

Older-aged persons do not constitute a large segment of people enrolled in adult education course offerings, and there is no evidence that they are clamoring to get into them. Nevertheless, reason does exist for belief that the field will serve a somewhat larger number of older persons in years to come than it has in the past. Differences between what is involved in teaching children and teaching adults are great enough to suggest that perhaps distinct disciplines, designated by Knowles as pedagogy and andragogy, should be recognized.

Without getting into the question of whether the justification for so drastic a division is adequate, I am raising here the additional question of whether the long period of adulthood--fifty or more years--is relatively homogeneous for the purposes of the educator, or if there are enough general differences between earlier and later maturity to warrant dissimilar approaches to teaching in the extreme ranges. I know of no evidence that that is the case, yet it seems to me a reasonable hypothesis for the following reasons:

1. Society determines that later adulthood is, like adolescence, a specifically identifiable period of human life.
2. Social change and demands of the present era require that special stress be placed on the education of this age-group.
3. Older persons probably have distinct types of learning difficulties.
4. Motivation for formal learning undoubtedly undergoes considerable change during the life cycle.

In the first of these papers, which pertains to the first of the above reasons, evidence derived from certain empirical studies is adduced to support a view that external elements--social values and age-norms, status patterns, and gross social system characteristics--produce much of the distinctive behavior and problems of old age.

The second paper endeavors to summarize in a way that

escapes the bias of the professional educational view some recent claims and developments related to the second reason.

The third paper includes a far from exhaustive review of a number of reports and writings about learning "decrement" in aging.

The final paper in the series concerns studies of the interests of the elderly, with regard to their usefulness to the educational planner.

The burden of the argument pursued throughout the set is that the most important aspect of the older-aged learner for the educator is his concept of himself, which is likely to have been "damaged" by the experience of coming to be regarded by himself and others as "old," with all the invidious concomitants of that idea in our culture. (The writer is solely responsible for the emotional loading of this and other statements in the papers.) It was recommended that the conference referred to above take up from there and deal with what it "means" to the older-aged person to undertake any kind of formal learning again after the age of fifty.

The individual papers are separate compositions, each with its own list of references.

I. SOCIAL IMPACTS ON AGING IN AMERICAN CULTURE

by

Edward E. Marcus

The University of Chicago

(April 24, 1972)

"Aging is a cultural as well as a biological process...personal adaptation to it depends upon self-perception, a product of cultural norms and values...some views of the self in old age are conducive to relative contentment in old age, while others breed despondency, futility, feelings of worthlessness, and even mental illness...self-perceptions of the aged are shaped by social expectations...American society--intentionally or not--helps in the destruction of some of its members simply because they have grown older...social expectations of the elderly reflect value systems which vary from culture to culture." (1, p.3)

"One of the most intriguing factors in the educability of old people may be society's attitude toward them. Many behavioral and personality characteristics...are shaped by the expectations of others, and members of any age group tend to conform to the stereotype into which society casts them. Stereotyped 'senescence' imposes the burden of an image unrelated to actual debilitation of mind and body, deleteriously affecting old people's sense of personal worth and well-being. Thus it may occur that old people yield passively to the self-fulfilling prophecies their social image projects such as conservatism, preoccupation with health, loss of memory, inability to learn, and withdrawal from social activities." (2, p.339)

"The American culture does not direct that old age be looked upon with reverence and esteem." (9, p.69)

"The integration of individuals into their society results from forces which place them within the system and govern their participation and patterned association with others. This network of bonds has three basic dimensions: (1) social values, (2) formal and informal group memberships, and (3) social roles. Thus, people are tied into their society essentially through

their beliefs, the groups that they belong to, and the positions that they occupy. In general, to the extent that older people can preserve their middle age patterns in these areas, then they maintain the basis of their social integration. That is, insofar as their lives do not change in old age. But to the extent that their lives do change and they cannot maintain their earlier patterns, then their integration may be undermined. The crucial factor is not the absolute state of their associations so much as the sheer disruption of their previous life style, activities, and relationships. In general, the greater the change, the greater the risk of personal demoralization and alienation from society. Under these conditions, older people also ripen into significant social problems." (10, p.9)

The developmental tasks of human persons are determined in part by biological changes and in part by sociopsychological factors--the complex interaction of individual self-perception and socially transmitted cultural values. The relative weights of these elements fluctuate. Maturation substantially both sets and controls the tasks which must be completed in infancy, and physical aging is that fact which cannot be eluded at the other end of the life-span. In between the two extremities of recent birth and impending death, culture gains and maintains ascendancy. The severity of its grip upon the elderly in America is what the above quotations attest to.

The length of this paper will not permit discussion of the nature of the developmental tasks of senescence. We

will confine our attention to the phenomenon of the socio-cultural definition of the special problems which confront the aging. These problems are not mainly the result of physiological processes. All old people are not physically ill, and the extent to which a larger proportion of them than of the total population suffers from lessened acuity and vigor of sensorimotor activity is a matter only of degree. The occurrence of reduction of intellectual power due to aging mental processes has not been established. Indications that such a reduction occurs can be explained in terms of the effects of disuse (including lack of practice, diminished confidence, and interference with different habits), modified motivation, and misapplication of the values and standards of youth to those of age. (3, p.27)

It is the writer's hypothesis that three elements outside the person create the conditions within which various disabilities and decrements of durable age take form and expression. They are: (1) social values and norms that distinguish between the several age-periods of human life; (2) prevailing patterns of social status and grading on the basis of age; and (3) social system characteristics related to such matters as the distribution of economic goods and the presence of competitive and alienating or dehumanizing forces affecting all the persons in the society. Only a few studies concerning these matters were consulted for evidence

relating to the stated premise. They deal with the direct effects of the three elements. But the indirect effects of exposure over a considerable lifetime to insidious never-ending and all-embracing value judgments must be even more formative with respect to the self-images of older persons than the readily observable and detectable influences of our culture. People must internalize the value judgments of their contemporaries and in time become the kind of persons that they perceive old people regarded as being in their culture.

That their perceptions differ on the basis of social group membership has been reported by Neugarten and Peterson (7), Rosenberg (9), and Rosow (10).

But social class influences on the self-views of the aging are neither all on one side nor total in their effect. It is clear from the work of Rosenberg and of Rosow that there are compensatory aspects in every social class situation, for example, that those lower in the economic scale tend to receive more care from neighbors and have less dread of financial stringency (to which they are more accustomed) than the affluent, who on their part can expect greater emotional support by relatives and friends, even though they may experience more anxiety about their own power to meet their financial needs adequately. However, the larger culture

provides overall stereotypes of aging and other generalizing standards (like the 65-year age limit to active careers fixed by the Social Security Act) which alter the perspectives within all its social class components. These more extensive patterns create the conditions that either do or do not mold the elderly into a distinct subculture or minority group and influence the way they tend to see themselves.

Brief partial summaries of the several studies referred to will indicate their relevance for the purposes of this argument.

