Chapter 18:
Social and Personality Development in Late Adulthood
IN THIS CHAPTER

• Theories of Social and Personality Development

• Individual Differences

• Social Relationships

• Career Issues in Late Life
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

18.1 What does research say about Erikson’s stage of ego integrity versus despair?
18.2 What are the main ideas of activity, disengagement, and continuity theory?
18.3 How is successful aging manifested in the lives of older adults?
18.4 How does religious coping influence physical and mental health in late adulthood?
18.5 What are the living arrangements of most elderly people in the United States and in other industrialized countries?
18.6 How do intimate partnerships contribute to development in late adulthood?
LEARNING OBJECTIVES (con’t)

18.7 What is the significance of family relationships and friendships for older adults?
18.8 What are some gender and ethnic differences in older adults’ social networks?
18.9 What factors contribute to the decision to retire?
18.10 How does retirement affect the lives of older adults?
THEORIES OF SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT
Ego Integrity versus Despair

Research Findings

• Little research on adults’ ability to achieve acceptance
• Older adults do become more reflective and philosophical.
• Older adults respond to thwarted personal goals with sadness.
Erikson’s Final Stage

**Ego Integrity versus Despair:** An individual experiences a sense of mortality that precipitates the final life crisis.

- **Manifests as life review to determine whether it was a success or a failure.**

- **Ego quality emerging from positive resolution is wisdom.**

- **Despair:** hopelessness related to too little time to make meaningful changes.

- **Ego integrity:** sense that one has lived a useful life.
Ego Integrity versus Despair

**Reminiscence**: life review foundation

- For Erikson, it is essential to achieve ego integrity and help prepare for death.
- Researchers propose a connection between reminiscence and health.
OTHER THEORIES OF LATE-LIFE PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING
Baltes and Baltes

**Activity theory**: older adults maintain higher performance by concentrating on their strengths.

- The healthiest response is to maintain a high level of activities and roles.
- Active adults report greater satisfaction, better health, and higher morale.
Disengagement theory: suggests shrinkage of life space, increasing individuality, and acceptance of these changes

Versus

Continuity theory: implies maintenance of consistency in activities and interests
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES
Successful Aging Paradigm

- Maintenance of good physical health
- Retention of cognitive abilities
- Continuing engagement in social and productive activities
- Adoption of subjective sense of life satisfaction
- Conceptualization of old age as variability rather than universal decline
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES
Staying Healthy and Able

Health Benefits

- Healthy choices made earlier in life
- Participation in rehabilitation to improve recovery and resume activities
- Positive response to health crises
Cognitive Ability Links

- Verbal intelligence and education
- Complex cognitive challenge engagement
- Cognitive adventurousness
- Avoidance of ageist self-stereotyping and use of new technologies
STOP AND THINK

What will you do when you retire?
Social Engagement

What contributes to social engagement?

- Life satisfaction is linked to frequent contact with family and friends.
- Community engagement is related to higher physical and emotional functioning.
- Helping others contributes to life satisfaction.
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Productivity

Productivity links
Volunteerism

New pursuits offer productivity options
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
Criticisms of the “Successful Aging Paradigm”

Questions to Consider

• Does this provide a new kind of ageism?
• Can people with physical limitations feel adequate?
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Life Satisfaction

- Sense of control
- Perceived adequacy of social support
- Perceived adequacy of income
- Self-ratings of health
- Comparison of problems with others
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Religious Coping

Tendency to Turn to Religious Beliefs and Institutions in Times of Stress or Trouble

- Primary means of coping for many
- Racial differences
- Gender differences
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Religious Beliefs

Religious beliefs linked to:
• Less worry
• Physical and mental health
• More successful life integration
• Income effects
• Social aspect necessary for sustained health
• Compliance with medical advice
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Social Roles

What affects roles in late adulthood?
• Physical and cognitive changes
• Ageism
• Peer prejudice
• Expectations and duties
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Living Arrangements

Preferences

- Most older adults prefer to live in private homes: “aging in place.”
- Comprehensive home-based care has strong positive effects on elders’ physical and mental health.
Older Adults’ Living Arrangements

Living arrangements of the population age 65 and over, by sex and race and Hispanic origin, 2010

with spouse  | with other relatives | with nonrelatives | alone
---|---|---|---
Total  | 72% | 74% | 55% | 79% | 62% | 42% | 45% | 23% | 39% | 36%
Non-Hispanic White alone  | 19% | 19% | 28% | 12% | 15% | 37% | 39% | 39% | 21% | 23%
Black alone  | 6% | 4% | 5% | 7% | 5% | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2%
Asian alone  | 7% | 7% | 5% | 7% | 5% | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2%
Hispanic (of any race)  | 7% | 7% | 5% | 7% | 5% | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 2%
LIVING ARRANGEMENT
Living with an Adult Child

In the U.S., 6 percent of men and 18 percent of women over 65 live in the homes of relatives, usually their adult children.

