Chapter 16: Socioemotional Development in Middle Adulthood

Erikson’s Generativity vs. Stagnation
- Generativity: adults’ desire to leave legacies of themselves to the next generation
  - Biological generativity
  - Parental generativity
  - Work generativity
  - Cultural generativity
- Stagnation: develops when individuals sense that they have done nothing for the next generation

Levinson’s Seasons of a Man’s Life (continued)
- Transition to middle adulthood lasts about 5 years (ages 40 to 45) and requires that men come to grips with conflicts existing since adolescence:
  - Being young vs. being old
  - Being destructive vs. being constructive
  - Being masculine vs. being feminine
  - Being attached to others vs. being separated from them
Levinson’s Periods of Adult Development

Insert Figure 16.3

Personality Theories and Development

- Stages of Adulthood
  - 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

Stages of Adulthood

- Individual Variations
  - Stage theories do not adequately address individual variations in adult development
  - Some individuals may experience a midlife crisis in some contexts of their lives but not others
  - In 1/3 of cases where individuals report experiencing a midlife crisis, the crisis was triggered by life events such as job loss, financial problems, or illness
Personality Theories and Development

- The Life-Events Approach
  - Contemporary Life-Events Approach: how life events influence the individual's development depends on:
    - The life event itself
    - Mediating factors
    - The individual's adaptation to the life event
    - Life-stage context
    - Sociohistorical context

- Stress and Personal Control
  - Middle-aged adults experience more “overload” stressors that involve juggling too many activities at once
  - Middle-aged adults feel they have a greater sense of control over their finances, work, and marriage than young adults but less control over their sex life and their children
Contexts of Midlife Development

- Historical Contexts (Cohort Effects)
  - Changing historical times and different social expectations influence how different cohorts move through the life span
  - Social clock: the timetable according to which individuals are expected to accomplish life’s tasks
- Gender Contexts:
  - Stage theories have a male bias
  - The demands of balancing career and family are usually not experienced as intensely by men

Cultural Contexts
- The concept of middle age is unclear or absent in many cultures
- Depending on the modernity of the culture and the culture’s view of gender roles, midlife often brings about great change for women in nonindustrialized societies

Personality Theories and Development

- Costa and McCrae’s Baltimore Study
  - Focused on the Big Five Factors of Personality
  - Stability occurs in five personality factors: emotional stability, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness

Stability and Change

Longitudinal Studies
Stability and Change

- **Longitudinal Studies**
  - Berkeley Longitudinal Studies
    - Intellectual orientation, self-confidence, and openness to new experience were the more stable traits
  - Ability to nurture and self-control changed most
  - Extent to which individuals were nurturant or hostile and whether or not they had good self-control were characteristics that changed

- **Helson’s Mills College Study**
  - Three main groups of women
    - Family-oriented
    - Career-oriented
    - Neither path

Stability and Change

- **George Vaillant’s Studies**
  - Used data collected from individuals at 50 years of age to predict whether they would be in “happy-well,” “sad-sick,” or “dead” category between 75 and 80 years of age

Stability and Change

- **Vaillant’s Study**
  - Graph showing the distribution of individuals in different categories at age 70-80.
Stability and Change

- Conclusions
  - Personality traits continue to change during the adult years, even into late adulthood
  - Cumulative personality model: with time and age, people become more adept at interacting with their environment in ways that promote the stability of personality

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 midlife can be less intense than in early adulthood

- The Empty Nest and Its Refilling
  - Empty Nest Syndrome: a decline in marital satisfaction after the children leave the home
  - For most parents, marital satisfaction actually increases during the years after child rearing
  - Refilling of empty nest is becoming a common occurrence

- Sibling Relationships and Friendships
  - Sibling relationships continue over the entire life span
  - The majority of sibling relationships in adulthood are close
  - Friendships that have endured over the adult years tend to be deeper than those that have just been formed in middle adulthood
Close Relationships

- Grandparenting
  - Many adults become grandparents during middle age

- Grandparent Roles and Styles
  - Three prominent meanings
    - Source of biological reward and continuity
    - Source of emotional self-fulfillment
    - Remote role

- Three Grandparenting Styles:
  - Fun-seeking style
  - Distant-figure style
  - Formal style

Close Relationships

- Grandparenting
  - The Changing Profile of Grandparents
    - An increasing number of U.S. grandchildren live with their grandparents; 6.1 million in 2005

- Most common reasons are divorce, adolescent pregnancies, and parental drug use

- Full-time grandparenting has been linked to health problems, depression, and stress

Close Relationships

- Intergenerational Relationships
  - Middle-aged and older adults typically express a strong feeling of responsibility between generations in their family

- Midlife adults play important roles in the lives of the young and the old

- When conflicts arise, parents most often cite habits and lifestyle choices, while adult children cite communication and interaction styles

Close Relationships

- Intergenerational Relationships
  - Differences in gender:
    - Mothers and daughters have closer relationships during their adult years than mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, and fathers and sons

- Married men are more involved with their wives’ families than with their own

- Maternal aunts and grandmothers are cited as the most important or loved relative twice as often as their paternal counterparts