Clark and Anderson (1) studied 435 people living in San Francisco who were available survivors of a much larger group originally selected for longitudinal study. One of their basic acceptances was that cultural forms have everywhere been developed which invest both youth and age with special significance. Through the agency of culture, members of a particular society come to share certain perceptions of age. (p. 5) Where old age is defined in functional terms, biological deterioration signals the end of active adult status, but Western civilization--and particularly American society--employs a formal definition based strictly on time. (p. 7) Here, our culture is producing a new life-era, a long hiatus between retirement and death which is essentially devoid of social meaning but is marked by social attitudes appropriate only in the last days of life. (p. 11) "The roots of many

problems of the elderly in our culture lie in the normlessness of this newly extended life epoch of relatively healthy old age." (p. 10)

According to these writers, four principal historical factors have influenced this normlessness: the weakness of kinship ties, the rapidity of industrial and technological change, a phenomenal increase in the number of older persons, and the dominant emphasis on the value of productivity. (pp. 13-16) Through these factors, the culture has affected the mental health of the aging in at least three ways: by definitions of mental illness established by social consensus; by the creation of individual stresses differing in kind, number, and locus; and in the provision of resources for tension reduction. (pp. 18-26) The interaction of these with the uniquely personal thoughts and feelings of the aging person gives rise to the personal system, which was the focus of the Clark-Anderson study. (p. 78) One of their findings was that age alone was unrelated to self-evaluation. (p. 115) That appears to mean that culture, rather than biology, is the source of the self-images of the old. Contrasting patterns of personal value-orientations distinguished between adaptive and maladaptive life-styles on the part of the subjects in the study. (p. 207) Such formulations as the "Protestant ethic" held a tremendous meaning for them in maintaining

their self-esteem. (p. 390)

...In America, one must not admit that, when one grows old, one will need to lean more and more upon others. In America, no adult has any right to this. At all costs, the major work must be done, the major values must be acted out. Those who cannot do these things are either "children" or fools, useless or obsolete. It is the central values of American culture which lay down such cruel alternatives, and those elderly, not wishing to be thought of as foolish or useless, often believe the only way out of such an either-or dilemma is to keep their peace, their social distance, their insularity, their independence, their inviolable selfhood--even at the awful cost of loneliness and isolation. And it is in corners such as these that we have seen breed the suspicions and fears and despairs that wreck a sizeable number of elderly Americans. (p. 425)

It should be obvious that what Clark and Anderson called "isolating factors in American life" shape the ways we see ourselves and our expectations of what we can expect in old age.

Ecklund (2) noted that the primacy we place on youth, occupational identity, beauty, and vitality is a detrimental standard for the elderly. He proposed that we attempt to counteract the effects upon them of such negative social images of aging through amending the education of all age groups in the society. (pp. 339-340) Indeed, for Landsman, education is for the very intellectual survival of the aged. (3, p.39)

Neugarten (4) considered relations between age groups in relation to social movements of both youth and the aged, noting the appearance of antagonisms directed toward each and the phenomenon of "age-ism." Turning to individual social role patterns, she concluded that diversity is the rule and will probably increase in the future. "From the perspective of social role patterns for older individuals, the future will probably bring increased social permissiveness, increasing diversity of life styles, and increased freedom to develop idiosyncratic patterns that provide for higher levels of life satisfaction." If this is true, we may speculate that even long-standing rigidities of the aging personality might relax to an extent, allowing the aged freedom to see themselves more fully as integral persons instead of social stereotypes.

The Neugarten and Moore report (5) detailed many of the changing aspects of the age-status system in the United States that are leading to new relationships between the age-groups. Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe (6) reported a study of age norms and constraints among a sample of middle class people. Their findings indicated that personal belief in the relevance and validity of social norms increases through the adult life span; the individual becomes increasingly aware of age discriminations in adult behavior and of the



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system of social sanctions that operate with regard to age appropriateness. The older person has internalized age norms and his attitude in regard to age and age-related behaviors tends to be highly charged emotionally. Neugarten and Peterson (7) studied the American age-grade system as part of the Kansas City Studies. They found general agreement concerning the existence of four periods of life but clear and consistent differences between social class groups concerning the way the system operates with regard to the nature and timing of social and psychological rewards and crisis points in aging.

Rose (8) and Streib (11) presented arguments--leading to opposite conclusions--regarding the status of the aged as a subculture or minority group, but the discussions of both showed the strong effects on the aged of social attitudes and views about aging.

Rosenberg (9) started from a premise that aging holds differential meaning in terms of deprivation for the poor and the solvent. (p. 12) He studied class-linked effects in 1596 persons in Philadelphia, observing such possibilities as that a higher evaluation of old age per se can be found among poor old men than among the solvent or the working class in general, for whom affiliation with old people may be more demeaning. (p. 69) He discovered no structural

basis for assuming subcultural or quasiminority group status for aged persons: indeed, the most significant variable in his findings, particularly with regard to the friendship patterns of the old, was their context of poverty or solvency. (pp. 103-107) Rosenberg's analysis of social distinctions in relation to achievement by the individual and individual conceptions of the nature of the class system seems to me salient ground for understanding the observations and conclusions of others--some of which have already been cited--that social class affiliation makes a major difference in how the elderly perceive themselves. (pp. 156-157; 163-167; 187) Thus, the income history of the individual molds a man's image of his success or failure (and consequently, I feel, his sense of capability to control his own life in old age).

Rosow (10) also investigated the friendship relationships of twelve hundred people whose age qualified them for social security benefits in the Cleveland metropolitan area. He believed that there was little evidence that aging makes any difference in beliefs between the old and the young, but that age-group differences in values reflect social change. (p. 10) That is, such differences are more likely to be historically instead of developmentally engendered. (p. 11) For example, the stereotype of political conservatism associated with old age is probably an artifact of the growth of liberalism in twentieth century America. (p. 12) Not aging,

but the progressive loss of social roles and memberships alienates older people from the mainstream. (p. 13) The alienating effects include role ambiguity (with the emergence of a basically empty aged role); general devaluation of the aged; sharing by old and young alike of invidious beliefs about aging; and attempts to retain youthful self-images. (pp. 30-33)

Rosow perceived a growing trend of age-grading as a compelling institution in America, reinforced by social status distinctions, social pressures, and symbols and stigmata (p. 37) and felt that the data from his study definitely confirmed his hypotheses (p. 78). These findings showed major social class differences in such matters as this: in general, working class people feel old considerably more often than middle class persons of the same age. (p. 287) His observations about class-linked values were remarkably similar in many instances to Rosenberg's. (pp. 290-291) His conclusion, that "(there) may be no effective substitute for the loss of any major social role except an equally significant status which is as highly valued and rewarded," also offers strong support for my argument. (p. 317) A drastic discontinuity marks the later life of Americans (p. 330), which I feel interferes with their capacity to successfully mediate the developmental changes of those

years. The only question is whether age-grading is still as sharp as Rosow declared (p. 323) or is softening as our society improves in permissiveness and the adoption of policies to aid the elderly to meet their needs.

Finally, Susser (12) took the rather dangerous step, logically speaking, of inferring that the array of physical, psychological, and social stigmata that accompany old age in contemporary society cannot with confidence be attributed to degeneration caused by the intrinsic process of aging alone. (pp. 126-128) That is, aging does not make people what they are when they become aged. Many pathological factors are involved. "Social status is bound up with physiological status." (p. 126)

It has not been possible in so few pages to reason rigorously from the mass of information to be found in this dozen authoritative statements and studies to show specific detailed effects of the gross variables of age-value norms, age-status grading, and systemic features of the society on individual performance of the developmental tasks of aging. Nevertheless, the statements and studies collectively supply evidence and theoretical support that external elements are extremely efficient and effective in producing characteristic behavior and symptoms of aging people. I believe that their

pervasive direct and indirect influences are adequate to account for many of the problems of later life, including some of those that also involve pathological physiological processes.

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II. THE EDUCATIONAL PLIGHT OF TODAY'S ELDERLY

by

Edward E. Marcus

The University of Chicago

(May 8, 1972)

More than 70% of those who are currently 65 years of age and older have had no more than an eighth-grade education. Many have had much less. (8) Seven per cent have had no schooling at all, and about a fifth are considered functional illiterates, constituting a third of the nation's population so classified. (1) These figures do not reveal the true nature of the educational status of the aged. Most of those who have had no more than elementary school education received it between 1880 and 1920, "when teachers were no doubt less qualified than those today and when instructional facilities were less adequate; furthermore, the subject matter offered then is now for the most part obsolescent in terms of today's needs." (8)

A probability not raised in the shocked observations of some professional educators about this state of affairs is that life experience compensates for much of the kind of learning imparted through the twelfth grade. The General Educational Development (G.E.D.) Test approach to determining high-school equivalency qualifications is based in part upon that assumption. The basic question asked here is, are "senior citizens" really handicapped by their low educational level? Educators would probably agree that they are apt to be. Do specialists in other fields tend to agree with that judgment?

