Middle Adulthood

Psychosocial Development
Personality

- Personality provides major source of continuity, providing coherence and identity, allowing people to know themselves and others to know them.

- Stable Traits: The Big Five
  - Neuroticism: anxious, moody, self-punishing, critical
  - Extroversion: outgoing, assertive, active
  - Openness: imaginative, curious, artistic, open
  - Agreeableness: kind, helpful, generous
  - Conscientiousness: organized, deliberate, conforming

Individual ranking of either low or high in each of the big five is determined by the interaction of genes, culture, and early-childhood experiences.
Developmental Changes in Personality

- Trend is to become less neurotic and open and more agreeable and conscientious

- Ecological Niche: the particular lifestyle and social context that adults settle into that are compatible with their personality needs and interests
  - Includes person’s vocation, neighborhood, mate, and routines

How does personality shape lives?
Developmental Changes in Personality

- Most traits in midlife are quite stable

- Some changes are evident
  - Warmth toward others and confidence about one’s self are influenced by friendships and jobs, so are modified as context changes
  - If life circumstances are dramatically altered, people sometimes react differently, or in ways similar to old personality patterns.
  - MIDUS: agreeableness and conscientiousness increase with age, openness and neuroticism decrease, and extroversion remains stable
Gender Convergence

- Gender restrictions loosen during middle age, allowing both men and women to explore feelings and behaviors previously reserved for the other sex

- Gender convergence: tendency for men and women to become more similar thru middle adulthood

- Biological Explanation: sex hormones may have something to do with male and female tendency

- Changing life situations Explanation

- Psychoanalytic Explanation: because of social pressure we “belong” to our own gender

- Historical Change: times have changed
Mid-Life Crisis

- A period of unusual anxiety, radical reexamination, and sudden transformation has more to do with developmental history than chronological change.
- Research not supportive of crisis, but positive changes (especially in women).
- Attention due to biological clock and aging.
Family Relationships in Midlife

- **Social convoy**: group of people who form relationships with an individual through which they guide and socialize that person as he or she moves through life.

- **Partners**: 70% of middle age adults in US have a spouse.

- For some, divorced, widowed, never-married middle-aged adults, intimacy is achieved through cohabitation.

- In 2000, 5% of 35-65 yo lived with an unrelated adult of the other sex.

- 25% unmarried middle-aged adults find intimacy in a romantic relationship that does not include sharing a household.
Marital Happiness

- Marriage linked to happiness, health, wealth, and other advantages
- Trend in marriage: happiness at first (honeymoon period), then a dip for a decade or so, and then a gradual rise over the years of middle adulthood
- Presence of children reduces marital satisfaction when children are young (especially for women)
- Less marital violence
- Less stress
- Higher Income
- More time together

With every year of marriage, divorce becomes less likely
Some stay married for wrong reasons, financial and fear of loneliness
Most stay married because of love, trust, and joy
Trends

• Divorce rate in US, high at 50%, but has not increased in the last 20 years and has begun to decline

• Fewer people are getting married

• Couples more likely to share domestic tasks and in finances

• Divorce: reduces income and weakens family ties

• 46% if all US marriages are remarriages for at least one if the spouses, average age of remarriage (35)

• Most divorced men, remarry within 5 years of being divorced

• Many divorced women, do not remarry especially if they have custody of the children

• Second Marriages end in divorce more often than first marriages
Other Relatives

• Household: group of people who live together in one dwelling

• Increase in smaller households

• No decrease in family ties

• Middle Aged: most capable of providing family support

• Kin keeper: person who takes on primary responsibility for celebrating family achievements, gathering the family together, and keeping in touch with family members who do not live close
Familism

- The idea that family members should support one another because family unity is more important than individual freedom and success.

- Strong family ties can be supportive or destructive.

- Relationships between parents and their children improve with age:
  - Middle Aged adults caring for their aging parents
  - Sibling relationships: become closer into middle adulthood
  - Adult children: most maintain generally close relationships with their children
    - Study: 75% communicated with their children several times per month
Grandparents

- Grandparenthood begins in middle age

- Grandparent-grandchild relationship is closer if the grandchild is young, parent is first sibling to have children, and grandparent is not too young or too old

- Remote: emotionally distant but esteemed elders
- Involved: actively participate in daily lives
- Companionate: relationship is characterized by friendship and independence and visits occur by grandparents choice

Surrogate Parents: grandparents who take over raising their grandchildren as a result of their adult children’s extreme social problems
Work in Middle Adulthood

• In US, 90% of all middle-aged men and 75% of all middle-aged women are employed

• Intrinsic rewards of work increase with age, job satisfaction, relationships with co-workers, sense of participation in meaningful work and extrinsic rewards (salary and benefits) become less crucial
Balancing work and family

- Young adults are more willing to work overtime, take irregular shifts, and travel for promotion and job security
- Adjusting to work stress
- Finding satisfaction in other areas of life
- Scaling back: balancing the demands of work and family life, sometimes reducing work commitments
Retirement

• Retirement planning begins in the 50’s and actual retirement starts before age 65.

• Most retire by age 70.