Chapter 6: Early Adulthood

Module 6.1
Physical Development in Early Adulthood

Physical Development and the Senses
- Physical development and maturation complete
- Peak of physical capabilities
- Brain wave patterns show more mature patterns
- Senses are peak
- Most professional athletes at peak during early adulthood

Motor Functioning, Fitness, and Health: Staying Well

Physical Fitness
- Superior physical capabilities require exercise and diet
- No more than 10% Americans exercise enough to keep themselves in good physical shape
- Less than 20% participate in moderate exercise on regular basis

Benefits of Exercise
- Cardiovascular fitness increase
- Lung capacity increases, raising endurance
- Stronger muscles and greater flexibility
- Greater range of movement
- More elasticity in muscles, tendons, and ligaments
- Reduction in osteoporosis
- Optimization of immune response
- Decreased stress level
- Increased sense of control over their bodies and feeling of accomplishment …

...AND LOTS MORE!
One of the Best Pay-Offs: Longevity

Greater fitness level = lower the death rate

Health

- Leading causes of death among young adults (ages 25-34) are:
  - Accidents
  - AIDS
  - Cancer
  - Heart disease
  - Suicide
  - Murder
  (there are noteworthy gender and SES differences)

Secondary Aging

- Lifestyle decisions, including the use—or abuse—of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs or engaging in unprotected sex, can hasten secondary aging
- This can also increase a young adult’s risk of dying

Violence and Death: Tracking Murder

Eating, Nutrition, and Obesity

Young adults will put on weight if they do not eat sensibly.
- 31% of the adult population is classified as overweight.
- 7% of men and 10% of women between the ages of 20 and 25 are obese.
- The rate of obesity in the U.S. is increasing.
  - Genetic factors may lead people to become obese.
  - Environmental and social factors also produce obesity.
  - Obese people may have a higher WEIGHT SET POINT, the particular level the body strives to maintain.
  - Most people who diet eventually gain back the weight

Age and Obesity
Stress and Coping in Early Adulthood

STRESS: Response to events that threaten or challenge an individual

- Lives are filled with events and circumstances known as stressors, that cause threats to well-being.
- Stressors can be both pleasant events and unpleasant events (weddings, winning awards, exams, arguments).
- Long-term, continuous exposure to stressors may result in reduction of body's ability to deal with stress.
  - People become more susceptible to diseases as their ability to fight off germs declines.

Lazarus and Folkman

- People move through series of stages that determine whether or not they will experience stress
  - PRIMARY APPRAISAL is assessment of an event to determine whether its implications are positive, negative, or neutral.
  - SECONDARY APPRAISAL is assessment of whether one's coping abilities and resources are adequate to overcome the harm, threat, or challenge posed by potential stressor.

Predicting Stressful Event

(Shelly Taylor, 1991)

- Negative emotions are more likely to produce stress
- Uncontrollable or unpredictable situations are more likely to produce stress
- Ambiguous and confusing situations produce more stress
- Simultaneous tasks demands are more likely to cause stress
  (see: Stress Quiz in text (Table 13.1))

Styles of Coping

- Problem-focused coping is attempt to manage a stressful problem or situation by directly changing situation to make it less stressful.
- Emotion-focused coping involves conscious regulation of emotion.
- Coping is also aided by presence of social support, assistance and comfort supplied by others.
- Defense coping involves unconscious strategies that distort or deny true nature of the situation.

Hardiness, Resilience, and Coping

- Hardiness is a personality characteristic associated with lower rate of stress-related illness
- Resilience is ability to withstand, overcome, and actually thrive following profound adversity

The Informed Consumer of Development

Coping with Stress: General Guidelines

- Seek control over the situation producing the stress
- Redefine “threat” as “challenge”
- Find social support
- Use relaxation techniques
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Module 6.2
Cognitive Development in Early Adulthood

Intellectual Growth in Early Adulthood

Physical development slows down during early adulthood, but does cognitive?

What did Piaget propose?
– Piaget and others argued that by the time the teen years were finished, thinking stabilized.
– BUT increasing evidence suggests that this part of Piaget’s theory was incorrect!