Enlightened speculation and expert opinion seem to coincide that they are indeed handicapped, in various ways. The most obvious disadvantage 's ignorance regarding the many conditions and factors affecting the life state of the elderly and the means provided by society to ameliorate some of their worst aspects. Fellow travellers of ignorance are attitudes that are self-defeating. Thus, an older individual may not know about a government benefit to which he is entitled, but his lack of knowledge may obstruct his participation in necessary action to obtain it even when he is informed about it, through suspicion, fear, lack of confidence, uncertainty, and general unfamiliarity with what action involves. On a broader range of perspectives, the undereducated oldster suffers from special problems of motivation where learning of any kind is concerned and, as Ecklund says, is apt to yield passively to "self-fulfilling prophecies...such as inability to learn." (1) As a result, undereducation limits the older person in achieving satisfaction in any of the four categories of need which Howard McClusky, in the background paper on Education for the 1971 White House Conference on Aging identified as coping, expressive, contributive, and influence. (8)

The side-effects may be more pernicious yet. It is not beyond imagining that modern society deranks the elderly on bases entirely other than superannuation. In different

places and times, the old have been respected for wisdom and learning. "Wisdom" probably cannot be operationalized in a technologically sophisticated culture, but the abiding reputations of some scholarly old men, like Sophocles and Cicero and Michelangelo and Holmes, suggest that historically downgrading the senescent for their ignorance has not always been the rule. (5;6)

Some authorities assert that sheer survival is the price that may have to be paid for lack of continuing learning. This is apparent in instances where ignorance leads to death through failure to cope with conditions affecting personal health and safety, but what these speakers and writers testify to is a presumed relationship between the quality of life and its endurance. As we have noted above, not having the "habit of learning" usually means possessing self-deprecating and self-depriving tendencies that constrict life and make it less and less tolerable. The reverse, then, is liberating and by definition "life-giving." It nurtures survival. A single quotation from the literature is sufficient to illustrate this general point of view:

In the past, educational programs for the aged have been thought of as a diversion--somewhat like the do-gooders' benevolent plan to keep idle minds busy. In other instances, their purpose has been to provide retraining, the development of new or improved vocational competence. Both of these objectives are equally virtuous, although perhaps the latter is

a more practical virtue. But the issue may be one which, while it is sometimes linked with virtue, has an even more compelling purpose: intellectual survival itself.

It is true that the data presently available point to intellectual survival through continuous mental activity for those with higher intellectual levels at the start. The meaningfulness of the same approach with all levels, however, is by no means belied by the data, and research bespeaks its probable pertinence. It only remains for research to demonstrate whether those with lesser levels of intelligence will in fact maintain their mental vigor and defeat the decline for decades longer by engaging themselves in continued or renewed mental activity, perhaps by challenging educational experiences. (5)

A simple relationship between achieved educational level and longevity has not been demonstrated. In a practical sense, the matter may be just academic, if it turns out that the educational deficit of the present day elderly cannot be remedied. Ecklund feels that, in the absence of a vigorous effort (which he advocates) to completely change the nature of education and popular attitudes toward it in the United States, "education can do little more than it is doing now, although it might collect its institutional wits and do the remedial job a little better. But the total output will undoubtedly fall short of the need, if not the demand. Though retired from his job, the healthy older person never retires from an innate, uniquely human trait with which he has been blessed, a continued search for meaning and purposefulness in his life...But in spite of his desire for

understanding, his inadequately trained capacities are likely to collapse under the challenge, and he may find it easier to forsake the search and to retire to the comfort of a manageable past, quietly letting 'interests' in life ebb away." (1)

Ecklund was so perturbed by the prospect of all the human waste which this portends that he styled the paper referred to in the preceeding paragraph a "polemic" on the matter, averring: "Although some remedial and basic education may still be possible with a portion of this group, their situation of relative disadvantage should generate a resolve to prevent such disadvantage among succeeding generations." (1)

How do non-educators perceive the urgency of this terrible, tragic waste? We must look at some of the priorities recommended by educators, in the two background papers on education and training for the 1971 White House Conference, for a set of proposals about which there may be some disagreement on the part of persons from outside the field of education.

McClusky, in his already-cited paper summarized the long-range goals of education for older people as (1) growth in fulfillment of life-time potential, (2) development of abilities uniquely available in the later years, (3) facilitating the service of the old as models for emulation and guidance of oncoming generations, (4) acceptance by all of the desirability, legitimacy, and feasibility of these goals,

- (5) promoting continuing opportunity in lifelong learning,
- (6) provision of specialized programs to meet the particular needs of the old, and (7) delivery of educational programs to those who are nonparticipant and isolated from the mainstream of community services. (8)

The eight issues he posed for the Conference were these:

1. If public expenditures for education for older people are increased, should the size of the expenditures be related (a) to the proportion of older people in the total population, or (b) to their remaining life expectancy?
2. Should money and manpower devoted to providing educational opportunities have a higher priority among the various services provided for older people than is now the case? Or, should education for older people be allowed to remain at its currently low level of emphasis and support in relation to support for health services, housing, etc.?
3. Should responsibility for initiating, supporting, and conducting education for older people be vested in the established educational system, beginning with the U. S. Office of Education and extending through State educational agencies to universities, community colleges, and local school districts? Or should the responsibility be placed with specialized agencies serving older people: the Administration on Aging, State agencies on aging, and corresponding agencies at the community level?
4. Should education for older persons be: (a) conducted apart from or (b) integrated with education for persons at other ages?
5. In view of the limited financial resources available, which should receive the highest priority: (a) research and innovation? or (b) expansion of existing programs having a demonstrated record of success?
6. Should education (a) place emphasis on the development by older persons of greater collective (group) influence (or power) in political processes in meeting their

needs or (b) should it concentrate mainly on instruction in more effective use of political processes on an individual basis?

7. In the light of scarce financial and manpower resources, which should be given the higher priority: (a) educational services to those most ready and most in the habit of participating or (b) education for those "hidden," relatively unknown and difficult to reach?
8. Should available facilities, manpower, and funds be used for educational programs designed and offered by educators to the elderly on the basis of their presumed needs and interests? Or, should such support be available only when older people request educational services and participate in developing them, or develop and conduct the programs themselves?

Dr. James E. Birren, in the paper on training, after a much lengthier discussion of the needs of the training field (not the individual needs described by McClusky) and training goals and resources, listed six issues for the Conference's consideration, as follows: (9)

1. Given, that manpower development in aging is lagging seriously behind the proven need, should responsibility for the development of a more vigorous national plan and continuing surveillance of training be lodged in a single Federal agency created for the purpose? Or, should funds be made available to several Federal agencies for the support of manpower training in accordance with their individual perceptions of needs, as at present?
2. Should policy formation and planning for manpower training in aging be the sole responsibility of government agencies having statutory responsibility for programs and services for older people? Or, should these functions be shared with nongovernmental groups such as scientific and professional organizations and organizations of older and retired persons?
3. Should the major focus and priority be placed on doctoral level training for teaching and research? Or, should equal or greater priority be placed on short- and long-

term training of professional and semiprofessional personnel for planning and delivery of services to the older population?

