Social and Personality Development in Middle Adulthood

Chapter 16
Lecture Overview

• Theories of Social and Personality Development
• Relationships and Personality
• Mid-Life Career Issues
THEORIES OF SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

• Generativity versus Stagnation
• Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage
  • Generativity involves interest in establishing and guiding the next generation.
  • Stagnation involves pervading a sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment.
THEORIES OF SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Research on Generativity

• Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage

• Generativity is associated with several positive outcomes:
  • Successful marriages
  • Work achievements
  • Close friendships
  • Altruistic behaviors
  • Overall mental health
MIDLIFE CRISIS: FACT OR FICTION?

• Levinson and Erikson
• Each person must confront a constellation of difficult tasks at midlife.
• Newer research offers different conclusions.
  • Serious problems experienced by a minority of middle-aged adults may be triggered by life events.
• Newer research: Serious midlife problems are experienced by a minority—maybe 25 percent at most.
• Possibly triggered by life events rather than an age; for example, the death of a parent
• Midlife does present some physical challenges.
• Variations such as optimism can affect how one constructs one’s midlife “life story.”
Each of us occupies multiple roles at the same time, which produces frictions of various kinds.
Role Transitions

• Stress associated with the events of midlife is often complicated by role conflict.
• Role conflict: any situation in which two or more roles are at least partially incompatible
• For example, simultaneously caring for teenage children and aging parents (thus acting as both parent and child)

• Role strain: stress that occurs when a person lacks the resources needed to fulfill a role
• A midlife adult may need to return to college to learn new work skills, provoking anxiety.
• Roles that shift include family roles.
CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS

Partnerships

- **Midlife Profile**
  - Marital stability and satisfaction increase in midlife.
  - Less likely to divorce; more able to cope with divorce stress
  - Mellowing of personality = more resilience.

- Conflicts over childrearing decline.
- Increased sense of control
- Identification of successful problem-solving strategies
- Use of skilled diplomacy to ease tensions
CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS
Children and Parents

• In middle adulthood, the family role involves giving assistance in both directions of generational chain.

Sometimes called the midlife “squeeze”; those being squeezed are called the sandwich generation.

• In middle adulthood, the family role involves giving assistance in both directions of generational chain.
• Helping grown children
• Supporting aging parents
• The “sandwich generation”
• Between ages 40 and 65, adults give more help than they receive in both directions within the family.
Research on the Empty Nest

• THE EMPTY NEST AND THE REVOLVING DOOR
  • Women more often describe the empty nest event as positive.
  • The revolving door event may be stressful for middle-aged parents.
  • Reasons for “Peter Pandemonium”
    • Lack of desire to grow up
    • Enjoy being nurtured by family life
    • Mutual acceptance of situation by parents and adult children
    • “Boomerang” or “Adultescents”: adult children who use a “revolving door” in and out of parental home
Critical Thinking

1. What evidence would suggest that the economic explanation of the “revolving door” is the best one?

2. What are some of the advantages enjoyed by single young adults who live with their parents. What are some of the disadvantages of such a living arrangement?
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

Grandparenting

- **Overview**
  - New roles for middle-aged adults
  - Grandparenting may be shifting to a slightly later age.
  - Most grandparents express high levels of satisfaction with their role.
  - Grandparents can positively influence children’s development.
Let’s discuss each category.
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS
Grandparenting: Remote Relationships

- Characteristics
  - 29 percent of grandparents
  - Infrequent contact and little direct influence
  - Most commonly created by physical distance
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS
Grandparenting: Companionate Relationships

• Characteristics
  • Just over one-half of grandparents
  • Warm, pleasant relationships
  • Not involved in day-to-day responsibilities
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS
Grandparenting: Involved Relationships

- Characteristics
  - Sixteen percent of grandparents report involved relationships with their grandchildren.
  - Daily participation in rearing their grandchildren
  - Often living in multi-generational housing
  - Nearly full-time care
  - More common in poor families
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

Grandparenting

• Full-time custodial grandparenting (around 11 percent) is more likely when the grandchild’s mother is unmarried.
  • The daughter can continue school or work.
• The role of grandmother is broader and more intimate than that of grandfather.
• For most adults in middle age, grandparenthood is not central to their lives, their sense of self, or to their overall morale.
In-Laws

• ME, A MOTHER-IN-LAW?
  • Cultural differences in roles mothers-in-law play
  • Conflicts exist across cultures.
    • Childrearing; loyalty boundaries
  • Recommendations
    • No unsolicited advice or unannounced visits
    • Nonjudgmental sharing of experiences
    • Avoid behind-the-back criticism of in-law children.
    • Refrain from insistence on weekend or holiday visits.
    • Respect childrearing choices.
Reflection

1. How much of the conflict between mothers-in-law and their children’s spouses is brought about by expectations based on cultural stereotypes?

2. What would you include in a list of tips that might help spouses avoid conflicts with their in-laws?
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS
How Do Friendships Change?

• **Changes**
  • Total number of friends declines
  • Friendships more intimate and close
  • Friendships endure, even with less frequent contact.
  • There is scant research on middle adulthood friendships.
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN PERSONALITY
A Brief Review

• The “Big Five”: OCEAN

- Openness
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN PERSONALITY

Three Ideas about the Big Five

• The Big Five are relatively stable from childhood through old age.
• Openness, extraversion, and neuroticism decline as adults age.
• Agreeableness and conscientiousness tend to increase through age 70.
MIDLIFE CAREER ISSUES

Work Satisfaction

• At its peak, despite few work promotions in middle age
• Work performance quality is high.
• Experience less burnout than younger adults
• More career stability
MIDLIFE CAREER ISSUES
Job Performance

• Job Performance
  • Remains high throughout middle adulthood
  • May engage in selective optimization with compensation to remain highly productive
  • The link between selection, optimization, and compensation and the quality of work performance strengthens with increasing age.
MIDLIFE CAREER ISSUES
Unemployment and Career Transitions

• Can be more difficult in middle age
• Often involves ageism: Potential employers believe in the productivity of younger workers.
• Involuntary career changers experience heightened anxiety, depression and health risks after job loss.
• Loss of self-esteem
• Good coping skills are critical.
• Reemployment restores a sense of wellbeing.
• Involuntary career changers
• Their skills have become obsolete; their jobs have been eliminated.
• Reemployment tends to restore health, emotional stability, and a sense of wellbeing.
MIDLIFE CAREER ISSUES
Preparing for Retirement

• **Baby Boomers**
• Projected to be the healthiest, best-educated, and longest-living retirees in history
• Make retirement plans for both wives and husbands
• May not have saved enough and may have accumulated too much debt for their desired lifestyle
• Expect to retire in their early 60s and live into their 80s
• May not have saved enough and may have accumulated too much debt for their desired lifestyle