Middle Adulthood

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4/30/2013
Lecture Outline

• The nature of middle adulthood
• Physical development
• Cognitive development
  – Intelligence
  – Careers, work, and leisure
  – Spirituality
• Socioemotional Development
  – Personality
  – Stability and change in middle adulthood
  – Close relationships

4/23/2013
Early adulthood: socioemotional development

• Attraction, love, and close relationships
• Adult lifestyles:
  – Relationship statuses:
    • Single
    • Cohabitation
    • Marriage
  – Parenthood

Questions?
Material?
Course business?
Practice question

- Cohabitation—as defined in this class—refers to:
  A) Living together
  B) Moving into one’s own home
  C) Sharing your home with foster children
  D) Living together in a sexual relationship without being married

The Increase in Cohabitation in the United States

Practice question

- The ‘matching hypothesis’ says that we choose partners:
  A) Who have similar values.
  B) On the basis of proximity.
  C) Our parents choose our partners
  D) Who are close to our level of physical attractiveness.
  E) Who have opposing personality traits.

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The Nature of Middle Adulthood

- Changing midlife
  - An increasing percentage of the population is made up of middle-aged and older adults
- "Rectangularization" of the age distribution
- Often, age identity is younger than chronological age

Defining middle adulthood
- Middle adulthood: 40–45 years of age to about 60–65 years of age
- Declining physical skills and increasing responsibility
- Awareness of the young-old polarity
  - Abe video
- Transmitting something meaningful to the next generation
- Reaching and maintaining career satisfaction

The Nature of Middle Adulthood

- Defining middle adulthood
  - Gains and losses and biological and sociocultural factors balance each other
  - Late midlife (55 to 65) is likely to be characterized by:
    - Death of a parent
    - Last child leaving the parental home
    - Becoming a grandparent
    - Preparation for and actual retirement

Physical Development

- Physical changes
  - Visible signs
    - Wrinkling and sagging of skin
    - Appearance of aging spots
    - Hair becomes thinner and grayer
    - Nails become thicker and more brittle
    - Yellowing of teeth
Physical Development

- Physical changes
  - Height and weight
    - Individuals lose height and gain weight
    - Being overweight is a critical health problem in middle adulthood

- Physical changes
  - Strength, joints, and bones
    - Age-related loss of muscle mass and strength
    - Joint stiffness and more difficulty in movement
    - Progressive bone loss

- Physical changes
  - Vision and hearing
    - Accommodation of the eye - Ability to focus and maintain an image on the retina
    - Experiences sharp declines between 40–59 years
    - Difficulty viewing close objects
    - Reduced blood supply decreases visual field
    - Hearing can start to decline by the age of 40
    - High-pitched sounds are typically lost first

- Physical changes
  - Cardiovascular system
    - High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and cardiovascular disease
    - Metabolic syndrome:
      - Hypertension, obesity, and insulin resistance
      - Exercise, weight control, and a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can often help
**Physical Development**

- Physical changes
  - Lungs
    - Lung tissue becomes less elastic at about age 55, decreasing the lung’s capacity
  - Sleep
    - Wakeful periods become more frequent in the 40’s
    - Sleep-disordered breathing and restless legs syndrome

**Physical Development**

- Health, disease, stress, and control
  - **Chronic disorders**: Slow onset and a long duration
    - Rare in early adulthood but increase in middle age
  - Stress and disease
    - The immune system and stress
    - Stress and the cardiovascular system
  - Sense of Control
    - “I can get better”
    - Peaks in midlife then declines in late adulthood

**Physical Development**

- Mortality rates
  - Chronic diseases are now the main cause of death during middle adulthood
    - Heart disease
    - Cancer

**Physical Development**

- Sexuality
  - **Menopause**: Cessation of a woman’s menstrual periods (“biological clock”)
    - During the late forties or early fifties
    - Hot flashes, nausea, fatigue, and rapid heartbeat
    - Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
      - estrogen
**Physical Development**

- Sexuality
  - Hormonal changes in middle-aged men
    - Decline in sexual hormone level and activity
    - **Erectile dysfunction**: Inability to achieve and maintain an erection
    - HRT - Testosterone

- Sexual attitudes and behavior
  - Sexual activity occurs less frequently than in early adulthood
  - Middle-aged men are more interested in sex than middle-aged women

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### Frequency of Sex at Different Points in Adult Development

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<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Not at all (%)</th>
<th>A few times per year (%)</th>
<th>A few times per month (%)</th>
<th>2-3 times a week (%)</th>
<th>4 or more times a week (%)</th>
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Cognitive Development

