# **Chapter 14 Socioemotional Development in Middle Adulthood**

# Adult Stage Theories

# Generativity vs. Stagnation

## Erikson believes generativity encompasses adults’ desire to leave a legacy to the next generation.

## Through generativity, adults achieve a kind of immortality by leaving their legacy.

## Stagnation or self-absorption develops when individuals sense that they have done nothing for the next generation.

## Through generativity, adults promote and guide those who follow by parenting, teaching, leading, doing things to benefit the community.

# How to Develop Generativity

## Biological Generativity

## Parental Generativity

## Work Generativity

## Cultural Generativity

# Generativity and Identity

## One study showed that middle-aged adults especially were concerned about generativity and guiding younger adults.

Robert Peck theory

# Season’s of a Man’s Life

## Daniel Levinson extensively interviewed 40 middle-aged men and compiled information from the biographies of famous men.

## Levinson emphasizes that development tasks must be mastered at each of these stages.

# Early Adult transition

Middle adult

Late Adult

Transition to middle age—last about 5 years

## Levinson claimed that middle adulthood is the time for men to come to grips with four conflicts that have existed since adolescence:

### Being young versus being old

### Being destructive versus being constructive

### Being masculine versus being feminine

### Being attached to others versus being separated from them

# How Pervasive Are Midlife Crises?

## Levinson views midlife as a crisis

## A recent study has indicated that the idea of midlife crises have been exaggerated.

The life-events approach

Contemporary life-events approach: How life events influence the individual’s development depends on:

Life event itself

Mediating factors

Individual’s adaptation to the life event

Life-stage context

Sociohistorical context

Drawbacks

Life-events approach places too much emphasis on change

It may not be life’s major events that are the primary sources of stress

Daily experiences

Stress and personal control in midlife

Middle-aged adults experience more “overload” stressors that involve juggling too many activities at once

Developmental changes in perceived personal control

Some aspects of personal control increase with age while others decrease

Stress and gender

Fight-or-flight: When men experience stress:

Become aggressive, socially withdraw, or drink alcohol

Tend-and-befriend: When women experience stress:

Seek social alliances with others, especially female friends

# Contexts of Midlife Development

# Historical Contexts

## changing historical times and different social expectations influence how different cohorts move through the life span.

## values, attitudes, expectations, and behaviors are influenced by the period in which we live.

# The Social Clock

## The timetable according to which individuals are expected to accomplish life’s tasks—marrying, having children, establishing themselves in a career.

## Individuals whose lives are not synchronized with these social clocks find life to be more stressful than those who are on schedule.

# Cultural Contexts

## In many cultures, particularly nonindustrialized cultures, the concept of middle age is not very clear, or in some cases is absent.

# Longitudinal Studies

# The Baltimore Study

## Costa and McCrae focused on the big five factors of personality:

### emotional stability – openness to experience

### extraversion – agreeableness

### conscientiousness

## The study followed approximately 1000 college-educated men and women aged 20-96 over many years. They concluded that considerable stability occurs in the five personality factors.

# Berkeley Longitudinal Studies

## included more than 500 children and their parents.

## The most stable characteristics were found to be the degree to which individuals were intellectually oriented, self-confident, or open to new experiences.

## The characteristics that changed the most included the extent the individuals were nurturant or hostile and whether they had good self-control or not.

George Vaillant’s studies

Alcohol abuse and smoking at age 50 was the best predictor of death between ages 75 and 80

Factors at age 50 which are best predictors of “happy-well” between ages 75 and 80:

Regular exercise and avoiding being overweight

Well-educated and future oriented

Having a stable marriage and good coping skills

Being thankful, forgiving, and empathetic

Being active with other people

Conclusions

Personality traits continue to change during the adult years, vinto late adulthood

Cumulative personality model: With time and age, people: Become more adept at interacting with their environment in ways that: Promote the stability of personality

# Love and marriage at midlife

Affectionate or companionate love increases during middle adulthood.

# Security, loyalty, and mutual emotional interest are more important in middle adulthood

# For married individuals in midlife, most voiced considerable satisfaction with being married.

## A recent large scale study found that 72% of married midlife individuals reported that their marriage was either “excellent” or “very good.”

Divorce in middle adulthood may be more positive in some ways, more negative in others

## Many individuals perceive divorce in midlife as failing in the best years of their lives.

## divorce in midlife may be less negative and less intense than for younger individuals; have more resources and can simplify their lives.

AARP Study: reasons for divorce

# The Empty Nest and Its Refilling

## Characterized by a decrease in marital satisfaction due to the children’s departure which leaves parents with an empty feeling.

## Parents who live vicariously through their children are more likely to experience the empty nest syndrome.

## Most parents do not experience less marital satisfaction, in fact for many it increases after their children have left home.

# Coming Home

## More adult children are returning to live at home after an unsuccessful career or divorce.

## One study showed that 42% of middle-aged parents had serious conflicts with their resident adult children.

# Siblings and Friends

## Sibling relationships may be extremely close, apathetic, or highly rivalrous

## The majority of sibling relationships in adulthood have been found to be close.

## Siblings who are close to each other in adulthood tended to be that way as children.

## It is rare for sibling closeness to develop for the first time in adulthood.

## Friendships continue to be as important in midlife as they were in early adulthood.

Friendships that have endured over the adult years tend to be deeper

Grandparenting

Grandparent roles and styles: Three prominent meanings

Source of biological reward and continuity

Source of emotional self-fulfillment

Remote role

The changing profile of grandparents

Most common reasons are divorce, adolescent pregnancies, and parental drug use

Full-time grandparenting has been linked to health problems, depression, and stress

Intergenerational relationships

Middle-aged adults express responsibility between generations

Midlife adults play important roles in the lives of the young and the old

Gender differences characterize intergenerational relationships

Mothers and daughters have closer relationships during their adult years

Married men are more involved with their wives’ families than with their own