Postformal Thought

Giesela Labouvie-Vief

suggests that nature of thinking changes qualitatively during early adulthood.

Adults exhibit POSTFORMAL THOUGHT, thinking that goes beyond Piaget’s formal operations.

Adult predicaments are sometimes solved by relativistic thinking rather than pure logic

Postformal thought acknowledges that world sometimes lacks purely right and wrong solutions so adults must draw upon prior experiences to solve problems

K. Warner Schaie

...suggests that adults’ thinking follows set pattern of stages.
– The ACQUISITIVE STAGE, which encompasses all of childhood and adolescence, in which main developmental task is to acquire information.
– The ACHIEVING STAGE is point reached by young adults in which intelligence is applied to specific situations involving attainment of long-term goals regarding careers, family, and societal contributions.
– The RESPONSIBLE STAGE is stage where the major concerns of middle-aged adults relate to their personal situations, including protecting and nourishing their spouses, families, and careers.
– The EXECUTIVE STAGE is period in middle adulthood when people take broader perspective than earlier, including concerns about world.
– The REINTEGRATIVE STAGE is period of late adulthood during which the focus is on tasks that have personal meaning.

How Information Is Used: Schaie’s Stages

Intelligence: What Matters in Early Adulthood?

• Sternberg - TRIARCHIC THEORY OF INTELLIGENCE
  • Intelligence is made up of three major components:
    • Componential aspects
    • Experiential components
    • Contextual factors
Expanding on Sternberg’s Theory…

- Psychologist Seymour Epstein
  - Constructive thinking
  - Form of practical intelligence
  - Underlies success in such areas as social relationships and physical and emotional health

Creativity: Novel Thought in Early Adulthood

- Early adulthood
  - Peak of creativity
  - Many of professional problems are novel
  - Willing to take risks

Life Events and Cognitive Development

- Major life events may lead to cognitive growth
  - Think about the world in novel, more complex, sophisticated, and often less rigid ways
  - Apply postformal thought (Labouvie-Vief)

COLLEGE: PURSUITING HIGHER EDUCATION

Although you may believe that college attendance is commonplace, this is not case at all: Nationwide, high school graduates who enter college are actually in minority.

College: Pursuing Higher Education

College is period of developmental growth that encompasses mastery not just of particular bodies of knowledge, but of ways of understanding world.

- Nationwide, a minority of high school graduates enter college
- Only about 40% of those who start graduate from college in 4 years
- Influenced by race and gender variables

Who goes to college?

- 40% of college students today are 25 years of age or older
- Average age of a community college student is 31
- College degree is becoming increasingly important in obtaining and keeping job
- Absolute number of minority students enrolled in college has increased BUT overall proportion of minority population has decreased over past decade
Consequences

Proportion of students who enter college but ultimately never graduate is substantial!

Depression in College Students

- Surveys find that almost half of college students report having at least one significant psychological issue.
- Other research finds that more than 40 percent of students who visited a college counseling center, reported being depressed.
- These figures include only those students who sought help from the counseling center and not those that did not seek treatment.
- Figures are not representative of the entire college population.

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Module 6.3 Social and Personality Development in Early Adulthood

A variety of “tasks”…

SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY ADULTHOOD
Seeking Intimacy: Erikson’s View of Young Adulthood

**INTIMACY-VERSUS-ISOLATION STAGE**

Intimacy = Close, intimate relationship with others
Isolation = Feelings of loneliness and fearful of relationships

Falling in Love

- **STIMULUS-VALUE-ROLE THEORY (Murstein)**, says that relationships proceed in a fixed order of three stages:
  - **Stimulus stage** — relationships built on superficial, physical characteristics
  - **Value stage** — between second and seventh encounter, relationship characterized by increasing similarity of values and beliefs.
  - **Role stage** — relationship built on specific roles played by participants.

Passionate and Companionate Love:

- **Passionate (Romantic Love)** — state of powerful absorption in someone.
- **Companionate Love** — strong affection we have for those with whom our lives are deeply involved.