- Raymond Cattell’s view on Intelligence
  - Fluid intelligence: Ability to reason abstractly
    - May begin to decline in middle adulthood
  - Crystallized intelligence: Accumulated information and verbal skills
    - Continues to increase in middle adulthood

Cognitive Development

- Intelligence
  - The Seattle Longitudinal Study
    - 1956-2012
    - Extensive evaluation of intellectual abilities during adulthood
Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Comparisons of Intellectual Change in Middle Adulthood

Cognitive Development

- Reaction time:

  - Speed of information processing
    - "Press a button as soon as you see a light"
    - Reaction-times increase
      - But, usually only ~1 second slower

Cognitive Development

- Reaction time:

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    - But, usually only ~1 second slower
**Cognitive Development**

- Information processing
  - Expertise
    - Rely on accumulated experience
    - Process information automatically and analyze it more efficiently
    - Have better strategies and shortcuts to solving problems
    - Are more creative and flexible in solving problems

**Careers, Work, and Leisure**

- Work in midlife
  - The role of work is *central* during middle age
  - In the U.S., about 80% of people aged 40-59 years of age are employed
  - Adults think about work a lot!

**Careers, Work, and Leisure**

- Career challenges and changes
  - Challenges
    - Globalization of work
    - Rapid developments in information technologies
    - Downsizing organizations
    - Early retirement
    - Pensions and health care

**Careers, Work, and Leisure**

- Leisure
  - Pleasant times after work
    - When individuals are free to pursue activities and interests of their own choosing
  - Changes may produce expanded opportunities for leisure
Religion, Spirituality, and Meaning in Life

- Religion:
  - Organized set of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols
  - Believes in a sacred or transcendent ‘other’

- Religiousness:
  - Degree to which an individual participates in prescribed rituals and practices
  - Feels a sense of connection with its beliefs
  - Involved in a community of believers

- Spirituality:
  - Experiencing something beyond oneself in a transcendent manner
  - Sometimes: Living in a way that benefits others and society

Religion and Meaning in Life

- Religion, spirituality and health
  - Religion is positively linked to health
  - Religious commitment helps to:
    - Moderate blood pressure and hypertension

Spirituality at Four Adult Age Periods

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Personality Theories and Development

- Stages of adulthood
  - Erikson’s generativity versus stagnation
    - Generativity: Adults’ desire to leave legacies of themselves to the next generation
    - Stagnation: Develops when individuals sense that they have done nothing for the next generation
  - Generativity can be developed in a number of ways
    - Biological generativity
    - Parental generativity
    - Work generativity
    - Cultural generativity

Personality Theories and Development

- How pervasive are midlife crises?
  - The 40s are a decade of reassessing and recording the truth about the adolescent and adult years
  - Only a minority of adults experience a midlife crisis
  - In 1/3 of cases where individuals report experiencing a midlife crisis:
    - Triggered by life events such as job loss, financial problems, or illness

Emotional Instability and Age

What stresses you out daily?

What really “makes your day”?
Age and Well-Being

Personality Theories and Development

- Stress and personal control
  - Stress, personal control, and age
    - Middle-aged adults experience more “overload” stressors that involve juggling too many activities at once
    - Some aspects of personal control increase with age while others decrease

Most Frequent Daily Stressors and Uplifts of Middle-Aged Adults

Personality Theories and Development

- Contexts of midlife development
  - Cultural contexts
    - The concept of middle age is unclear or absent in many cultures
    - Middle age like for women - Depends on the modernity of the culture and the culture's view of gender roles
    - Middle-aged women in nonindustrialized societies experience certain advantages
**Stability and Change**

- Longitudinal studies
  - Costa and McCrae’s Baltimore Study
    - Focused on the big five factors of personality

- Berkeley longitudinal studies
  - Intellectual orientation, self-confidence, and openness to new experience were the more stable traits
  - Characteristics that changed the most
    - Extent to which individuals were nurturant or hostile
    - Whether or not they had good self-control

**Close Relationships**

- Love and marriage at midlife
  - Security, loyalty, and mutual emotional interest are more important in middle adulthood
  - Most married individuals are satisfied with their marriages during midlife
  - Divorce in middle adulthood may be more positive in some ways, more negative in others

- The empty nest and its refilling
  - Empty nest syndrome: Decrease in marital satisfaction after children leave the home
    - Parents derive considerable satisfaction from their children
  - Refilling of empty nest is a common occurrence
Close Relationships

- Grandparenting
  - Grandparent roles and styles
    - Three prominent meanings
      - Source of biological reward and continuity
      - Source of emotional self-fulfillment
  - Remote role
  - Three grandparenting styles
    - Formal (proper, )
    - Fun-seeking (informal, & playful)
    - Distant-figure (nice, but absent)

Close Relationships

- Grandparenting
  - 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