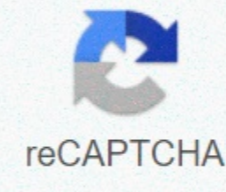




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Generativity versus stagnation (middle adulthood)

Learning Outcomes Describe Erikson's Stage generativity vs. Stagnation Evaluate Levinson's Concept of Midlife Crisis Explore Key Theories About Aging, Including Socio-Emotional Selectivity Theory (SSC) and Choice, Optimization and Compensation (SOC) What Do You Think Is the Happiest Stage of Life? And the saddest stages? Perhaps surprisingly, Blanchflower & Oswald (2008) found that reported levels of unhappiness and depressive symptoms peaked in the early 50s for men in the U.S., and interestingly, the late 30s for women. In Western Europe, minimal happiness is reported around the mid 40s for both men and women, although with some significant national disparities. Stone, Schneider and Brad (2017) have reported a decline in perceived stress in U.S. men since the early 1950s. There is now a view that older people (50+) may be happier than younger people, despite some cognitive and functional loss. It is often referred to as the paradox of aging. Positive attitudes towards continuing cognitive and behavioural activities, interpersonal engagement and their vitalising effect on human neuronal plasticity can lead not only to further life, but also to an extension of the period of self-contentment and continued joint involvement. Erikson's theory As you already know, Erikson's theory is based on an idea called epigenesis, which means that development is progressive and that each individual has to go through eight different stages of life — all influenced by context and environment. Each stage forms the basis for the next stage and any transition to the next stage is marked by a crisis that must be resolved. The sense of self, every season, has been wrestled, from and into this conflict. Age 40-65 is no different. The individual is still driven to engage productively, but childcare and generational income take on less functional significance. Where will an individual derive their sense of self and self-worth? Generativity versus stagnation is Erikson's characterization of the underlying conflict of adulthood. It is the seventh clash of his famous 8 seasons man (1950) and negotiations about this conflict leads to the basis of care. Generativity is primarily interested in creating and leading the next generation (Erikson, 1950 p. 267). Generativity is an interest in generalized by others (like those close to the individual) and occurs when a person can shift their energy to care and mentor the next generation. One obvious motive for this generative thinking might be parenting, but others have suggested intimations of mortality alone. John Kotre (1984) thesayed that generosity was a selfish act, adding that his basic task was to survive myself. He saw generosity as a form of investment. Commitment in kind can be taken in many ways, and it is probably correct to say that most modern treatments of generativity are treated as a collection of aspects—involving creativity, productivity, commitment, interpersonal care, and so on. On the other side of generativity is stagnation. It is a feeling of lethargy and a lack of enthusiasm and involvement in both individual and communal matters. It can also take an underdeveloped sense of self, or some form of exaggerated narcissism. Erikson sometimes uses the word rejection when referring to the severe stagnation of Stage-Crisis View and the midlife crisis of 1977. Daniel Levinson published a very influential article that would be essential in creating the idea of a deep crisis that lies at the heart of middle adulthood. The concept of a midlife crisis is so pervasive that more than 90% of Americans are familiar with the term, even though those who actually report experiencing such a crisis are significantly lower (Wethington, 2000). Levinson based his findings on the midlife crisis on biographical interviews with a limited sample of 40 men (no women), and an entirely American sample for it. Despite these severe methodological limitations, its findings have proved hugely influential. Levinson (1986) identified five main stages or seasons of a person's life as follows: Preddulthood: Age 0-22 (with 17 to 22 is early adult transition years) Early adulthood: Age 17-45 (with 40 - 1999) 45 is midlife transition years) Middle adulthood: Age 40-65 (with 60-65 is late adult transition years) Late adulthood: Age 60-85 Late late adulthood: Age 85 + Figure 1. Levinson says we're going through a midlife crisis. While most people have heard of the midlife crisis, and often associate it with sports cars, joining a band, or exploring new relationships, there is very little support for the theory as it was designed by Levinson. Levinson's theory is known as a view of a phase crisis. It claimed that each stage overlaps, consisting of two distinct phases — the stable phase and the transitional phase to the next period. The second phase may involve questioning and change, and Levinson believed that 40-45 was a period of profound change that could only culminate in a rethink, or perhaps confirmation, of goals, commitments and previous election-time for evaluating and recalibrating what was important in life. Crucially, Levinson would have argued that a much wider range of factors, which include work and family in particular, would influence this assessment — what he achieved, what he did not have; what he considered important, but brought only limited satisfaction. In 1996, two years after his death, a study he conducted with his co-author and wife, Judy Levinson, was published for the period of life experienced by women. Again was a small-scale study, with 45 women who were professionals/business women, academics and homemakers, in equal proportions. The changing place of women in society was, according to Levinson, a profound moment in the social development of the human species, but it led to a fundamental polarity in the way women formed and understood their social identity. Levinson called it a dream. For men, the dream was created between the ages of 22-28, and largely centered on work assignments and professional ambitions. Levinson understood the woman's dream as fundamentally divided between this work-centered orientation, and