Erikson’s Theory: Generativity versus Stagnation

**Generativity**
- Reaching out to others in ways that give to and guide the next generation
- Commitment extends beyond self
- Typically realized through child rearing
- Other family, work mentoring relationships also generative

**Stagnation**
- Place own comfort and security above challenge and sacrifice
- Self-centered, self-indulgent, self-absorbed
- Lack of involvement or concern with young people
- Little interest in work productivity, self-improvement

Levinson’s Four Tasks of Middle Adulthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Young-Old</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find new ways of being both young and old</td>
<td>Giving up some youthful qualities, retaining and transforming others, and finding meaning in being older.</td>
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<td>Acknowledge past destructiveness, try to create products of value</td>
<td>Focus on products of value to self and participating in activities that advance human welfare</td>
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<td>Balance masculine and feminine parts of self</td>
<td>Men becoming more empathic and caring and women more autonomous, dominant, and assertive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance involvement with external world and separateness from it</td>
<td>Men pulling back from ambition and achievement and becoming more in touch with the self. Women who’ve devoted themselves to childrearing or with unfulfilling jobs move toward greater involvement in the work world and wider community</td>
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Midlife Crisis?

Research: Wide individual differences
- Gender differences
  - Men – changes in early 40s
  - Women – postponed to late 40s–50s until a reduction in parenting responsibilities gives them time and freedom to confront personal issues.
- Sharp disruption and agitation uncommon
  - Self-doubt and turmoil lead to drastic changes in their lives.
- Life regrets—opportunities that weren’t pursued
  - At midlife w/less time left to make life changes, interpretation of regrets influences well-being
  - “Turning points” rather than drastic alterations of lives
- Sometimes “midlife relief”
  - Brought on a sense of confidence and accomplishment and a

Stage vs. Life Events

- If midlife crisis is rare, is middle adulthood actually a stage of development?
- Some believe the midlife transition is not stage-like.
  - No qualitatively different thinking, feeling, and behaving
- An adaptation to normative life events such as children growing up, reaching the crest of a career, and impending retirement.
- Life events not as age graded as in past—this variable timing can’t be the sole cause of midlife change.
- Adaptation during midlife as the combined result of growing older and social experiences.
Possible Selves

- What one hopes or fears becoming
- Become fewer and more modest with age
- May help with adjustment and self-esteem
  - Future-oriented representations of what one hopes to become or is afraid of becoming
- As we age, we rely less on social comparisons in judging our self-worth and more on temporal comparisons—how well we are doing in relation to what we had planned for ourselves.
- Less desire to be best and most successful.
- People affirm self, even when things are not going well.
- Possible selves may be key to continued well-being as people revise these future images to achieve a better match between desired and achieved goals.

Factors in Midlife Psychological Well-Being

1. Good Health and Exercise
2. Sense of Control and Personal Life Investment
3. Positive Social Relationships
4. Good Marriage
5. Mastery of Multiple Roles

Gender Identity in Middle Adulthood

- Women: Increase in “masculine traits”
  - Women more confident, self-sufficient, and forceful
- Men: Increase in “feminine traits”
  - Men more emotionally sensitive, caring, considerate, and dependent

Theories

- Parental Imperative
  - Traditional roles maintained during active parenting years to ensure survival of children.
- Decline in sex hormones associated with aging may contribute to androgyny in later life
- Androgyny isn’t associated with menopause
- Androgyny in midlife results from a complex combination of social roles and life conditions.

Big Five Personality Traits

- **Openness to Experience**
  - High scorers tend to be original, creative, curious, complex.
  - Low scorers tend to be conventional, down to earth, narrow interests, uncreative.
- **Conscientiousness**
  - High scorers tend to be reliable, well-organized, self-disciplined, careful.
  - Low scorers tend to be disorganized, undependable, negligent.
- **Extraversion**
  - High scorers tend to be sociable, friendly, fun loving, talkative.
  - Low scorers tend to be introverted, reserved, inhibited, quiet.
- **Agreeableness**
  - High scorers tend to be good natured, sympathetic, forgiving, courteous.
  - Low scorers tend to be critical, rude, harsh, callous.
- **Neuroticism**
  - High scorers tend to be nervous, high-strung, insecure, worrying.
Big Five Personality Traits (cont.)

- Agreeableness and conscientiousness increase from teen years through middle age, neuroticism declines, and extroversion and openness to experience don’t change or decrease slightly.
- Changes that reflect “settling down” and greater maturity.
- The consistency of cross-cultural findings lead to conclusion that adult personality is genetically influenced.
- Not measured: changes in motivations, preferred tasks, coping styles, and other aspects of personality, effects of life events, the social clock, or cultural values.
- Adults change in organization and integration of personality, but keep enduring dispositions.

Marriage and Divorce in Middle Adulthood

- Marital satisfaction is a strong predictor of midlife psychological well-being.
- Economic well-being and time between parenting and retirement allow focus on marriage.
- Review and adjust marriage
  - Many strengthen relationship
  - Some divorce
- Divorce in midlife
  - Higher in remarried couples
- Feminization of poverty
  - Trend in which women who support themselves or their families are the majority of the adult poverty population, regardless of age and ethnic group.

Parenting in Middle Adulthood

- Parents begin “letting go” starting in childhood and gaining momentum in adolescence.
- Parents still provide more assistance than they receive throughout middle adulthood.
- Most middle-aged parents adjust well to children leaving home.
- Children who are “off time” in development—not showing expected signs of independence and accomplishment—cause parents stress.
- Individual and cultural variations
  - Extended family traditions

Grandparenthood

- Become grandparent average late 40s and can spend 1/3 of life.
- Highly meaningful to most.
- Grandparenting styles vary
  - Geography, gender, SES, ethnicity are factors.
- Ways of viewing grandparenthood:
  - Valued elder—perceived as wise and helpful.
  - Immortality through descendants—leaving behind two generations after death.
  - Reinvolve with personal past—passing family history and values to new generation.
  - Indulgence—having fun with children without child-rearing responsibility.
Middle-Age Children and Their Aging Parents

- More likely to have parents still alive than in past
- Adult children reassess relationships with parents
- Children provide more help to parents
  - Financial, household aid; caregiving
  - Helping based on earlier relationships
- Frequency and Quality of Contact
  - Past generations were not more devoted to aging parents.
  - Fewer aging adults live with children now because of desire for independence.
  - Proximity increases with age
  - Non-Western older adults most often live with their married children.

Caring for Aging Parents

- Adults with elderly parents are caught in a sandwich generation.
  - “Sandwiched” or squeezed between the needs of aging parents and financially dependent children.
- Daughters most likely to provide care
- Because duration of caregiving is uncertain, caregivers often feel they no longer have control over their lives.
- Caregiving often has emotional and physical health consequences and leads to role overload.
- Social support is highly effective in reducing caregiver stress.

Job Satisfaction

- Psychological and economic significance
  - If people are dissatisfied at work, the consequences include absenteeism, turnover, grievances, and strikes, all of which are costly to employers
  - Job satisfaction increases in midlife at all occupational levels, from executives to hourly workers
  - Weaker for women than men probably because women’s reduced chances for advancement result in a sense of unfairness.
- Predictors of job well-being include involvement in decision making, reasonable workloads, good physical working conditions
  - Older people may have greater access to jobs that are attractive in these ways
- Burnout
  - Long-term job stress leads to emotional exhaustion, loss of personal control, and feelings of reduced accomplishment.