This is influenced by:

- Health
- Lower-income elders
- Child gender and marital status
- Ethnicity
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
Cultural Differences in Living Arrangements

Filial piety: to love, honor, obey, and respect parents, and to advise, teach, and care for them as they age

- In some cultures, children have a duty to care for elderly parents.
- Common feature of Asian cultures
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
Residential Options for Older Adults

- Independent living community
  - Health care assistance not provided
  - Social activities among residents offered
- Age-restricted apartment complex
- Social activities among residents offered

Diagram showing the cross-section of options with overlapping sections for each option.
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
Residential Options for Older Adults

Assisted Living Facility

- About 4 percent of older adults; average age 80
- Most require help.
- Nurses available
- Less stress and enhanced sense of wellbeing because help is nearby
LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
Residential Options for Older Adults

Skilled Nursing Facilities

- Four percent of adults live in nursing homes.
- Help with multiple ADLs
- About half have dementia
- Continuing-care retirement communities offer aging in place.
FILIAL PIETY

Filial Piety in Some Western Cultures—more like that of North Americans and Europeans

• Based on affection and attachment
• Motivated by cultural, spiritual, and religious values
• Influenced by children’s social and financial resources
• May have adverse consequences for elderly Asians
Critical Analysis

1. In what ways do Western families display filial piety other than by having elders live in their homes?

2. Beyond the influence of Western media, what kinds of internal social changes in Asian societies might have contributed to declines in filial piety?
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Partnerships

Marriages and Partnerships

- Marriages tend to be based on loyalty, familiarity, companionship, and mutual investment in the relationship.
- Similar effects in gay and lesbian relationships
DECIDING ON NURSING HOME CARE

Finding the best long-term placement for an older adult:

- Assessment of needs and resources

Criteria for Evaluation of Long-Term Care (U.S. DHHS/2007)

- Staff and equipment to meet needs
- Check for complaints.
- Research inspection documents.
- Visit several times and note resident care.
- Talk to family members of other residents.
- Ask about medical emergency policies.
- Closely monitor after admittance.
You Decide

Decide which of these two statements you most agree with and think about how you would defend your position:

1. In some cases, an older adult is probably better off living in a long-term care facility than with a family member.

2. Living with a family member is always preferable to placement in a long-term care facility.
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Contacts with Adult Children

- Eighty-six percent see at least one child at least once a week.
- Sixty-five percent live within one hour of at least one child.
- Elders both give and receive social and financial support with children.
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Partnerships

Influences
- Death of spouse
- Gender differences
- Remarriage

Overall
- Married older adults have higher life satisfaction, better health, and lower rates of institutionalization.
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
Grandchildren and Siblings

As grandchildren become adults, contact with elders declines.

- Sibling relationships may become more important with age.

*Why do these relationships change?*
OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Friendships

What role do friendships play?

- Provide a support network.
- Improve life satisfaction, self-esteem, and reduce loneliness.
- Provide companionship, laughter, shared activities.
- Provide relationships that are more reciprocal or equitable than those with family members.
OTHER RELATIONSHIPS
Gender and Ethnic Differences in Social Networks

Differences

• Gender differences in disclosure and intimacy
• Different configurations and network size between genders
• Ethnic differences
CAREER ISSUES IN LATE LIFE
Retirement

Issues and Impacts

- Timing and phases of retirement
- Reasons for retirement
- Income effects of retirement
- Poverty effects of retirement
RETIREMENT
Poverty

Links to Consider
• Ethnic group poverty rates
• Disability status
• Educational attainment
• Gender differences
Sources of Retirement Income

Where’s the Money?

- Government pensions
- Saving and other assets
- Continued employment
- Public assistance
- Other pensions
TRUE OR FALSE

It appears that retirement is the factor that predicts happiness—not satisfaction with life in earlier adulthood.
Figure 18.2  Ethnicity and Poverty among the Elderly in the United States

These data show the percentages of White, African American, Hispanic American, and Asian American males and females over the age of 65 who were classified as poor in 2011.

(Source: FIFARS, 2012.)
Increased Living Choices upon Retirement

- Amenity move
- Compensatory (kinship) migration
- Institutional migration
RETIREMENT DECISIONS
Choosing Not to Retire

Elderly adults continue to work for many reasons.

- Economic necessity
- Good health and professional commitment
- Perception of continued job satisfaction
- Opportunity to learn new job skills and remain productive