

Invitation to the Life Span

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Chapter 13— Adulthood Psychosocial Development

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Ages and Stages

- **Erikson's Stages**

- Erikson originally envisioned eight stages of development, which occur in sequence from birth through old age.
- Three of his stages cover the years after adolescence.
- Erikson's 7th stage generativity vs. stagnation (generally resolved between ages 30 – 65)
- Later in his life, however Erikson stressed that stages and ages do not occur in lockstep.

Ages and Stages (p 456)

TABLE 13.1 Erikson's Stages of Adulthood

Unlike Freud or other early theorists who thought adults simply worked through the legacy of their childhood, half of Erikson's eight stages described psychosocial needs after puberty. His most famous book, *Childhood and Society* (1963), devoted only two pages to each adult stage, but published and unpublished elaborations in later works led to a much richer depiction (Hoare, 2002).

Identity Versus Role Diffusion

Although the identity crisis was originally set for adolescence, Erikson realized that identity concerns could be lifelong. Identity combines values and traditions from childhood with the current social context. Since contexts keep evolving, many adults reassess all four types of identity (sexual/gender, vocational/work, religious/spiritual, and political/ethnic).

Intimacy Versus Isolation

Adults seek intimacy—a close, reciprocal connection with another human being. Intimacy is mutual, not self-absorbed, which means that adults need to devote time and energy to one another. This process begins in emerging adulthood and continues lifelong. Isolation is especially likely when divorce or death disrupts established intimate relationships.

Generativity Versus Stagnation

Adults need to care for the next generation, either by raising their own children or by mentoring, teaching, and helping younger people. Erikson's first description of this stage focused on parenthood, but later he included other ways to achieve generativity. Adults extend the legacy of their culture and their generation with ongoing care, creativity, and sacrifice.

Integrity Versus Despair

When Erikson himself was in his 70s, he decided that integrity, with the goal of combating prejudice and helping all humanity, was too important to be left to the elderly. He also thought that each person's entire life could be directed toward connecting a personal journey with the historical and cultural purpose of human society, the ultimate achievement of integrity.

Ages and Stages

- **Maslow's Stages**

- Abraham Maslow (1954) described five stages, which occur in sequence.
- Movement occurs when people have satisfied their needs at one level and are ready for the next step.
- In his later years, Maslow reassessed his final level, *self-actualization*.
- He suggested another level after that, called *self-transcendence* which is described in chapter 15.

Ages and Stages

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

5. Self-actualization

Need to live up to one's fullest and unique potential

4. Success and esteem

Need for self-esteem, achievement, competence, and independence; need for recognition and respect from others

3. Love and belonging

Need to love and be loved, to belong and be accepted; need to avoid loneliness and alienation

