Social and emotional development

Theories focusing on adulthood
Erikson’s Middle Adulthood

**Generativity versus stagnation stage**

– People consider their contributions to family, community, work, and society.

– **Generativity** = looking beyond oneself to continuation of one's life through others

– **Stagnation** = focusing on the triviality of their life
Erikson’s Last Stage

Ego-integrity versus despair stage

Process of looking back over one's life, evaluating it, and coming to terms with it

– Integrity
  • Comes when people feel they have realized and fulfilled the possibilities that have come their way

– Despair
  • Occurs when people feel dissatisfied with their life, and experience gloom, unhappiness, depression, anger, or the feeling that they have failed
Erikson’s Approach in Perspective

- Influential
- Comprehensive; covers entire life span
- Not everyone passes through stages at the same time
- Contemporary research provides refinement and alternative approaches
Building on Erikson’s Views: Gould, Vaillant, and Levinson
Adults pass through series of seven, age-related stages

People in late 30s and early 40s begin to feel sense of urgency in attaining life’s goals

Descriptions not research supported
Gould’s Transformations in Adult Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>APPROXIMATE AGE</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT(S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 to 18</td>
<td>Desire to escape parental control</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18 to 22</td>
<td>Leaving the family; peer group orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22 to 28</td>
<td>Developing independence; commitment to a career and to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>29 to 34</td>
<td>Questioning self; role confusion; marriage and career vulnerable to dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>35 to 43</td>
<td>Period of urgency to attain life’s goals; awareness of time limitation; realignment of life’s goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>43 to 53</td>
<td>Settling down; acceptance of one’s life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>53 to 60</td>
<td>More tolerance; acceptance of past; less negativism; general mellowing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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George Valliant

Keeping meaning versus rigidity

Occurs between the ages of 45 and 55

Adults seek to extract meaning from their lives by accepting strengths and weaknesses of others

Those who are rigid become increasingly isolated from others
Most people are susceptible to fairly profound midlife crisis:
- Late 30s
- Early 40s
- Between 40 and 45
• **Stage of uncertainty and indecision brought about by realization that life is finite**
  – Gender differences
  – Despite widespread acceptance, evidence for midlife crisis does not exist
Non-Midlife Life Crisis

- For majority of people, transition is smooth and rewarding
- Many middle-aged people find their careers have blossomed
- They feel younger than they actually are
Does personality change or remain stable over the course of development?

- Erikson and Levinson = substantial change
- Paul Costa and Robert McCrae = stability in traits across development
Continuity and Change in Personality

- Fundamental continuity to personality
- Profound social environmental changes throughout adulthood may produce fluctuations and changes in personality
- Some discontinuities in development
Personality in Late Adulthood

Robert Peck

*Personality development in elderly people is occupied by three major developmental tasks or challenges*

- Redefinition of self-versus-preoccupation-with-work-role
- Body-transcendence-versus-body-preoccupation
- Ego-transcendence-versus-ego-preoccupation
People enter late adulthood by passing through transition stage

- View themselves as being “old”
- Recognize stereotypes and loss of power and respect
- Serve as resources to younger individuals
- Discover new freedom to do things for simple sake of enjoyment and pleasure
Life Review and Reminiscence

Common Theme of Personality Development

Triggered by increasingly obvious prospect of one’s death
Provides better understanding of the past
Resolves lingering problems and conflicts
Leads to a sense of sharing, mutuality, and feeling of interconnectedness with others