the desire/imperative of marriage/family; polarity that heralds new opportunities, and underlying anxiety. Levinson found that the men and women he interviewed sometimes had trouble reconciled the dream they held about the future with the reality they were currently having. What do I really get from my wife, children, friends, work, community and myself? asks a man (Levinson, 1978, p. 192). Middle-aged transition tasks include: early adulthood; reassessment of life at present and, if necessary, adjustment; polarity or contradictions in those senses to themselves. Perhaps early adulthood ends when a person is already looking for adult status, but feels like a full-fledged adult in the eyes of others. This authorisation can lead to different decisions in life — decisions that are fulfilled instead of social acceptance. While people in their 20s can emphasize how old they are (gain respect, be seen as experienced), by the time people reach their 40s, they tend to emphasize how young they are (a few 40 years cut each other for being so young: Are you only 43? I'm 48!). This new perspective on time brings a new sense of urgency to life. A person focuses more on the present than on the future or the past. A person grows impatient at being in the waiting room of life, snozing to do things they have always wanted to do. If it ever happens, it's better it happened now. The previous focus on the future gives way to an emphasis on the present. Neugarten (1968) notes that in middle age people no longer think about their lives in terms of how long they live. Rather, life is thought of in terms of how many years remain. If an adult is not satisfied in middle age, there is a new sense of urgency to start making changes now. Changes may include ending a relationship or changing a partner's expectations. These adaptations are easier to change than separately (Levinson, 1978). Middle age is a period of transition in which one holds older images independently while forming new ideas about themselves of the future. Greater awareness of ageing is accompanied by feelings and the damage that can be done before in relationships haunts new dreams to contribute to the well-being of others. These polarities are quieter struggles that continue after the external signs of crisis have gone. Levinson characterized middle age as a time of developmental crisis. However, like any body of work, it has been the subject of criticism. Firstly, the sample size of the populations on which he based his primary findings is too small. What right do we generally generally general the findings of interviews with 40 men and 45 women, as all thoughtful and well-executed? Secondly, Chiriboga (1989) could not find any substantial evidence of a midlife crisis, and it could be argued that this, and other failed replication attempts, indicate a cohort effect. Levinson's findings suggested a common historical and cultural position rather than the inter-cultural universal experienced by most individuals, or even most individuals. Middle age is a time of reevaluation and change that can escape exact determination in time and geographic space, but people emerge from it, and seem to enjoy a period of satisfaction, reconciliation and acceptance of themselves. This video explains the research and controversy surrounding the concept of midlife crisis. Can you see the transcript for Does every 'midlife crisis'? here (opens in a new window). Socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST) It is imper essential for human beings to know that their lives are limited. As people move through life, goals and values tend to shift. What we consider to be priorities, objectives and ambitions is subject to renegotiation. Attachments to others, present and future, are no different. Time is not an unlimited good, as the child perceives it under normal social circumstances: It is a very valuable commodity that requires careful consideration when it comes to investing resources. In academic literature, it became known as mortality. Mortality salience assumptions that a reminder of death or finitude (either conscious or subconscious) fills us with fear. We try to deny its reality, but awareness of the growing proximity of death can have a powerful impact on human judgment and behavior. This has become a very important concept in contemporary social science. It was with this understanding that Laura Carstensen developed the theory of socio-tenancy selectivity, or SST. The theory argues that as time horizons shrink, as they usually do with age, people become more selective, investing more resources in emotionally meaningful goals and activities. According to the theory, motivational shifts also affect cognitive processing. Aging is associated with a relative preference for positive over negative information. This selective narrowing of social interaction maximises positive emotional and minimizes emotional risks as individuals age. They systematically improve their social networks so that the social

partners available meet their emotional needs. The French philosopher Sartre noted that hell is other people. An adaptive way of maintaining a positive impact could be to reduce contact with those we know, negatively affect us, and avoid those who might. SST is a theory that emphasizes time perspective rather than chronological age. When people see their future as open, they tend to focus on future-oriented development or knowledge-related goals. When they feel that time is running out, and the opportunity to reap rewards from future goals' goals is diminishing, their focus tends to shift toward present-oriented and emotion or pleasure-related goals. Research on this theory often compares age groups (e.g. young adulthood vs. old adulthood), but a shift in goal priorities is a gradual process that begins in early adulthood. Importantly, the theory argues that the cause of these target shifts is not age itself, i.e. the passage of time itself, but rather a shift in the time outlook associated with age. The theory also focuses on the types of goals that individuals are motivated to achieve. Knowledge-related objectives are focused on knowledge acquisition, career planning, the development of new social relationships and other efforts that will pay off