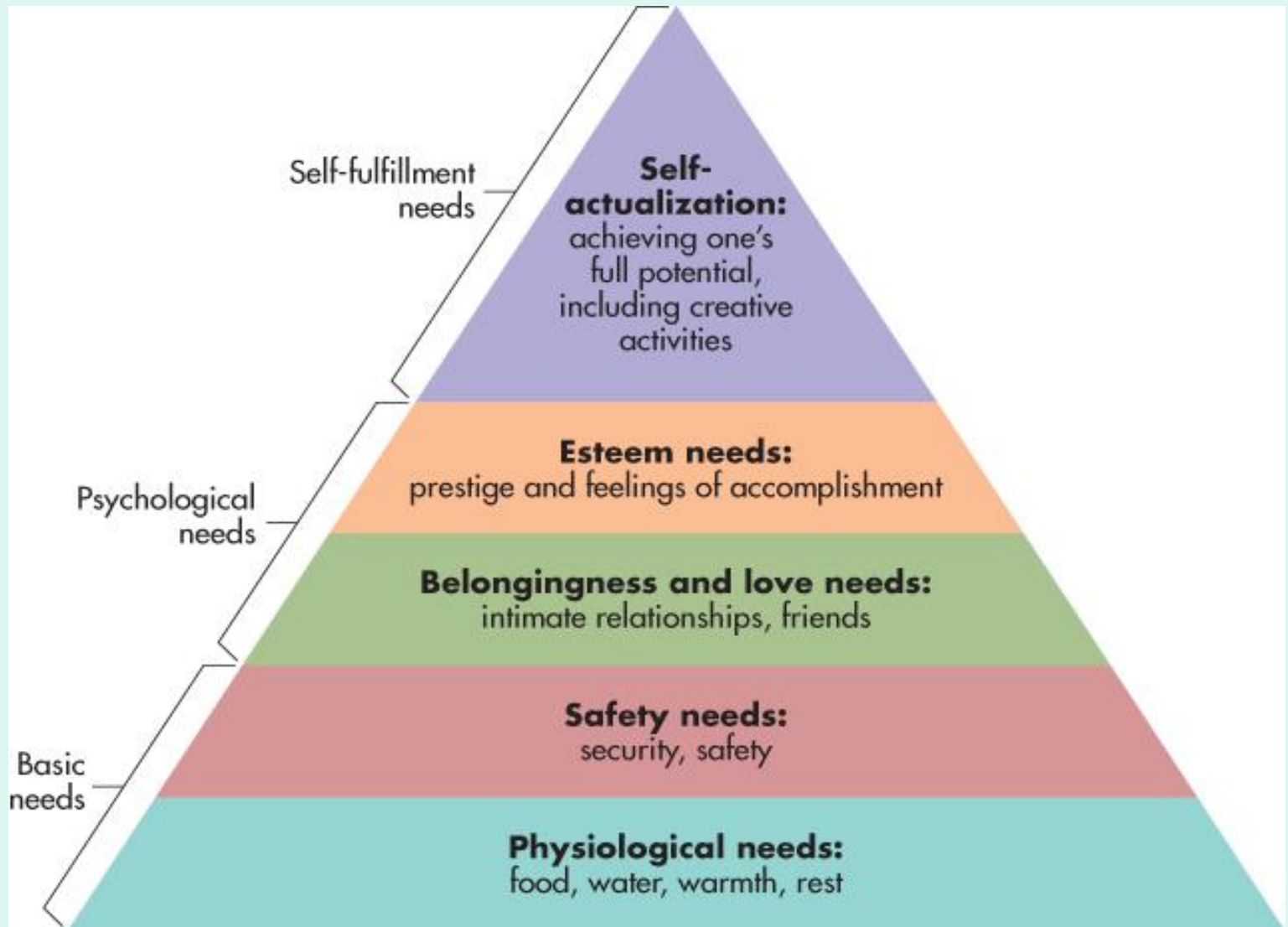
2. Safety

Need to feel that the world is organized and predictable; need to feel safe, secure, and stable

1. Physiology

Need to satisfy hunger and thirst

Source: Maslow, 1954.



Ages and Stages

- **The Social Clock**

- A developmental timetable based not on biological maturation but on **social norms**, which set the stages of life and the behaviors considered appropriate to each of them.
- Some ages set by the social clock are enacted into law, in the form of minimal ages for driving, drinking, voting, getting married, signing a mortgage, and being entitled to retirement benefits.

Ages and Stages

- **Personality Throughout Adulthood**
 - Genes, parental practices, culture, and adult circumstances all contribute to personality.
 - Of these four, genes are probably the most influential, according to longitudinal studies.
 - Since genes do not change from conception through death, it is not surprising that every study finds substantial continuity in personality.

Ages and Stages

- **The Big Five**

- **Openness**: imaginative, curious, artistic, creative, open to new experiences
 - **Conscientiousness**: organized, deliberate, conforming, self-disciplined
 - **Extroversion**: outgoing, assertive, active
 - **Agreeableness**: kind, helpful, easygoing, generous
 - **Neuroticism**: anxious, moody, self-punishing, critical
- The Big Five (arranged above so that their first letters spell the word *ocean*, as a memory aid) correlate with almost every aspect of adulthood.

Five-Factor Model (McCrae and Costa)

- Described a little bit differently among researchers
- These Five Factors — usually rated from low to high
 - Extraversion
 - Neuroticism
 - Openness to Experience
 - Agreeableness
 - Conscientiousness
- **Four out of the big five (except for agreeableness) are more determined by genetics than environment**

Ages and Stages

- **Choosing a Lifestyle**

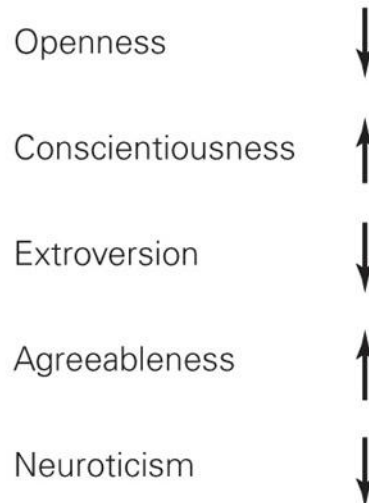
- In adulthood, people choose their particular social context, or **ecological niche**.
- Adults select vocations, mates, and neighborhoods, and they settle into chosen routines and surroundings.
- Ages 30 to 50 are marked by more stability of personality than are other periods of life.