4. Should there be developed regional university-based multidisciplinary training centers in gerontology? Or, should research and training be fostered in a wide range of colleges and universities in individual departments or multidisciplinary programs in gerontology?
5. Is the need for personnel especially trained for serving the older population and for teaching and research critical enough to call for continued or increased Federal and State government financial support? Or, should educational institutions at all levels build training for work in aging into their programs and look to their established sources (State appropriations, tuition, gifts, and foundations) for support?
6. In allocating funds for support and recruitment of personnel to be trained in aging, should priority be given to young persons yet to make a career commitment? Or, should the major focus be on providing knowledge and skills in aging to persons who have had work experience in other areas or who may have retired?

These issues were stated by educators. One answer to the question as to how others may regard them has been supplied by The Gerontological Society in the Spring 1972 issue of The Gerontologist. (3) Under a government grant, members of the Education and Training Subcommittee of the Society mailed a questionnaire to the general membership of the Society. It contained thirty items to be rated on Likert scales, plus three open-ended questions. The items constituted a slightly more detailed listing of the issues indicated above. The survey was completed before the Conference commenced, so the results were not biased by knowledge of what was said

and decided there.

The findings were too lengthy to repeat here. Several points only are sufficient for my purpose here:

(1) The respondents were gerontologists. How many were educators working in the field of education the writer does not know; but he presumes that the majority of them were not (at least narrowly construed).

(2) Being gerontologists, they can be regarded as more conversant with the problems and needs of the aged than persons not involved with them. Their viewpoints can supply some measure of objectivity with regard to the claims of professional education to have basic "vision" concerning what the elderly "really need." Yet, they are also interested professionals, and this survey reveals nothing about how still other educated people and the general population, including the aged, view the issues seen as central by educators.

(3) Seventy four per cent of the respondents agreed that education should receive higher priority among services provided for old people, and 76% denied that other matters (health, income, housing, etc.) should receive priority over education. This indicates that gerontologists also tend to regard the educational deprivation of the aged as one of their greatest areas of lack. However, 71% felt that educators lack knowledge of the educational needs of older persons

and the means of supplying them. Obviously, gerontologists do not believe that educators have the answers! This is not in conflict with the opinions Ecklund also expressed regarding this matter.

(4) Only a third approved the idea that the established educational system should be responsible for the education of older people, 50% supporting the institution of specialized agencies for this purpose. Yet, 57% disapproved of the notion that education for older people should be conducted apart from education of persons of other ages, and 67% believe that education for older people should be integrated with that of people of other ages. It would be difficult to reconcile these views in a logical manner.

(5) The haste with which the survey was conducted, because of the time factors involved, assured that the instrument used was probably unreliable. There are many other inconsistencies similar to the one stated in the preceding paragraph. These findings cannot be cited as evidence for stating just what gerontologists do believe, but certain inferences are possible. One is that gerontologists do tend to agree about the severity of the educational need.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that the Conference Report included strong recommendations for the expansion and funding of educational programs and development of a vigorous national training policy and plan. Belief that the

educational deficiency of the elderly will cause them to shun opportunities even when offered may have contributed to recommendations for provision of incentives and institution of a national awareness campaign through mass media and educational systems. That is not clear, because the statement on incentives indicates that they are to be aimed at eliminating specific barriers to the availability and accessibility of educational services for older persons, like transportation, admission requirements, charges, and inconvenient locations. (6)

Nevertheless, that idea must have entered into the deliberations of the delegates, because McClusky's paper stated unequivocally, "The background papers indicate that comparatively few older people have evinced much interest in continuing their education." (8)

"Comparatively few" is an impression that anyone working with middle aged and older adults easily gains from them. It is not wholly unsupported by official statistics. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's 1969 report on participation in adult education furnishes the information that only 4.5% of persons in the nation between 55 and 64 and only 1.6% of those over 65 were participants in adult education at that time. Though small percentagewise, the numbers were not insubstantial, amounting to over one million

persons over 55 years of age (300,000 of them over 65). (7)

Despite the pessimistic nature of some professional opinion about the disinterest of today's aged in education, concrete indications do exist that can lead to doubts about this kind of conclusion. One example will have to suffice here. The April 1972 issue of American Education includes a story by Michael W. Fedo, a newspaper correspondent, concerning classes for the elderly at North Hennepin State Junior College in Minnesota. (2) Three hundred "senior citizens" are enrolled as students at the college. A few impressionistic types of remarks from the article are:

"'I always felt incomplete without my education,' says a 70-year-old retired postal worker."

"'Give us educational opportunities just like anybody else,' said a man in a wheelchair. 'We like to learn too.'"

"'I had to quit school in the sixth grade,' said a 73-year-old widow. 'But I never quit wanting to learn. Now I've got the time, but I need help.'"

One elderly woman allegedly said, "'I found my brain wasn't asleep while I attended North Hennepin. Imagine, past 65 and attending college. This is a wonderful world.'"

A retired bus driver was reported as saying, "'This program has added a dimension and excitement to my life that I've never known before.'"

One swallow doesn't make a summer. This set of testimonials by participants in a single educational experiment in one locality is not furnished as proof that the notion that undereducated older persons generally tend to fear and avoid formal education is baseless. Nevertheless, there are many indications that American society in a period of rapid social change exhibits some rather remarkable instances of fluidities and resiliencies. Perhaps the older age strata in our society, even with admitted educational handicaps, are a lot more flexible than many highly-trained professional people consider likely.

SUMMARY

This paper is concerned with the impoverished educational status of the current age-group of 65 and older. Educators may agree that this impoverishment constitutes what might be the most severe handicap for this cohort of nineteen million persons. Other specialists and the aged themselves may not agree with that judgment. After all, workers in any professional field are prone to overestimate the importance of what they have to offer to the world, and educators probably have the same type of self-centered view.

After discussion of the gravity with which some writers regard the problem, attention was directed to the

opinions of gerontologists on a set of issues on education and training formulated for deliberation at the 1971 White House Conference on Aging. The results of a survey of their opinions may not be dependable but at least seem to confirm the fact that gerontologists tend to agree with educators regarding the urgency of the situation.

On the other hand, evidence was cited that some of today's older people welcome and enjoy opportunity for formal education and are able to benefit from it. It may be that the problem has been blown up out of proper proportion and that if adequate resources were made available to them, the aged would make up for their underprivileged educational position in American society. This is not intended as an optimistic concluding suggestion, since I do not consider it likely that the country is ready to accept and subsidize the type of massive revolutionary educational effort that is called for.

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III. PROBLEM SOLVING AND COMPLEX LEARNING
BEHAVIOR IN OLD AGE

by

Edward E. Marcus
The University of Chicago

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This paper is intended to summarize more than forty research reports and articles. I cannot claim that they are typical of the total field of literature from which they were drawn, nor that they are the most significant group of readings about their collective subject matter. They were items in the 1967 list by Kuhlen and colleagues (36) under the heading, "Problem Solving and Complex Learning Behavior," supplemented chiefly by the collection of articles edited by Talland (39). Although many of them were cited by Birren (2)--suggesting to me that they may indeed be representative of the field--they include virtually nothing published during the past five years.

A short paper of the type that this is planned to be allows little room for critiquing each individual item in a group of more than forty readings. What I will do is summarize them in relation to what they seem to show concerning decrement in ability to learn that supposedly occurs in the later portion of human life, after which I intend to criticize them rather cursorily as a corpus of research matter. I will conclude with a few inferences and other personal comments about the subject.

