

Psychosocial Development: Late Adulthood

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Psychosocial Development: Late Adulthood

Successful Aging – the maintenance of psychological adjustment and well-being across the full lifespan.

- If not cognitively impaired, most fare quite well
- Though elderly often are less satisfied with their health than are younger adults, they usually are **MORE** satisfied with most other areas of their lives.
- But, much to adjust to (e.g., death of loved ones, declining health, economic hardship), for which elderly call upon personal skills and styles honed over a lifetime

Theories

- Erikson: **Integrity vs. Despair**: the eighth and final stage -- older adults seek to integrate their unique experience with their vision of community
 - **Integrity**: pride and contentment with past and present life. Satisfaction with the course one's life has taken.
 - Takes the 'sting' out of death
 - **Despair**: the life one has lived is not acceptable as the only one that could have been lived, and time is too short to correct it.
 - Leads to a fear of death

In general, the more positively a person feels about him- or herself, the less depression or despair is felt

- Dynamic and Stratification theories – **dynamic** emphasize change and readjustment; stratification focus on limitations of aging caused by social forces.
 - *Continuity theory*—each person experiences changes of late adulthood and behaves towards others in much the same way as he or she did earlier in life
 - *Activity Theory*—suggests that maintenance of social, physical and intellectual activity contributes to successful aging (i.e., active aging is healthy aging)
 - *Disengagement Theory*—suggests that reduction of social involvement is normal, and occurs as a result of a mutual process between the individual and society

Research shows that reality of older people's lives does not correspond exactly with either disengagement or activity theories

The Social Convoy

- *Social Convoy*—collectively, the family members, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers who move through life with an individual
 - We travel our life in the company of others
 - Special bonds formed over lifetime help in good times and bad
 - People who were part of a person's past help him or her to maintain sense of identity

Long-Term Marriages

- Spouse buffers many problems of old age
- Married elders generally are
 - healthier
 - wealthier
 - happier
- Nature of long-lasting relationships
 - tends to get better over time
 - sharing of accumulated experiences
 - affectionate acceptance of each other's frailties with feelings of affection
 - passionate love still exists

■ Losing a Spouse

- ❑ Divorce is rare in late adulthood
- ❑ Widowhood is common
- ❑ Death of a spouse eventually occurs for half of all older married people
- ❑ Adjustment to loss varies depending on sex of surviving partner
- ❑ Many older widows come to enjoy their independence

Widowhood

- ❑ 4 x as many widows as widowers
- ❑ Because women take better care of their health, they live longer than men
- ❑ Death can mean loss of close friend, social circle, income, and status
- ❑ Widows do not usually seek another husband

Widowers

- ❑ Living without a spouse is more difficult for men
- ❑ Widowers often lack social support (over course of marriage, tend to become increasingly dependent on wives for social support of all kinds)
- ❑ After death of spouse, more likely to be physically ill than widows or married people of their age
- ❑ Many widowers prefer not to remarry, but with favorable gender ratio and loneliness, often find themselves more likely to remarry than widows