FIGURE 13.2 Trends, Not Rules Overall stability, and some marked individual variation, is the main story for the Big Five over the decades of adulthood. In addition, each of the traits tends to shift slightly, as depicted here.

Adult Personality: Stability Within Change

Personality →

Quite stable overall, but with minor ups and downs:



Sources: Allemand et al., 2008; Lachman & Bertrand, 2001.

Ages and Stages

- **Gender Differences in Personality**
 - Men are higher in extroversion and openness, women higher in conscientiousness and agreeableness.
 - These sex differences may be innate, perhaps related to hormones.
 - **gender convergence**- A tendency for men and women to become more similar as they move through middle age.

Intimacy

- **Intimacy needs are lifelong.**
- Adults meet their need for social connection through their relationships with relatives, friends, coworkers, and romantic partners.
- **social convoy**
 - Collectively, the family members, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers who move through life with an individual.

Friends

- **Friends:**
 - are typically the most crucial members of the social convoy
 - often able to provide practical help and useful advice when serious problems—death of a family member, personal illness, loss of a job—arise.
- A comprehensive research study (Fingerman et al., 2004) found that friendships tend to improve with age.

Family Bonds

- When family bonds are similar to friendship bonds, relatives are mainstays of the social convoy.
- Physical separation does not necessarily weaken family ties.
- *In fact, relationships between parents and adult children are more likely to deteriorate if they live together*.

Family Bonds

- Over the years of adulthood, parents and adult children typically increase in closeness, forgiveness, and pride as both generations gain maturity.
- **Familism** (Cultural belief)
 - The belief that family members should support one another, sacrificing individual freedom and success, if necessary, in order to preserve family unity.

Family Bonds

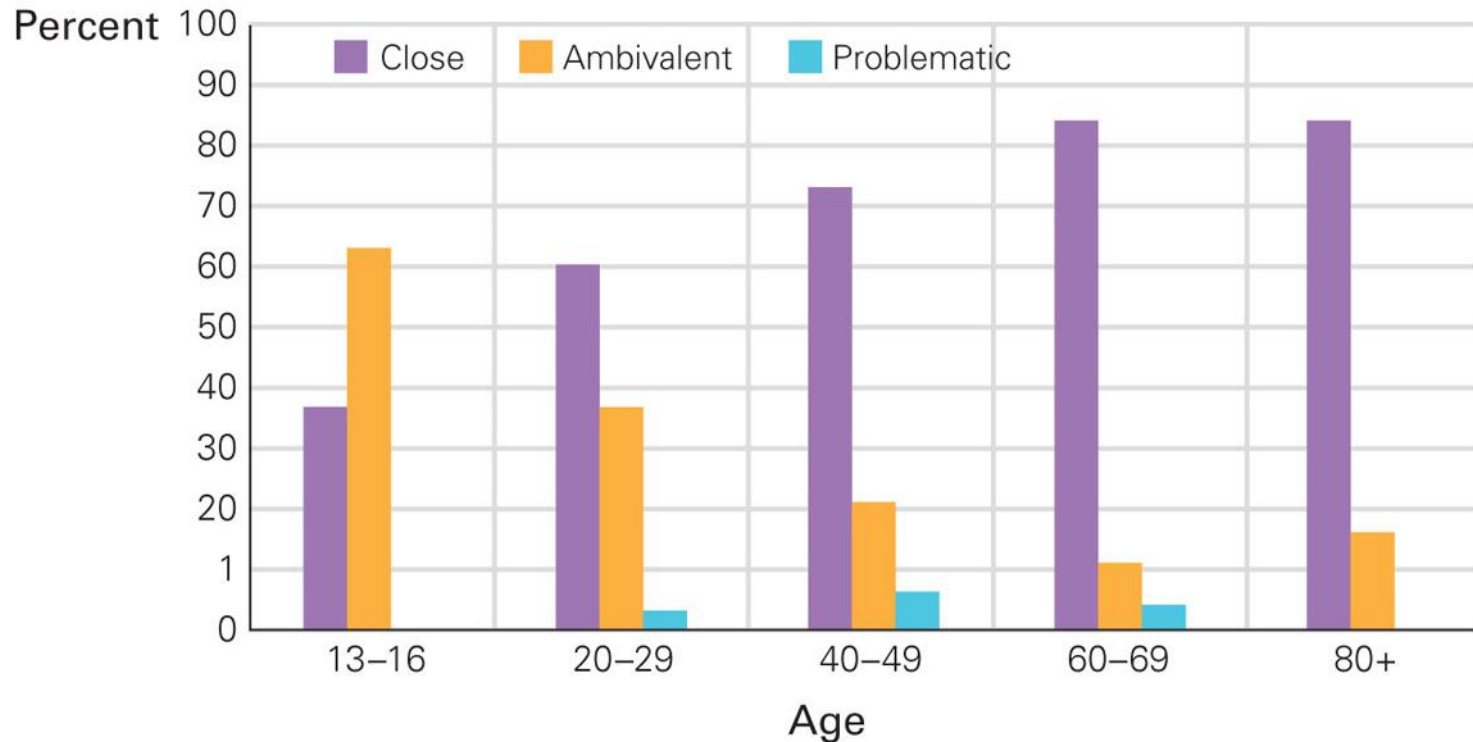
- Adult siblings also often become mutually supportive in adulthood.
- Adult siblings help one another cope with children, marriage, and elderly relatives.
- Sibling bonds are particularly likely to develop during adulthood among children who grew up in large families with major stressors like extreme poverty or a bitter divorce.