Thorndike's studies of the relationship of age to learning ability have been widely hailed as a scientific departure point. (1;2) His contribution amounted to an authoritative statement that increasing age--it is instructive

to note that the mean age of his older subjects was 42 years-- is not a barrier to learning. Yet it was equally authoritative on the point that ability to learn does decline with age, and Ruch's review of early studies (4;11;20) strengthened the general consensus about this question. Nevertheless, some of the pioneer work resulted in contradictory findings. Stone, in a 1929 monograph on the learning of rats (34), reported that in maze-running, his older rats were superior to his younger ones: they needed only 50% to 70% as many trials to meet the criterion of success (one or less entrances into blind alleys), and they made fewer errors in a twenty-trial series. He was uncertain whether any of the age differences he observed were fundamental within the range of experimental error. For example, employing a multiple-T maze, he unearthed differences on the basis of motivation between animals that were not significantly different in age. This early work was primitive in several respects, and it cannot be accepted on the basis of the evidence presented by Thorndike and Stone that learning ability does lessen with age.

Common sense insists that older people have greater difficulty learning both motor and cognitive skills than younger ones have. The trouble is, the aging organism seems to run down gradually in a great many ways, and it is hard to distinguish between alleged decline in learning ability

and the effects on ability to learn of lessening capacity of other kinds. For instance, old organisms react to stimulation more slowly and initiate movement more slowly than young organisms. What in an administered test may appear to be diminished ability could be due to a physiological, not an intellectual, factor. Birren and Botwinick (3) tested several age groups in arithmetic and commented, "It takes the aged so long to do a problem of 25 digits that it is very difficult to obtain a reliable estimate of their rate of correct addition with paper-and-pencil methods."

This slowing-down is itself hard to pinpoint as a basic datum; it may be the reflection of rigidity, caution, interference effects, loss of memory, loss of confidence, and other psychological occurrences. The older person realizes he may not act as speedily as younger persons expect him to and consequently puts forth additional effort and adopts various coping strategies which can be time-consuming but successful. Even so, the delay element is not unequivocally established. Clay (7;8) asked subjects who ranged from under 30 to over 70 to arrange numbered counters in certain ways and those who were in their fifties took more time than either those below and those above that age level.

Birren (1;2) ascribed the slowing of responses in aged persons to changes in the central nervous system, but they can be attributed as much to lack of practice and a lower

schedule of reinforcement as to biological causes. However, assuming that the efficiency of the system suffers regardless of the cause, the transmission of information within the system is affected adversely, so senescent experimental subjects allow themselves more time to respond. (Also, Babbitt, 27) Davies (12) set up paced inspection tasks in which slower responses were not permitted and found no significant reaction time difference between age groups. He did find age differences in errors of omission and commission, but only in some situations. Heglin (4;18) tested "set" (which he related to conservatism and rigidity) in three age groups and concluded that its hindrance effect was tied to time. His older subjects took longer on every phase of their assigned tasks, but that could have been due to forgetting instructions or to the greater importance that more experienced persons place on taking time to make decisions. Wiersma and Klausmeier (46) found that speed of concept attainment drops with age, but their approach was verbal and their findings conflict with findings in other studies that verbal facility suffers least in aging. Clay, in the study already mentioned, Bromley (in one on the serial production of creative conceptual responses), and others have noted that even where no time limits are imposed, older subjects have a lower output. (4;7;8;15;17)

Finally, slowing-down appears in aging human behavior more than in aging animal behavior, leading to more questions about the nature of its causation. If it is indeed physiologically determined, the cause may be pathology, rather than simple aging. Some studies appear to relate learning decline with deterioration of health and impairment of bodily structure and functions. (11;37) Birren observed that differences in intelligence test scores reported by some experimenters could be explained on the basis of the health of their subjects. Clark, using 25 intelligence tests on subjects between 20 and 70, accounted for almost all the age variance found by differences in blood pressure, lens accommodation, and sound threshold. But Birren and Spieth felt that blood pressure was not a cause but an evidence of change in the regulation of vegetative and behavioral functions. Obrist and others learned that state of health, not age, influenced EEG's associated with intelligence test responses. About the same time, Reed and Reitan discovered that neither age nor brain damage affected ability to improve sensorimotor performance with practice. (1)

The "terminal drop hypothesis" is relevant at this point. (23) Sanderson and Inglis (1) correlated verbal scores with the approach of mortality, and Kleemeier followed 200 subjects over a period of twelve years, deciding at last

that learning decrement is related not to age but to impending death. (23)

Some studies have revealed that institutionalization may have derogatory effects on learning. Comalli, Frus, and Wapner (10) compared the scores of patients and nonpatients on tests of cognitive performance and concluded that institutionalization induces and/or is symptomatic of formal developmental regression in cognitive processes. Yet, Comalli (9) also reported that such regression is a function purely of senescence. Dennis, utilizing Piaget's test of animism with older subjects, also found regression in deteriorated seniles.

Another factor of biological origin remains to be considered: if perception of stimuli is poor, response has to be slower and more hesitant, because less information per unit of time filters in and reinforcement occurs or is recognized less certainly. Sime and Kay (33) set out to prove that the persistence of previously-acquired habits of response that are inappropriate for solving a problem at hand interferes with efforts to deal with that problem. They worked with rats and failed to confirm their hypothesis, but their results suggested that old rats suffer from loss in ability to discriminate shape. But Shock (32) believes that perceptual impairment is related to the loss of speed

factor--given time enough, old persons can discriminate almost as well as the young do. Decay of perception is another concept hard to disentangle from reduced motivation, strain, anxiety, and lack of confidence. Besides, loss of sensory acuity is easy to compensate for externally, by increasing the intensity of light and sound and going slower.

Is there, then, a basic biological cause of presumed or actual learning decrement? Discussing cognitive deficit in elderly psychiatric patients, Inglis (20;21) concluded that Hebb's neuropsychological theory provided an adequate conceptual framework for all the relations that have been established. It is when we think about persons without major defects except the piling up of years that we have to wonder about the possible efficacy of psychological causation without an organic foundation.

What about disorders of memory, as an example? "Impaired memory" can mean many different things. For instance, it can mean poorer initial registration of the memory trace as the aging nervous system becomes less impressionable. The fault may be inadequate short-term storage, showing up in the forgetting of instructions, or persistent long-term storage of interfering, unneeded, outmoded, conflicting and maladaptive ideas, attitudes, recollections, and habits. However, these explanations are hard to keep separate from

sensory loss or from psychological happenings of other kinds, like trouble organizing data into complex patterns. (5;8;11;38; 40) Jerome's older subjects asked four to five times as many redundant questions as his younger ones, indicating "decay of facility for recognizing occasions for the application of heuristically controlled behavior." Ruch was unable to determine whether decline in performance of subjects in mirror-reversed activity was caused by interfering habit patterns or inadequate perceptual elements. Korchin and Basowitz, Gladis and Braun, and Jerome all carried out studies relative to this question with contradictory findings or results reversed by inference. (1;11)

Allen (28), in a study of the logical thinking of younger and older people, concluded that older persons have preformed opinions confirmed by their personal experience, so that organizing complex material is much more troublesome for them, but when Cijfer (6) attempted to replicate Allen's work with a different type of subject, his older group performed better than the younger. Clay (7;8) and Heglin (18), whose studies have already been mentioned, each felt that his subjects forgot their instructions and "lost the thread" of what they were doing. Heron and Craik (11;19) set out specifically to check on impairment in transfer from short- to long-term storage and decided that their older subjects were no worse than younger ones at meaningless tasks but had more trouble

with the presentation of new meanings, a conclusion at some variance with Thorndike's finding that meaningful verbal materials are retained better than meaningless ones. (11; 28;30) Landsman (23) pointed out that a slower rate of acquisition must affect memory, while Laurence (24) showed that rigidity of memory can be an asset instead of a liability to learning in old age.

