

chapter 13

Adult Life and Theories of Aging

KEY TERMS

activity theory of

aging

despair

generativity

gerotranscendence

integrity

midlife transition

non-event

orderly change model

phases

psychological clock

seasons

social construction theory

stability template model

stagnation

theory of random change

wisdom

CHAPTER EXPECTATIONS

While reading this chapter, you will:

- describe the development of individuals at different stages of life, drawing on a variety of developmental theories
- analyze several viewpoints on similarities and differences in male and female development and on the impact of those differences on the roles individuals play
- evaluate emerging research and theories explaining the developmental tasks of individuals at various stages of life
- summarize current research on factors influencing satisfaction within enduring couple relationships
- analyze the division of responsibility for childrearing and socialization, and the interaction of caregivers
- identify and respond to the theoretical viewpoints, thesis, and supporting arguments of materials found in a variety of secondary sources

RESEARCH SKILLS

- conducting research using oral histories



Childhood and early adulthood is Act I in life. There are several acts in the drama of life yet to be presented before the final curtain.

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the patterns of individual development in later adulthood. Is there a midlife crisis? Are people happily married? What is the role of seniors in Canada? Using a psychological framework, the challenges of the later stages of life will be investigated using various developmental theories. The roles of occupational choices, marriage, and family life in the achievement of generativity will be explored. The changing patterns of satisfaction in marriage will be explored in light of the alterations in marriage relationships. Finally, the concept of old age as the completion of a life story will be examined from the perspective of current studies in gerontology.

The Transitional Years

Leaving home, forming enduring love relationships, and perhaps having children are important rites of passage that signify increasing maturity for individuals in most societies. Although the timing of these events may vary, they are usually assumed to occur in the first half of life, and they set the stage for mature adult life. There has been a tendency in the twentieth century to view aging in a negative light (Borysenko, 1996, p. 2):

All human beings go through cycles in their lives, progressing from infant to child to adolescent to adult. While each stage builds upon previous biology and experience, evolving from one stage to the next sometimes requires a dying to what we have been in order to complete our metamorphosis. While the infant does not lament becoming the toddler, or the child mourn the approach of adolescence, women have been portrayed as lamenting our continued maturation into midlife and older adulthood.

However, middle age, the years from 35 to 65, and the aging years, after 65, are stages of growth and development. Because of the variations in the timing of the normative events of life, middle-aged adults are a more diverse group than people at other ages. Some are parents of young children, some are making the transition from being parents of young children to being parents of adult children, and some are becoming grandparents. In the workplace, some are at the peak of their careers, while others are preparing for early retirement. Women may be at the beginning of a career when re-entering the workforce after their childbearing years. The later years are transitional years, as men and women's children leave home, as they leave the workplace, and as they embark on the final stage of their lives (Ward, 1994). This chapter will examine the patterns of aging in the second half of life.

"We grow neither better nor worse as we get older, but more like ourselves."

—May Lamberton Becker

Early Ideas on the Life Cycle

The concept of predictable stages in life is not new. Descriptions of the stages of life have been recorded in such diverse literature as the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras; in the scriptures of Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and Christians; in the plays of Shakespeare; and in the writings of twentieth-century psychologists (Borysenko, 1996).

The ancient Chinese philosophy described seven-year stages of life for men and women that were believed to parallel the workings of the universe. Although the stages of a woman's life followed predictable biological changes, they set a