in the future. Emotion-related goals are focused on emotion regulation, the pursuit of emotionally gratifying interactions with social partners, and other pursuits whose benefits can be realized in the present. This shift in emphasis, from long-term goals to short-term emotional satisfaction, may help explain the previously mentioned paradox of aging. This means that despite noticeable physiological declines, and some notable self-reports of reduced life-satisfaction around this time, post-50 appears to be a significant increase in reported subjective well-being. SST is not an advocate of social isolation that is harmful to human health, but shows that increased selectivity in interpersonal relationships, rather than abstinence, leads to a more positive impact. Perhaps the crisis of middle age and recovery may be a more apt description of the 40-65 life span. Watch Laura Carstensen in this TED talk to explain how happiness actually increases with age. You can see the transcript for Older people are happier - Laura Carstensen here (opens in a new window). Figure 2. Italian footballer Paulo Maldini in 2008, just a year before he retired at the age of 41. During his 25-year career he has appeared in an incredible eight Champions League finals. Defensive players like Maldini tend to have longer careers because of their experience to compensate for the decline in pace, while offensive players are generally sought after for their agility and speed. Optimization, Compensation (SOC) Another look at aging has been identified by German developmental psychologists Paul and Margret Baltes. Their text Successful Aging (1990) marked a seismic shift in the movement of social science research into aging from a largely deficit-based perspective to a more recent understanding based on a holistic view of the life-course itself. The former tended to focus solely on what was lost during the aging process, rather than seeing it as a balance between these losses and gains in areas such as regulating emotion, experience and wisdom. The Baltes model of successful ageing argues that throughout their lifetime people face different opportunities or challenges, such as jobs, educational opportunities and diseases. According to the SOC model, a person can choose specific goals or experiences, or circumstances may be imposed on them. Either way, the selection process involves moving or adjusting goals based on choice or circumstances in response to those circumstances. A change of direction can occur at a subconscious level. This model emphasises that setting targets and directing efforts towards a specific purpose is beneficial for healthy ageing. Optimization is about making the best use of the resources we have in achieving our goals. Compensation, as the name suggests, is about using alternative strategies to achieve these objectives. Selection, optimization and compensation processes can be found throughout their lifetime. As we progress through the years, we select areas in which we place resources, hoping that this choice will optimize the resources that we have and compensate for any errors resulting from physiological or cognitive changes. Previous accounts of ageing have underestimated the extent to which the options we have chosen have been eliminated, not reduced, or even just changed. As we select the areas in which to invest, there is always an opportunity cost. We are masters of our own destiny, and our own individual orientation on SOC processes will dictate successful aging. Rather than seeing aging as a process of gradual disconnection from the social and communal roles performed by the group, Baltes argued that successful aging was a matter of sustained individual engagement, along with a belief in individual self-efficacy and mastery. The SOC model covers a number of functional areas – motivation, emotion and cognition. We could become more adept at playing SOC games as time moves on as we work to compensate and adapt to changing abilities throughout our lifetime. For example, a footballer at 35 may no longer have the vascular and muscular condition they had at 20, but her reading of the game could offset that decline. She may be a better player than she was at 20, even with fewer physical resources in a game that seemingly Their. The work of Paul and Margaret Baltes was very influential in creating a very broad development perspective that would come together around the central idea of resilience. Generativity: the ability to look beyond self-interest and motivate yourself to care for, and contribute to the well-being of the next generation theory of socio-helpful selectivity: a theory associated with developmentalist Laura Carstensen, who posits a shift at this time in life course, caused by a shift in time frame. The time we have left in life is now shorter than the time spent before. Consciously, or sub-consciously, it affects a greater reluctance to suffer fools happy or endure unsatisfactory situations at work or elsewhere. The emotional regulation, and satisfaction it provides, becomes more important, and requires fulfillment in the current selection, optimization, compensation (SOC) theory: a theory that argues that the declines experienced at this time are not easy or absolute losses. Or rather, they don't have to be. Baltes argues that life is a series of adjustments and that choosing fewer goals, optimizing our personal and social resources to achieve them, and then compensating for any loss of experience for life, should mitigate those losses. They don't completely negate, but a positive attitude of engagement can, and does, lead to a successful aging phase-crisis view: a theory associated with Levinson (and Erikson before) that each life phase is characterized by a fundamental conflict(s) that must be resolved before moving on to the next. Each stage has its challenges that are resolved, which encourages a transition period that sets the stage for further stagnation: a sense of disconnection from the wider society experience of those 40-65 who fail to develop the attitude of care associated with the generativity of Contribute! Did you have an idea to improve this content? We'd like you to get in. Improve this page Learn more

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