Thus, studies of memory impairment in relation to learning decrement in aging have been no more clear-cut in the direction of their findings than those of other possible factors. Another possibility rests in increasing anxiety and loss of confidence in the elderly learner. But Wallach and Gahm (42) attempted to discern the effect of anxiety level on probability learning and found no differences due to age. Fattu, Kapos, and Mech (16) did obtain an inverse correlation between anxiety and ability to achieve correct solutions to problems but were unable to relate the anxiety to behavioral stereotypy in their old subjects. Wallach and Kogan (43), studying judgment and decision making, reported that they could not confirm age differences in decision and risk terms. In one study, Wetherick (44) found that older subjects learned more from experience than younger ones, and yet in another, the same experimenter (45) found the old less willing than the young to change concepts that were adequate

in the past in the face of evidence that they were no longer adequate.

The sum of the insights that can be gained from these investigations is that they do not prove that ability to learn is less in old age than earlier in life, but if it is, that it is due to slowing-down in physiological processes, loss of perceptual acuity, impeded memory, or increased anxiety and reduced confidence. Decrement associated with pathology, institutionalization, and imminent decease seems substantiated, but little else. Leading scholars have reached the same opinion. Birren (1) has stated that according to the evidence revealed by the research, age changes in primary ability to learn are small in most circumstances. Szafron (37) wondered if the doctrine of wear-and-tear is not stronger than the facts. Jacobs (22) argued that such studies show that persons do not lose their ability to learn. Houle (20) pointed out that the individual differences shown in most of the studies are great and ascribed a gradual general decline in the faculties of most people to the disuse of learning habits and a heightened sense of strain in educational situations.

As I said at the outset, this particular set of studies and articles may not be representative of the total field, yet if in the mass, they contribute more to confusion than to

enlightenment, it suggests that a very great deal of the research about the learning of older persons has little value. The reasons why this may be so are not hard to guess.

1. The main line of approach has been through cross-sectional studies, instead of longitudinal studies. As a consequence, what we have derived from them consists of multitudinous comparisons between different people, instead of evidence about what happens to individuals as they progress through the life cycle. (8;22)

2. Sampling techniques generally have not been sound, so that people have been compared with one another who are not really comparable, and the results of such comparisons are not broadly generalizable. (17)

3. Tests used on older subjects were developed for younger persons and validated on samples of persons in good physical health and state. (16;17)

4. The stress in many studies has been upon instrumental responses instead of the more expressive aspects of personality. (17) For example, Miles has observed that imagination is ageless, and Gilbert, that speed tells nothing about intelligence and obscures real native ability. (48)

The inadequacy of the sample of studies referred to here can be illustrated by naming one factor which may be truly basic to understanding changes in learning ability in

later life: motivation. None of these studies focussed upon the role of motivation or two related elements which can account for much of the difficulty experienced by elderly persons in learning situations: (1) long-standing negative valence created by antiquated and ineffective learning skills and a history of unpleasant experiences associated with education and training; (2) the damaged self-image of the aged person in our culture. Another serious lack is of studies of more recent vintage. Colleagues with whom I have discussed the possible effects of that omission speak of evidences of a "new wave" of studies undertaken with different assumptions under different conditions, with markedly different results than the earlier studies exhibited. Before I mention what newer, better forms of research in this field might reveal, I want to identify another serious defect of the literature discussed, which I shall designate high viscosity of concept.

I started to develop a comprehensive list of "indicators"--topic identifiers or code-words that would signal to me the pertinence of an article to my major area of interest in educational gerontology. The list was to include such terms as caution, effectance, integration, latency, retention, and transfer. I quickly accumulated more than seventy of them, with no sign of slacking off as I continued to peruse more articles. Learning is extremely complex behavior, so it is

probable that dozens and perhaps hundreds of words are necessary to identify most of the main variables involved in it. But my expanding list could scarcely be systematized, since (1) the terms were not of relatively equivalent orders of importance, and (2) they apparently meant different things to different experimenters. One researcher described "set" as expectancy, another as rigidity. "Rigidity" can mean set or conservatism or habit persistence, depending on whose reports are read. The case with which the meanings of many of these concepts slip into and out of others illustrates why the literature fails to single out factors that significantly affect learning ability in senescence. Almost any factor can be explained as being "really" some other factor. Only one or two of the readings reviewed suggested that attempts to formulate a general theory are required to bring order out of this semantic chaos. The knowledge to undergird theorizing is probably not completely available. Meanwhile, the concepts that many of these studies dealt with are unreliable, to say the least about them.

It is difficult to describe the phenomena of senescence without invoking a biased point of view. Whether the observer of senescent behavior is himself young or old and whether he intends to be "objective" do not substantially alter this fact. The situation is produced by the ethnocentrism that

blinds us from seeing our own culture distinctly. "Aging" has derogatory connotations in this cultural system. Young or old, we are so steeped in culturebound values of youth, vigor, health, beauty, agility, resilience, and competence, that we intuit about the aged chiefly a lack of these virtues, and it does not occur to us to identify anything that might replace them or compensate for their loss.

Therefore investigation of problem-solving and complex learning behavior in old age deals largely with assumptions of decrement. One reads the reports of gerontological research with a sense of too much drab sameness: generally, experimenters have hypothesized that older subjects would do more poorly than younger ones on tasks to be assigned and then either inferred from the results that their predictions were confirmed or expressed their surprise when they found any evidence indicating that they were not.

Most studies have consisted of comparing younger persons with older ones while defining as "success" achievements likely to be more highly valued by the younger participants than the older. We are still sufficiently ignorant of the basic processes which constitute being "old" that efforts to describe or explain the behavior of the aged in terms not loaded with youth values is without doubt extremely difficult. It is strange to compare this literature with the

literature of childhood research. Children also do poorly in tests of some abilities as compared with adults, yet terms having invidious connotations like "decrement" are rarely used to discuss their inferior accomplishments. There is no need to belabor a difference here. The point is merely that whether one looks forward into the future and thinks of the "potentiality" of the development of children or back into the past with a mind-set on "loss" of what is highly valued is a matter of cultural predilection. In some cultures, old age is regarded as the halcyon period of life and is associated with mellowness, wisdom, experience, serenity, and reverence.

Where are the studies that show the maximum learning increment that aging folk are capable of under optimum conditions of encouragement, environments rigged to their advantage, learning materials and approaches designed for their special needs, and supportive attitudes that offer the powerful effects of social reinforcement? Suppose educational psychologists undertook most of their studies to show that children have difficulty in learning--would educators acquire improved capabilities in childhood educational endeavors from that?

Landsman (23) calls attention to the significance of evidence to the essence of the human being as a continuous

output system, rather than as a limited capacity system. Education for the aging, he says, is not for the sake of diversion or retraining but for intellectual survival. In the past, the paradigm of man as a homeostatic system conveyed among its corollaries that human behavior is limited to reacting to stimuli and that the organism possesses a fixed reservoir of energy which living uses up. (48) Man does appear to have less and less energy in his old age, but what does the new paradigm of man as one who actively seeks tension and attacks his environment say of the condition of those whom society protects from further tension, progressively removes from contact with external challenges, and denies a vigorous self-image?

Perhaps Havighurst's observation about "the separation of function from structure in the later part of life" is very pertinent at this point. (17) The physical status of the person suffers damage due to age. If there are processes in his system capable of remaining relatively intact while their organic underpinning deteriorates, we should multiply our efforts to identify and strengthen these, to the end that the goodness of human life may last at least as long as the system does.

