

PREFACE

The idea for this book was conceived while I was teaching "Biological Variation in Health and Illness," a course I developed at the University of Utah in 1976. The need for the course first became apparent to me after I took the course, "Human Races," taught by Dr. Alice Brues, at the Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado. Although her classes did not relate specifically to health and illness, my work with Eskimo, Indian, Black, and Mexican American clients sensitized me to the health implications of what I was learning. I determined early on to make this information available to others in the health field. The first edition of this book was published in 1985.

The extensive revision of this second edition reflects the enormous amount of research undertaken in the past ten years. I complained in the Afterword to the first edition that data on biologic variation were sparse with little replication. In preparing this edition, however, it was often difficult to choose which studies to cite out of the many now available.

Since the first edition, researchers have increasingly recognized the importance of studying other racial groups besides Blacks and Whites; yet gaps in racial coverage persist. Although researchers have begun to look at Hispanic Americans as a separate group, they have yet to focus much attention on American Indians except concerning diabetes. Moreover, Oriental Americans and recent migrant groups in the United States are still mostly ignored. Looking at other aspects of human diversity, one sees that the amount of research on healthy aging and differences between the sexes has not increased much in the last decade. All these subjects are in great need of scientific exploration.

Currently, research findings concerning biologic variation as it affects health and illness are scattered among many journals targeted toward other professions; most of these journals are not ones regularly read by health professionals. This book is a compilation of that research as it pertains to health and illness.

IMPORTANCE OF BIOLOGICAL VARIATION TO THE HEALTH FIELD

"Biomedical research is concerned mostly with abnormal variation, but most variation, in most traits, in most people, for most of their lives is within the *normal* range, and deserves more attention."*

Both external and internal biological differences exist between races, age groups, and the sexes. These differences are substantial enough to affect the safe provision of health care. Differences exist in growth and development rates, in aging rates, in enzyme systems, in drug metabolism, in disease

* Weiss, K.M., *Genetic Variation and Human Disease*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1993, 313.