Social and Personality Development in Late Adulthood

Chapter 18
Lecture Overview

• Theories of Social and Personality Development
• Individual Differences
• Social Relationships
• Career Issues in Late Life
Research Findings

Little research on adults’ ability to achieve acceptance

 Older adults do become more reflective and philosophical.

 Older adults respond to thwarted personal goals with sadness.
THEORIES OF SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Erikson’s Final Stage

**Ego Integrity versus Despair:** an individual experiences a sense of mortality that precipitates the final life crisis

Manifests as life review to determine whether it was a success or a failure

Ego quality emerging from positive resolution is wisdom

Despair: hopelessness related to too little time to make meaningful changes

Ego integrity: sense that one has lived a useful life
Ego Integrity versus Despair

- **Reminiscence**: life review foundation
- For Erikson, it is essential to achieve ego integrity and help prepare for death.
- Researchers propose a connection between reminiscence and health.
  - Elders who do not have an inter-generational view of reminiscence do not engage in reminiscence as often as older peers.
  - Way of communicating older adult experiences to younger individuals
OTHER THEORIES OF LATE-LIFE PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING

Baltes and Baltes

- **Activity theory**: older adults maintain higher performance by concentrating on their strengths.
- The healthiest response is to maintain a high level of activities and roles.
- Active adults report greater satisfaction, better health, and higher morale.
Disengagement versus Continuity

• Disengagement theory: suggests shrinkage of life space, increasing individuality, and acceptance of these changes

Versus

• Continuity theory: implies maintenance of consistency in activities and interests
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Successful Aging Paradigm

- Maintenance of good physical health
- Retention of cognitive abilities
- Continuing engagement in social and productive activities
- Adoption of subjective sense of life satisfaction
- Conceptualization of old age as variability rather than universal decline
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES
Staying Healthy and Able

• **Health Benefits**
  • Healthy choices made earlier in life
  • Participation in rehabilitation to improve recovery and resume activities
  • Positive response to health crises
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Social Engagement

• What contributes to social engagement?
  • Life satisfaction is linked to frequent contact with family and friends.
  • Community engagement is related to higher physical and emotional functioning.
  • Helping others contributes to life satisfaction.
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Productivity

• Between 10 and 30 percent of older adults are involved in volunteer activities.
  • Older adults contribute more to school programs than any other group.

• Volunteerism
  • Performing unpaid work for altruistic reasons is linked to successful aging.

• New pursuits offer productivity options.
  • Music lessons or art classes
  • Attending college classes
  • Gives a sense of purpose in life
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Life Satisfaction

- Sense of control
- Perceived adequacy of social support
- Perceived adequacy of income
- Self-ratings of health
- Comparison of problems with others
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Religious Coping

- Tendency to Turn to Religious Beliefs and Institutions in Times of Stress or Trouble
  - Primary means of coping for many
  - Racial differences
  - Gender differences
- Religious beliefs linked to:
  - Less worry
  - Physical and mental health
  - More successful life integration
  - Income effects
  - Social aspect necessary for sustained health
  - Compliance with medical advice
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Social Roles

- What affects roles in late adulthood?
  - Older adults may be unjustly forced out of roles by younger adults.
- Physical and cognitive changes affect roles.
- Ageism affects roles.
  - “Looking old” can lead to negative stereotypes about competence.
  - Ageism is applied to older women more than men.
- Older adults may be prejudiced against their elder peers.
- Elder roles have fewer expectations and duties.
  - Daily routines may no longer be structured by specific roles.
  - Risk of isolation or alienation
Living with an Adult Child

- In the U.S., 6 percent of men and 18 percent of women over 65 live in the homes of relatives, usually their adult children.

- This is influenced by:
  - Health
  - Lower-income elders
  - Child gender and marital status
  - Ethnicity
LIVING ARRANGEMENT
Living with an Adult Child

• **Influences**

• Health: especially those who need help with one or two activities of daily living (ADLs)

• Lower-income elders more often live with children.

• More likely to live with daughters: married adults are more likely to take in elders.

• Ethnicity: Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans are more likely to live with relatives.
Independent living community: apartment complex in which all residents are over a certain age, such as 55. Typically does not provide health care assistance. Residents join together for social activities. Approximately 4 percent of older adults live in assisted living facilities. Average age is 80.
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Partnerships

• Marriages and Partnerships
  • Marriages tend to be based on loyalty, familiarity, companionship, and mutual investment in the relationship.
  • Similar effects in gay and lesbian relationships
CAREER ISSUES IN LATE LIFE

Retirement

• Issues and Impacts
• Timing and phases of retirement
• Reasons for retirement
• Income effects of retirement
• Poverty effects of retirement
CAREER ISSUES IN LATE LIFE

Retirement

• Those who are still supporting children retire later.
• Late marriages and raising grandchildren delays retirement.
• Poor pension plans mean working longer even when health is an issue.
• Challenging and interesting work leads to later retirement.

• **Timing of retirement**
  • Decline in average age of retirement
  • Most older adults plan on working part time.
  • Multi-phase process: bridge jobs to retirement

• **Reasons for retirement**
  • Health
  • Family composition and considerations

• **Effects of retirement**
  • The elderly face a decline in income of roughly 25 percent after retirement.
RETIREMENT
Sources of Retirement Income

- Government pensions
- Saving and other assets
- Continued employment
- Public assistance
- Other pensions