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IV. EDUCATIONAL INTERESTS OF THE ELDERLY AS MOTIVES
TO SEEK OUT ORGANIZED INSTRUCTION

by

Edward E. Marcus
The University of Chicago

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At the outset of this set of papers, I suggested a possibility that there are enough differences between earlier and later adulthood to warrant a different approach to teaching older adults than is customary with younger ones. One reason for this is that "motivation to learn probably undergoes considerable change through the life cycle." I hoped to be able to cite adequate evidence from reports of empirical studies of the interests of the elderly to support that assertion.

The evidence I have unearthed so far appears to be far from adequate to do that. Nevertheless, since exploration to a respectable intellectual depth of a subject should start with the awareness of a deficiency or a problem, there is plenty of reason to proceed with this paper. The problem here has to do with identification of the educational interests of older persons.

The phrase "educational interests" may suggest that I think that educational interests are a distinct category of interests. I do. But I employ the term for another purpose. The literature of interests deals more with vocational and leisure-time interests than other kinds, and there is a strong implication in it that interests are somehow related to action--that vocational interests are or should be the tie between the individual and his life's work and that recrea-

tional interests are or should be the link between the individual and the provision of leisure-time activities for him. Indeed, one usually supposes that the purveyors of mass entertainment, the communications media, and general goods and services know or endeavor to find out what people are interested in and attempt to match their products with the interests of the populace.

It comes as a distinct shock to the scholar entering this field to discover that little is known about interests--that even the concept is vague. The article on "Interests" in The Encyclopaedia of Educational Research, written by John O. Crites (2), is my authority for stating that the idea has hardly been analyzed conceptually. According to Crites, "interest inventories have been developed from a set of implicit assumptions about individual and group differences in specific likes and dislikes, which has seriously impeded the formulation of useful conceptual definitions." That is to say, the work of Strong--whose name comes to mind at once when one thinks about studies of interests--has not materially helped us to understand what interests are, even if it enables us to identify some of them. So it is disconcerting to find the authors of two Ph.D. dissertations dealing with the educational interests of adults merely quoting Strong's definition, "Experimentally, an interest is a response of liking..." (1;8)

Historically, Crites wrote, the expression has been used to refer to (1) some aspect of all forms of motivation, or to (2) special forms of motivation, or to (3) the place of interests in personality and ego structure. He listed six theories about interests--that they are learned, that they are adjustment modes, that they are an aspect of personality, that they are an expression of the self concept, that they are motives, and that they are multiply-determined. (2)

If we are going to deal with educational interests of the aging as a way to focus attention upon changes in the motivation to learn during the life span, an operational definition is not very useful. What is the connection between motivation and interest, if more than a mere reference to "some aspect" of the former? Fortunately, I do not have to attempt to invent a definition of my own in order to make clear what I think I am writing about. J. W. Getzels has offered one that suits my purpose. An interest for Getzels (3) is a characteristic disposition, organized through experience, which impels an individual to seek out particular objects, activities, skills, understandings or goals for attention and acquisition. It is distinct from a drive, a need, or a value, all of which also relate to motivation.

The significance of Getzels' definition for my use is the dynamic nature of the behavior which it emphasizes:

"...which impels...to seek out...for attention and acquisition." I am not going to be concerned with hypothetical statements of what older people are interested in as instances of educational interests unless it can be shown that the dispositions supposedly revealed impel them to seek out education. There are three areas of extremely serious difficulty in taking this tack:

(1) It raises a question about the quality of interests in old age. Many authorities appear to feel that the transition from middle age to the so-called retirement years brings a shift from interests of an instrumental type to those that are more expressive in nature. But an interest that impels one to seek to acquire education as a means to fulfill the interest has an instrumental thrust. (The word "education" needs little explication as it is used here; consider it as meaning any form of organized instruction.)

(2) Do the old have any educational interests at all in this sense? There is little evidence that any significant number of older persons is impelled to seek out education. (I discussed this slightly in the second paper.) The fact is, there is no future in education for the aging unless the aging are interested or can become interested in it. Yet, a major current emphasis in social gerontology is upon education.

(3) Studies of the vocational and leisure-time

interests of adults do not throw much light on their educational interests. A vocational interest may impel one to seek a certain type of work or to avoid other types. It does not--per se--induce anyone to seek training in the area of vocational interest; if it does, it becomes an educational interest (in Getzels' sense of the word) as well as a vocational one. Similarly, a recreational interest is an unsatisfactory indicator of educational interest. That is most unfortunate, since practically the only empirical studies of the interests of the elderly relate to their use of leisure time.

Nevertheless, because my academic purpose relates to the education and training of the aging and only to that, intellectual rigor requires that I make these distinctions. I shall comment very briefly about some of the references to studies of aging and leisure in the following, but not because I believe that any of them offer much information about what might lead older adults to engage in organized learning (even self-directed). The most that they offer is something to speculate about. We can speculate, for example, that a strong interest in bridge might induce a retired man to attend a training-class in bridge-playing and a strong interest in reading might attract a retired woman to a book review series at a public library.

Speculation is a poor rod for an educator to lean on.

Are there no studies on the educational interests of the old, as contrasted with claims of educators concerning what older folk "need"? Well, so far I have found few and they have been less than satisfactory.

In 1964, Phifer submitted a dissertation on change of interest between young adulthood and early middle age among participants in adult education programs. (8) It is chiefly of interest to me because Bank built upon Phifer's work to study the stability of interests into older age levels. (1) Nevertheless, Phifer's methods indicate what seems to me a salient weakness of much of the research on interests of any kind--the lack of proof that what are called "interests" do lead to action. To cite a dramatic example that they may not--from another field, since I have already said that educational gerontology is not a fruitful place to look,--the report of the Commission on the Cities in the 70's states:

...the expressions of sympathy and concern that the Kerner Report elicited from a large number of those who, privately or publicly, wield the power that governs the United States, did not signify that they were willing to take the drastic action necessary to make American cities liveable again. (4)

At least, Phifer studied a population which might be assumed prima facie to be engaged in acting in accord with its educational interests--646 persons between 25 and 44 who were enrolled in adult evening schools. He said he was interested in adding to the body of knowledge about the needs

and interests of adults who participate in adult education and in providing "practical guidelines which the adult educator might find useful in developing meaningful educational programs." He hypothesized that young adults (25-29) are more interested in the physical interest-area (relating to family, home, and job) than in the cultural interest-area (civic affairs, cultural activities, and liberal education), while early middle-age adults (40-44) are more interested than young adults in the latter. Employing a questionnaire, he concluded from the data he collected that the hypothesis was true for the younger-age group but not for the middle-age group.

The point I wish to make is that the instrument that he used was designed to obtain information about "interests," but he secured no data at all relating interests to courses actually enrolled in. One learns from the study that Phifer's subjects were interested in their families, homes, and jobs, but we cannot tell what portion of them was enrolled in courses dealing with family and home life and occupations. As far as providing "practical guidelines" for the adult educator is concerned, one could have no assurance on the basis of this study that the interests of young or middle-aged adults in family, home, and job lead them to enroll in education pertaining to those subjects. We assume that they do. Phifer added nothing to change that assumption into dependable

knowledge about the matter.

One of Phifer's findings was that, for high-school graduates, the nature of family and home interests changes with age. He wrote that that implies that as they move from young adulthood into early middle age, "they will seek out basically different educational experiences relating to their family and home life." Notice the emphasis that "interest" leads to "seeking out," even though Phifer supplied no evidence that it actually does so. Bank (1) was concerned about the permanence of educational interests. He hoped his findings would be useful to adult educators in their efforts to provide educational opportunities for lifelong learning--again the assumed bridge between interests and action. But Bank's subjects as a group were not undertaking education at the time they were queried. They consisted of 169 physicians in private practice in the state of Missouri. However, this study was relevant for my purpose in this paper, in that Bank identified four age-groups, three of them encompassing people older than any of Phifer's subjects. They were: I, under 40; II, 40-54; III, 55-64; and IV, 65 and older.

