

## Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

**Programme:** Bachelor of Arts (Third Year)

**Subject:** Psychology

**Course Code:** PSD 105

**Course Title:** Developmental Psychology

**Unit:** 04

**Module Name:** Middle Adulthood: Personality throughout adulthood,  
Generativity

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### Notes

#### Stages of Adulthood

Adult stage theories have been plentiful, and they have contributed to the view that midlife brings a crisis in development.

Two prominent theories are:

- Erik Erikson's life-span view
- Daniel Levinson's seasons of a man's life

#### Erikson's Stage of Generativity Versus Stagnation

- Middle-aged adults face a significant issue—generativity versus stagnation
- *Generativity encompasses adults' desire to leave legacies of themselves* to the next generation. Through these legacies adults achieve a kind of immortality
- By contrast, *stagnation* sometimes called “self absorption” develops when individuals sense that they have done nothing for the next generation.

### **Middle-aged adults can develop generativity in a number of ways:**

- Through biological generativity, adults have offspring.
- Through parental generativity, adults nurture and guide children.
- Through work generativity, adults develop skills that are passed down to others.
- And through cultural generativity, adults create, renovate, or conserve some aspect of culture that ultimately survives.
- Adults promote and guide the next generation by parenting, teaching, leading, and doing things that benefit the community
- Generative adults;
  - commit themselves to the continuation and improvement of society through their connection to the next generation.
  - develop a positive legacy of the self and then offer it as a gift to the next generation.

### **Levinson's Seasons of a Man's Life**

- At the end of one's teens, a transition from dependence to independence should occur.
- This transition is marked by the formation of a dream—an image of the kind of life the youth wants to have, especially in terms of a career and marriage.
- Levinson sees the twenties as a *novice phase of adult development*.
- *It is a time of reasonably free experimentation* and of testing the dream in the real world.
- In early adulthood, the two major tasks to be mastered are exploring the possibilities for adult living and developing a stable life structure.
- From about the ages of 28 to 33, a man goes through a transition period in which he must face the more serious question of determining his goals.

- During the thirties, he usually focuses on family and career development.
- In the later years of this period, he enters a phase of *Becoming One's Own Man* (or *BOOM*, as Levinson calls it).

*By age 40, he has reached a stable location in his career, has outgrown his earlier, more tenuous attempts at learning to become an adult, and now must look forward to the kind of life he will lead as a middle-aged adult.*

The transition to middle adulthood lasts about five years (ages 40 to 45) and requires the adult male to come to grips with four major conflicts that have existed in his life since adolescence:

- (1) being young versus being old,
- (2) being destructive versus being constructive,
- (3) being masculine versus being feminine,
- (4) being attached to others versus being separated from them.

According to Levinson, the success of the midlife transition rests on how effectively the individual reduces the polarities and accepts each of them as an integral part of his being.

- Levinson proposed that a majority of Americans, especially men, experience a midlife crisis.
- Research, however, indicates that midlife crises are not pervasive.
- There is considerable individual variation in development during the middle adulthood years.

### **How Pervasive Are Midlife Crises?**

- Vaillant conducted a longitudinal study
- "Grant Study"—involved Harvard University men
- Concluded that only a minority of adults experience a midlife crisis

- Thus, for most people midlife is not a crisis (Pudrovskaya, 2009)
- Many cognitive skills, such as vocabulary, verbal memory, and inductive reasoning peak in midlife,
- Many individuals reach the height of their career success in midlife.
- Further, in midlife, reports of general well-being and life satisfaction tend to be high (Martin, Grunendahl, & Martin, 2001).

Adult development experts are virtually unanimous in their belief that midlife crises have been exaggerated (Brim, Ryff, & Kessler, 2004; Lachman, 2004; Pudrovskaya, 2009; Wethington, Kessler, & Pixley, 2004).

### **The Life - Events Approach**

In the early version, life events were viewed as taxing circumstances for individuals, forcing them to change their personality (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

In the contemporary life events approach, how life events influence the individual's development depends on mediating factors;

- physical health and family supports,
- the individual's adaptation to the life event,
- the life-stage context,
- the socio historical context

Drawbacks of the life-events approach:

- places too much emphasis on change, not adequately recognizing the stability
- it may not be life's major events that are the primary sources of stress, but our daily experiences

## The Empty Nest and Its Refilling

- An important event in a family is the launching of a child into adult life.
- Parents face new adjustments as a result of the child's absence.
- Parents who live vicariously through their children might experience the **empty nest syndrome**,
- which includes a decline in marital satisfaction after children leave the home.

For most parents, however, marital satisfaction does not decline after children have left home but rather increases (Fingerman & Baker, 2006).

- Marital partners have time to pursue career interests and more time for each other.
- In today's uncertain economic climate, the refilling of the empty nest is becoming a common occurrence as adult children return home after several years.
- The middle generation has always provided support for the younger generation, even after the nest is bare.
- Through loans and monetary gifts for education, and through emotional support, the middle generation has helped the younger generation.

However, as with most family living arrangements, there are both pluses and minuses when adult children return to live at home.

- Privacy issues
- Adjustment issues