Sternberg’s Triangular Theory: Three Faces of Love

- Robert Sternberg
  - Intimacy
  - Passion
  - Decision/Commitment

Seeking a Spouse: Is Love All That Matters?

- U.S. — love as a major factor
- In some other cultures (e.g., Pakistan, India), love may be secondary consideration
- What else matters?
  - Emotional maturity, health, similar education, chastity are among the top 18 (Buss, 1990).
  - U.S.—love and mutual attraction.
  - China—men: good health; women: emotional stability & maturity.

(See Table 14.3 in the textbook)
Attachment Styles and Romantic Relationships

- Infant attachment style is reflected in adult romantic relationships (Shaver)
  - Secure
    - Happy and confident about future of their relationships (over 50%)
  - Avoidant
    - Less invested, higher break-up rates, often feel lonely (25%)
  - Anxious-ambivalent
    - Overly invested, repeated break-ups with same partner, low self-esteem (20%)

- Infant style related to nature of care adults give to their romantic partners when they need assistance.
- Secure adults are more sensitive and supportive.
- Anxious adults are more compulsive, intrusive.

- People have relationship difficulties should look back to infant styles for insight into how to be more adaptive in adult relationships.

Developmental Diversity

Gay and Lesbian Relationships: Men with Men and Women with Women

- Research findings suggest that gay and lesbian relationships are quite similar to relationships between heterosexuals
- Most gays and lesbians seek loving, long-term, and meaningful relationships that differ little qualitatively from those desired by heterosexuals

What produced the decline in the US fertility rate?

- Today, the rate is at 2.1 children per woman
- This is less than replacement level (i.e., number of children that one generation must produce to be able to replenish its numbers).
- In some underdeveloped countries, fertility rate is as high as 6.9.
- Women between the ages of 30 and 34 are only ones whose rate of births has actually increased over earlier decades.
  - Availability of more reliable birth control methods
  - Increasing numbers of working outside the home
  - Choosing to have children later
  - Cost of raising and educating children
  - Fear of not being good or accessible parent

Dual-Earner Couples

- Working Parent Statistics and Distribution of Chores

Gay and Lesbian Parents

- About 20% of gay men and lesbian women are parents
  - No difference in psychological adjustment from children raised in heterosexual homes
  - Specialization of roles develop
- For children, no differences in terms of eventual adjustment from those raised in heterosexual households

Majority of American Women Are Living Without Spouse

- U.S. census data from 2005 revealed that, for the first time, a majority of women are living without a spouse in the United States.
  - Of 117 million women over the age of 15, 63 million are married.
  - But more than 5 million of those married women are either legally separated or are living apart from their husbands for various reasons, leaving a minority of adult American women (49%) living with a spouse.
- Marriage rate for American women varies by ethnicity, ranging from a low of about 30% for African American women to a high of more than 60% for Asian Women. Hispanic women (49%) and white women (55%) fall in the middle.
- Why?
  - Remaining single between marriages.
  - More options for women, including careers and cohabitation.
  - Need for emotional and financial support of marriage decreasing.
Something to ponder…

Why do you think that women are less inclined to remarry after a divorce than men are?

WORK: CHOOSING AND EMBARKING ON A CAREER

Identity During Young Adulthood: Role of Work

Vaillant: Career consolidation
- General pattern of psychological development as young adults center on careers
- Career concerns supplant focus on intimacy
- Criticisms
  - Highly restricted sample limits Generalizability
  - Dated findings questions in view of shifts in attitudes toward importance of work

The Gender-Wage Gap

- More women are working outside the home than ever before despite status and pay that are often lower than men’s.
- Between 1950 and 2003, the percent of the female population (aged 16 and over) in the U.S. labor force increased from around 35 percent to over 60 percent, and women today make up around 55 percent of the labor force, a figure comparable to their presence in the general population.
- Almost all women expect to earn a living, and almost all do at some point in their lives. In about one-half of U.S. households, women earn about as much as their husbands.