Chapter 19: Socioemotional Development in Late Adulthood

Erikson’s Theory:
- Integrity vs. Despair: involves reflecting on the past and either piecing together a positive review or concluding that one’s life has not been well spent
- Life review: looking back at one’s life experiences, evaluating them, and interpreting/reinterpreting them
- Regrets:
  - Education, careers, marriages, finance/money, family conflict and children’s problems, loss and grief, and health
  - Making downward social comparisons
  - Resolving regrets following the death of a loved one
- Reminiscence therapy: discussing past activities and experiences with another individual or group
Theories of Socioemotional Development

- **Activity Theory:**
  - The more active and involved older adults are, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their lives

- **Socioemotional Selectivity Theory:**
  - Older adults become more selective about their social networks, spending more time with individuals with whom they have had rewarding relationships

**Theories of Socioemotional Development (continued):**

- **Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (continued):**
  - Two important classes of goals:
    - Knowledge-related
    - Emotional
  - Trajectory for each type of goal is different
    - As older adults perceive that they have less time left, they spend more time pursuing emotional satisfaction

**Selective Optimization with Compensation Theory:**

- Successful aging is linked with three main factors:
  - Selection: older adults have a reduced capacity and loss of functioning, which require a reduction in performance in most life domains
  - Optimization: it is possible to maintain performance in some areas through continued practice and the use of new technologies
  - Compensation: older adults need to compensate when life tasks require a higher level of capacity
Personality, The Self, and Society

- The Self and Society
  - Self-Esteem
    - Tends to decline significantly in the 70s and 80s because of:
      - Being widowed, institutionalized, or physically impaired
      - Having a low religious commitment
      - Declining health
  - Personality
    - Conscientiousness predicts lower mortality risk from childhood through late adulthood
    - Low conscientiousness and high neuroticism predicts earlier death
    - High conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness were related to higher mortality risk
**Personality, The Self, and Society**

- The Self and Society
  - Possible Selves: what individuals might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming
  - Self-Control
    - A majority of adults in their 60s and 70s reported being in control of their lives

**Older Adults in Society**

- Stereotyping Older Adults
  - Ageism: prejudice against others because of their age
- Policy Issues in an Aging Society
  - Status of the Economy
  - Health Care
  - Eldercare
  - Generational Inequality
  - Income
  - Living Arrangements
  - Technology

**Families and Social Relationships**

- Lifestyle Diversity
  - Married Older Adults
    - In 2004, 56% of U.S. adults over 65 were married; 45% of older adult women were widows
    - Marital satisfaction is greater in older adults than middle-aged adults
    - Retirement alters a couple’s lifestyle
    - Older adults who are married or partnered are usually happier and live longer than those who are single

- Divorced and Separated Older Adults
  - Represented only 8% of older adults in 2004
  - Social, financial, and physical consequences of divorce
  - Remarriage is increasing due to rising divorce rates, increased longevity, and better health
Families and Social Relationships

- **Lifestyle Diversity**
  - Cohabiting Older Adults
    - Today, 3% of older adults cohabit
  - Romance and Sex in Older Adults’ Relationships
    - An increased number of older adults date
    - When older adults are healthy, they still engage in sexual activities

- **Older Adult Parents and Their Children**
  - About 80% of older adults have living children, many of whom are middle-aged
  - Adult daughters are more likely to be involved in the lives of aging parents
  - Adult children often coordinate and monitor services for aging disabled parents

- **Great-Grandparenting**
  - The four-generation family is more common
  - Great-grandparents can transmit family history

- **Friendship**
  - In late adulthood, new friendships are less likely to be forged and close friends are chosen over new friends
  - Friendships are more important than family in predicting mental health
  - Individuals with close ties to friends were less likely to die
  - Unmarried older adults in a friend-focused network fared better physically and psychologically than other unmarried older adults with little friend contact
Families and Social Relationships

- Social Support and Social Integration
  - Social Support
    - Convoy Model of Social Relations: individuals go through life embedded in a personal network of individuals to whom they give and from whom they receive social support
  - Social Integration
    - Older adults have fewer peripheral social contacts and more emotionally positive contacts with friends and family
    - Emotional and social loneliness can affect the quality of marriage in older adults

- Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture
  - Ethnicity:
    - Elderly ethnic minority individuals face both ageism and racism
    - More likely to become ill but less likely to receive treatment
    - Many never reach the age of eligibility for Social Security benefits
    - Despite stress and discrimination many ethnic minority individuals have developed coping mechanisms that allow them to survive
  - Gender:
    - Some developmentalists believe that there is decreasing femininity in women and decreasing masculinity in men during late adulthood
    - Older men often become more feminine, but women do not necessarily become more masculine
    - Older adult females face ageism and sexism

- Altruism and Volunteerism
  - Older adults who had persistently low or declining feelings of usefulness to others had an increased risk of earlier death
  - Volunteering is associated with a number of positive outcomes
Ethnicity, Gender, and Culture

- Culture
  - Three factors are important in living the “good life”
    - Health
    - Security
    - Kinship/support

- Seven factors are likely to predict high status for older adults in a culture:
  - Have valuable knowledge
  - Control key family/community resources
  - Engage in useful/valued functions as long as possible
  - Role continuity
  - Age-related role changes that give greater responsibility, authority, and advisory capacity
  - Extended family
  - Respect for older adults

Successful Aging

- Many abilities can be maintained and/or improved in older adults due to:
  - Proper diet
  - Active lifestyle
  - Mental stimulation and flexibility
  - Positive coping skills
  - Good social relationships and support
  - Absence of disease
  - A sense of self-efficacy