"An educational interest," wrote Bank, "is defined as an indicated preference to engage in an educational activity listed in the instrument used in the investigation;

the respondent assuming the only limitation preventing his engaging in the activity is his lack of desire to do so." How strange! Bank justified this discrepancy on the basis of inequalities of availability and other compelling demands upon the lives of his subjects, yet the fact that he found that justification necessary shows how little use adult educators could make of this data to provide opportunities for learning. The nature of the dilemma must be crystal clear by now: either the educational interests of people impel them to seek out education (for, as Getzels said, "attention and acquisition") or studies of such interests tell us little or nothing of practical value to an educator.

Anyway, Bank hypothesized that educational interests differ at each stage of the life cycle, and he adapted Phifer's questionnaire to increase its appropriateness for use with medical men and older-aged individuals. He concluded that, at least for professional people, the amount of interest that people have in the categories of education is generally stable and that his data did not indicate convincingly that interests differ in different stages of the life cycle. Some of his findings may be in harmony with the generally accepted instrumental-expressive ratio: for instance, "as individuals become older they become less interested in future benefits than in immediate concerns." Presumably, expressive utility

is likely to be more immediate, instrumental rewards more in the nature of future benefits. In any case, Bank inferred "that individuals maintain these educational interests throughout their adult lives, possibly beyond the apparent functional need for education in a particular area." He insisted that this has significance for adult education, but I cannot see how it does.

I am tempted to question whether any study of interests operationally defined as Strong defined them (i.e., "a response of liking") could convey any information beyond what people say they like or dislike. If the concept of interests has not been thoroughly thought through, empirical investigations of the subject probably reveal little about effective motivation.

Educational practitioners do attempt to ascertain the nature of the interests of their clients; they usually call them "needs" (and as an experienced trainer of adults, I can affirm that the "needs" identified are sometimes more clearly present in the educator than in the student, potential or real--as when a teacher decides what learners, to use Mager's expression, "ought to want to learn").

Malcolm Knowles (7) defined educational need as the discrepancy between an aspiration and a reality and educational interest as "the expressed preference among possible activities

perceived as potentially satisfying educational needs."

This is not dissimilar to Strong's definition of interest as an expression of a liking. Knowles also espoused the idea that interests change in the life cycle:

One of the most significant factors for program planning is the changing pattern of interest as a person moves through the life cycle. Although the number of interests a person has through his adult life span may remain relatively constant, the content and time-energy investment in them tend to change.

As the individual nears the age of retirement, according to Knowles, his area of interest comes to be occupied largely by concerns for cultural and interpretive (including religious) aspects of life and with health problems connected with advancing age.

Probably all practitioners of adult education proceed as Knowles advises to obtain information about the interests of adults by asking the individual. I have no objection to that; surely only the individual knows best what motivates him. But the persons who come within reach of adult education institutions, who get their interests counted, are a select group: they are already impelled to seek out education. Since the percentage of older persons who are attracted to adult education is not large, we are left unsatisfied. Can it be that older persons generally do not have educational interests? In this nation, it is surely unlikely! (While

writing these lines, I am watching a television broadcast of graduation ceremonies at Kennedy-King College. Among the graduates is a 76-year-old woman. She is interviewed and says, "I have waited 58 years for this. I always wanted to finish up my education.")

Lacking clues to studies that actually tried to relate educational interests to action in seeking out education, one does not reject the plain common sense of the matter, which is that one assumes that the expression of liking is pertinent to behavior in general. A very brief resume of some of the evidence about the interests of the elderly is thus not wholly outside the pale of this discussion.

Pressey and Kuhlen (9) can be a source for such evidence. For instance, they reported a study of the likes and dislikes of professional men that indicated a decline in achievement need with age, but the results also showed that the older person "values this trait no less and sees his role as stimulating its development in others." (p. 290) Another investigation dealt with a group of "high-achievers" with an average age of 56 reporting greater willingness to move if the move meant greater opportunity, than successful men with an average age of 36. One could deduce from these studies that the interests of older men tend to be stable and continue to be job-related. (p. 292)

One investigator hypothesized five basic interests as rather generally held by old people: (p. 296)

1. To live as long as possible, at least until life satisfaction no longer compensates for its privation, or until the advantages of death seem to outweigh the burden of life.
2. To get more rest, relief from the necessity of wearisome exertion at humdrum tasks and protection from too great exposure to physical hazards--opportunities, in other words, to safeguard and preserve the waning energies of a physical existence.
3. To remain active participants in personal and group affairs in either operational or supervisory roles--any participation, in fact, being preferable to complete idleness and indifference.
4. To safeguard or even strengthen any prerogatives acquired in a long life, i.e., skills, possessions, rights, authorities, prestige, etc.
5. Finally, to withdraw from life, when necessity requires it, as honorably as possible, without too much suffering, and with maximum prospects for an attractive hereafter.

A study of oldsters on old age assistance revealed that 78% made no plans whatsoever, even for the morrow, though Pressey and Kuhlen also cited a counseling program which helped such older individuals to recapture old motives and develop new purposes. (p. 296)

Studies of the availability of free time and changing time perspectives also have applicability for planners of adult education. (pp. 301,304) Most studies of nonvocational interests appear to relate to satisfaction in activities,

which is not altogether inappropriate in terms of the fulfillment of motives. Therefore Pressey and Kuhlen covered studies of general interests in relation to recreation, and many of the contributors to Kleemeier's volume, Aging and Leisure (6), dealt with the same types of data.

Participation in organized recreational activities drops off as adults move along in life, but liking for music resists age effects. (9, pp. 387;388) College graduates increase participation in leisure activities after retirement, and hobby participation increases in general, at least until physical decline interferes. (9, pp. 390;391) Interest in linguistic activities involving writing decreases. (p. 394) The following comment is particularly meet for my purposes: "Educators...have a special problem of motivation in programs planned for oldsters." (p. 395)

In Aging and Leisure (6), de Grazia identified the major recreational interests of persons above sixty as watching television, visiting friends and relatives, working in the yard and garden, reading magazines and books, pleasure driving, listening to records, hobbies, meetings and other organizational activities, and playing cards and checkers. Less than 5% of his respondents expressed interests in any other activities than these. Meyersohn studied the motion picture attendance and television viewing habits of the elderly.

Anderson reported on patterns of activity similar to those described by de Grazia.

Finally, Havighurst and Feigenbaum (5) analyzed interview data obtained in the Kansas City Study of Adult Life and devised a rating scale on the use of leisure time. They compared individual ratings on this scale with membership in life-style groups ascertained from role-performance scores. Their conclusion was that personality, more than the situation, determines leisure style. Successful leisure patterns tend to be autonomous, creative, instrumental, vital, and ego integrative, whether community-centered or home-centered.

As I indicated earlier, this review of some of the research on interests scarcely refers in any way to categories of educational interest. Comprehensive adult education programs such as are offered by large high school and community college systems nowadays include a variety of courses that are recreational in nature, like bridge, golfing, arts, crafts, and hobbies of all kinds. Tuition is often reduced or even free for senior citizens. Unfortunately, the studies of the recreational interests of the elderly merely record their "liking" for such activities. Reports of measurements of the strength of general interests as motivators to enroll in them are pretty conspicuous for their absence.

My conclusion can only be to point to a need for much more research about the educational interests of the elderly, especially with regard to their motivational influence. Such studies and observations as I have mentioned here offer contradictory testimony that educational interests of adults (1) tend to be stable or (2) tend to change. Research may well disclose that few oldsters are interested at all in formal instruction of any kind, but there is a little evidence to cause me to question that, as I indicated in the earlier paper on the so-called "educational plight" of the elderly.

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