Family Bonds

- Family closeness can sometimes be destructive, however.
- Some adults wisely keep their distance from their blood relatives.
- They may instead become **fictive kin** in another family, that is, someone who is accepted and treated like a family member.

Family Bonds

Closeness with Siblings at Different Ages



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007.

Committed Partners

- Adults everywhere seek committed sexual partnerships to help meet their needs for intimacy as well as to raise children, share resources, and provide care when needed.
- Less than 15 percent of U.S. residents marry before age 25, but by age 40, 85 percent have married.
- Married people are a little happier, healthier, and richer than never-married ones—but not by much.

Committed Partners

- Contrary to outdated impressions, the **empty nest** (the time when parents are alone again after their children have moved out and launched their own lives) often **improves** a relationship.
- Most long-married people stay together because they love and trust each other, not simply because they are stuck.

Committed Partners

TABLE 13.2 AT ABOUT THIS TIME: Marital Happiness over the Years

Interval After Wedding	Characterization
First 6 months	Honeymoon period—happiest of all.
6 months to 5 years	Happiness dips; divorce is common; usual time for birth of first child.
5 to 10 years	Happiness holds steady.
10 to 20 years	Happiness dips as children reach puberty.
20 to 30 years	Happiness rises when children leave the nest.
30 to 50 years	Happiness is high and steady, barring serious health problems.

Divorce

- Adults are affected (for better or for worse) by divorce in ways they never anticipated.
- Generally, those in very distressed marriages are happier after divorce, while those in merely distant marriages (most U.S. divorces) are less happy than they thought they would be.
- Divorce reduces income, severs friendships, and weakens family ties.

Divorce

TABLE 13.4 Factors That Make Divorce More Likely

Before Marriage

Parents were divorced

Either partner is under age 21

Family is opposed

Cohabitation before marriage

Previous divorce of either partner

Large discrepancy in age,
background, interests, values
(heterogamy)

During Marriage

Divergent plans and practices
regarding childbearing and
child rearing

Financial stress, unemployment

Substance abuse

Communication difficulties

Lack of time together

Emotional or physical abuse

Relatives who do not support
the relationship

In the Culture

High divorce rate in cohort

Weak religious values

Laws that make divorce easier

Approval of remarriage

Acceptance of single
parenthood

Sources: Fine & Harvey, 2006; Gottman et al., 2002; R. A. Thompson & Wyatt, 1999; Wolfinger, 2005.

Divorce

- The consequences of divorce last for decades.
- Income, family welfare, and self esteem are lower among the formerly married than among people of the same age who are still married or who have always been single.
- Almost one out of two marriages ends in divorce in the U.S.

Generativity

- According to Erikson, after the stage of *intimacy versus isolation* comes ***generativity versus stagnation***, when adults seek to be productive in a caring way.
- Adults satisfy their need to be generative in many ways, including creativity, caregiving, and employment.

Caregiving

- Some caregiving involves meeting another person's physical needs—feeding, cleaning, and so on—but much of it has to do with fulfilling another person's psychological needs.
- **kinkeeper**
 - A caregiver who takes responsibility for maintaining communication among family members.

Caregiving

- The chief form of generativity is establishing and guiding the next generation.
- Every parent is tested and transformed by the dynamic experience of raising children.
- Just when an adult thinks he or she has mastered the art of parenting, the child advances to the next stage and the adult is required to make major adjustments.

