

A Book Review:

OLDER PERSONS AND THEIR HOUSING: TODAY AND TOMORROW by T.O. Blank. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1988.

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Since the fastest growing age group in our country is the elderly, this book is very timely. Educators, professionals, students, researchers, children of aging, and the elderly themselves are increasingly confronted with the problems and needs related to aging. Because people are living longer, society cannot afford to ignore the needs of this growing population segment. Housing is certainly a critical issue since, as the author mentions, "every older person in fact lives somewhere."

The author is as a social psychologist. Consequently, his approach toward adult development and aging falls within a social psychology framework. His experiences with the Committee on Design for the Disabled of the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat and with the Pennsylvania Department of Aging expand his perspective in terms of housing issues.

The book is divided into four major parts: Part I - Setting the Scene: Characteristics and a Model; Part II - Issues of Living in Major Housing Types; Part III - Using the Present to Look at the Future; and Part IV - Topical Bibliographies.

Part I explores aging; compares it to other stages of development; discusses housing needs at this developmental stage; and describes how to match these housing needs with the individual. Blank avoids stereotypical descriptions of the elderly and typical methods of grouping. Instead he uses a more sensitive classification for grouping the elderly and maintains an emphasis on individual differences. The classification descriptor he uses for age is "birth cohort" (Schaie and Willis, 1986). This groups people born within the same time period, e.g., a decade. It is based on the idea that cohorts will share a historical background. This shared background will influence the way they perceive housing needs and life differently than members of other birth cohort groups.

Blank uses Nahemow and Lawton's (1973) competence-press matching model as a framework for discussing major types of housing for the elderly and as a structure for organizing discussions on matching an individual with an environment. This model, described in Part I, is used throughout the remainder of the book. It compares a person's ability to manipulate and use the physical environment (competence) with the demands placed on the individual by the environment (environmental press).

Community living, congregate housing, and long-term care housing are described in Part II. Again, Blank tries to dispel stereotypes and generalizations by using supporting data from a variety of research studies. He compares the migration patterns of the elderly with those of the general population. He explores the

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social and psychological issues of housing for the elderly: ghettos for elderly women and racial/religious integration in congregate housing. He also describes the social-psychological aspects of institutional housing in terms of facility design, activities, and family interaction with residents. Throughout this section, Blank encourages the reader to consider individual differences and avoid judgments based on personal perceptions and stereotypes.

In Part III, Blank proposes a possible environment of the future. He also invites the reader to consider future possibilities for housing design, housing programs, high- and low-tech product and device design, and computerized environments. He also discusses the influences which governmental changes may have on the nature, support, and financing of housing for the elderly. Here Blank raises many important issues that need to be addressed. He stresses the need to be sensitive to the changing nature of the elderly population. He cautions the reader not to forget individual differences or the goal to properly match the environment and individual.

The last chapter is a very extensive, topical bibliography. Its organization allows the reader to locate both general information sources and specific sources by topic, depending upon needs or interests.

Blank targets a wide audience with this book, and the clear presentation of theory and information does not presuppose prior knowledge of gerontology or housing. It can serve as an introduction to the topic for students, researchers, and practitioners. For those whose backgrounds are limited to either gerontology or housing, it should prove helpful as an introduction and a bibliographic resource. For the lay person, the book should provide helpful insights into different ways of viewing the aging process and the needs of the elderly. It suggests ways to better evaluate the appropriateness of housing alternatives for an elderly parent. The book would also be an excellent resource for legislators who make decisions which affect housing for the elderly through the formulation and modification of government-supported programs.

References

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