Caregiving

- Roughly one-third of all North American adults become stepparents, adoptive parents, or foster parents.
- Many adopted or foster children remain attached to their birth parents, part of the normal human affection for familiar caregivers.
- If children are not attached to anyone (as can happen when they spend years in an institution), they are mistrustful of all adults and fearful of becoming too dependent.

Caregiving

- **Stepfamilies**

- The average age of new stepchildren is 9 years, which means that usually they are strongly connected to their biological parents.
- This helps the child but hinders the stepparents.
- Young stepchildren often get hurt, sick, lost, or disruptive, and teenage stepchildren may get pregnant, drunk, or arrested.
- Generativity, with patient, authoritative parenting, is needed.

Caregiving

- **Adoption**

- Adoptive parents have several advantages: they are legally connected to their children for life, the biological parents are usually absent, and they desperately wanted the child.
- Strong bonds can develop, especially when the children are adopted as infants.
- During adolescence, these bonds may stretch and loosen as some adoptive children become intensely rebellious.

Caregiving

- Fewer adults are available to care for elderly family members and there are more older adults.
- Siblings' relationships can be strained if a parent becomes frail and needs care.
- One sibling usually becomes the chief caregiver.

Caregiving

- **“sandwich” generation**
 - The generation of middle-aged people who are supposedly “squeezed” by the needs of the younger and older members of their families.
 - In reality, some adults do feel pressured by these obligations, but most are not burdened by them, either because they enjoy fulfilling them or because they choose to take on only some of them or none of them.

Employment

- The other major avenue for generativity.
- Adults have many psychosocial needs that employment can fulfill.
- Unemployment is associated with higher rates of child abuse, alcoholism, depression, and many other social problems.

Employment

- Even though average income has doubled, overall happiness within the United States has not risen in the past 50 years.
- **relative deprivation**
 - The idea that people compare themselves to others in their group and are satisfied if they are no worse off than the group norm.

Employment

- Work meets generativity needs by allowing people to do the following:
 - Develop and use their personal skills
 - Express their creative energy
 - Aid and advise coworkers, as a mentor or friend
 - Support the education and health of their families
 - Contribute to the community by providing goods or services

Employment

- **extrinsic rewards of work**
 - The tangible benefits, usually in the form of compensation (e.g., salary, health insurance, pension), that one receives for doing a job.
- **intrinsic rewards of work**
 - The intangible gratifications (e.g., job satisfaction, self-esteem, pride) that come from within oneself as a result of doing a job.

Employment

- **Diversity in the workplace**
 - Diversity in employees' backgrounds presents a challenge for employers as well as for workers.
 - Not everyone has the same expectations, needs, and desires.
 - **mentor**
 - A skilled and knowledgeable person who advises or guides an inexperienced person.

Employment

- One recent change in the labor market that impedes generativity is an increased frequency of hiring and firing.
- Between ages 25 and 42, the average worker in the United States has five separate employers.
- Older workers find job changes particularly difficult.

Employment

- Another recent change in employment patterns is the proliferation of work schedules beyond the traditional 9-to-5, Monday-through-Friday.
- **flextime**
 - An arrangement in which work schedules are flexible so that employees can balance personal and occupational responsibilities.

Employment

- **Telecommuting**
 - Working at home and keeping in touch with the office via computer, telephone, and fax.
- About one-third of all working couples who have young children and nonstandard schedules save on child care by having one parent at home while the other is at work.

Coping with Stress

- **stressor**
 - Any situation, event, experience, or other stimulus that causes a person to feel stressed.
- **allostatic load**
 - The total, combined burden of stress and disease that an individual must cope with.

Coping with Stress

- Some stressors, such as serious illness or unexpected job loss, are major.
- Others are minor, but ongoing hassles, such as traffic on the daily commute or the added work of raising twins.
- Physiological reactions take a toll, and past stressors make it more likely that a new stressor will have an impact.

Coping with Stress

- **organ reserve**
 - The capacity of human organs to allow the body to cope with unusual stress.
- **problem-focused coping**
 - A strategy often used by younger adults to deal with stress in which they tackle a stressful issue directly.
- **emotion-focused coping**
 - A strategy often used by older adults to deal with stress in which they change their feelings about the stressor rather than changing the stressor itself.

Coping with Stress

- Gender also affects how a person responds to stress and thus affects allostatic load.
 - Men are inclined to be problem-focused, reacting in a “fight-or-flight” manner.
 - Women are more emotion-focused, likely to “tend and befriend.”
- Virtually every study finds that **social support is crucial** in reducing allostatic load.