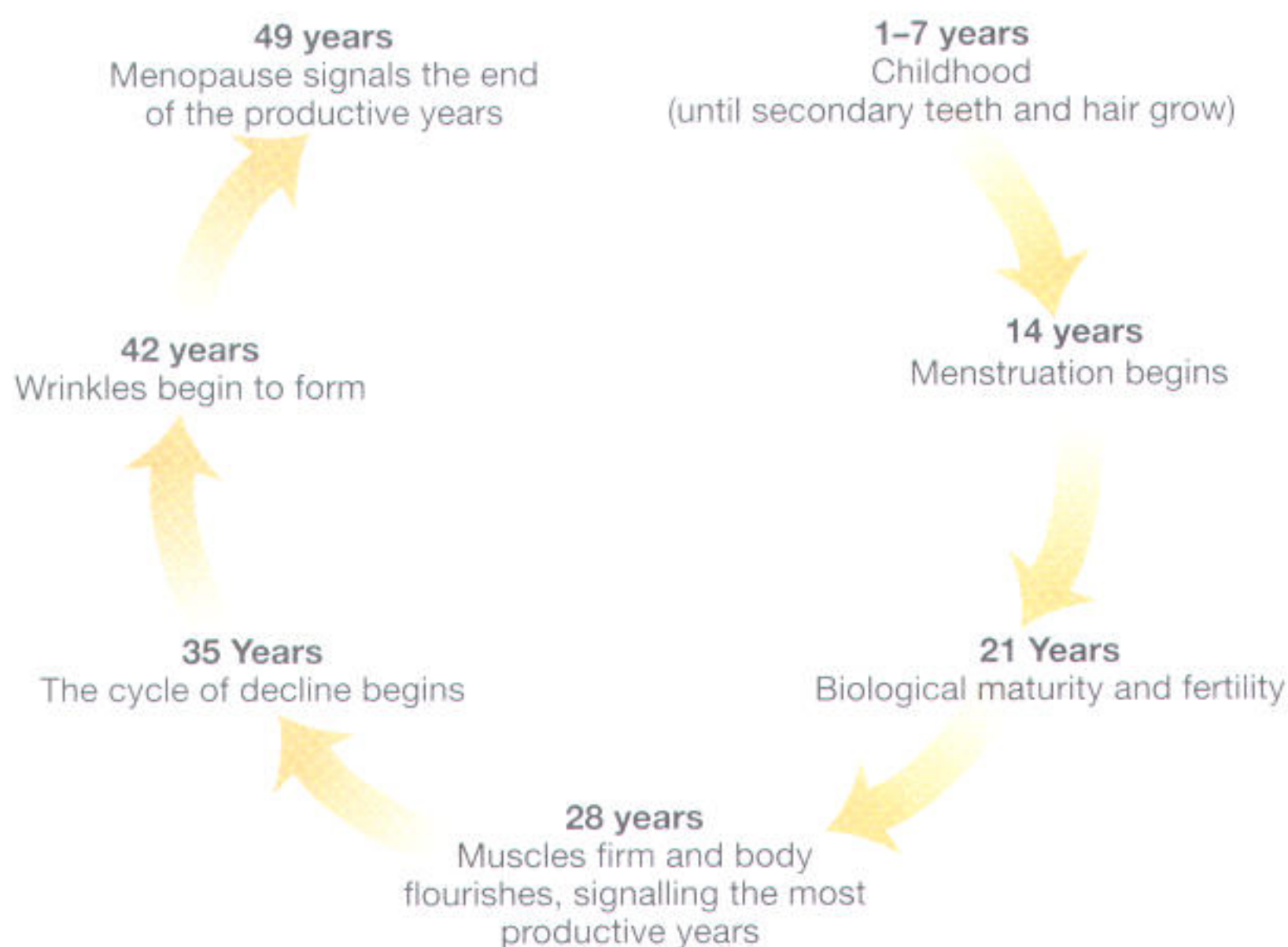
pattern for social functioning based on the role of women as mothers. Not included in the cycle are the years in which a woman would be a grandmother.

In the 1930s, Charlotte Buhler, a developmental theorist, published the earliest modern study of life stages in Western society. She studied biographies and determined that there is an orderly progression of **phases**, or changes in events, attitudes, and accomplishments. She concluded that the lives of individuals parallel their biological development. According to Buhler, the first 15 years are spent in progressive growth at home. From 15 to 25 years, a period of growth and fertility occurs, and individuals focus on clarifying their individual goals. The years from 25 to 45 are the productive years, when individuals focus on stability and the culmination of their goals. From 45 to 65 years, there is a loss of reproductive ability, and individuals begin a self-assessment of the results of their goals. After age 65, there is biological decline, and individuals reflect on the fulfillment of their goals or experiences of failure (Kimmel, 1990). Buhler's early work established the foundation for the theories of human development, such as Erikson's and Levinson's, which were developed later.

*“Every life is a circle.
And within every life
are smaller circles.
A part of our life goes
full circle every seven
years. We speak
of living in cycles
of seven.”*

—Barbara Means Adam,
Lakota Sioux

The Seven-Year Stages of a Woman's Life



Source: Adapted from *A Woman's Book of Life*, by Joan Borysenko © 1996 by Joan Borysenko. Reprinted with permission of Riverhead Books an imprint of Penguin Putnam, Inc.

Contemporary Theories of Aging

Because of the diversity of ways people live out their lives, there are various points of view on aging. The biological basis that was assumed in the past neither accounts for the cultural variations in adult behaviour in the second half of life, nor explains the historical changes in the roles of adults. Marjorie Fiske and David A. Chiriboga (1990) outlined three different models for aging that reflect the various theoretical perspectives on the impact of personality, or identity, on the behaviour of individuals:

- stability template
- orderly change
- theory of random change

The **stability template model** assumes that individuals do not change once they achieve adulthood. It is based on the belief that the basic personality is formed in childhood, as suggested by Sigmund Freud and accepted by psychoanalysts. The stability template accepts recent evidence that personality actually continues to develop into adulthood. This model explains that if an individual's identity is stable over time, he or she will respond to events and stresses in life in a consistent manner. Therefore, there will be variations in behaviour, but individual behaviour will be predictable (Fiske & Chiriboga,

1990). Erik Erikson suggests that identity formation is the focus of life and continues to be so throughout life (Erikson & Erikson, 1994). Erikson describes the central task in middle adulthood as **generativity**, which is usually interpreted as establishing and guiding the next generation. In later life, individuals seek the **integrity** that results from living out one's identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

The **orderly change model** is based on the stage theories of development. It explains that an individual's identity is formed earlier in life but changes through interaction with the environment in the present (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). Erikson emphasized that identity formation and generativity were dependent on having opportunities to develop (Erikson, 1968). Daniel Levinson suggests that in midlife, individuals examine the life structure they have been building in early adulthood and define a new life structure for themselves in later life based on changing circumstances (Levinson, 1978). Therefore, this model suggests that identity changes according to the options



The theories that attempt to explain people's behaviour as they age differ on whether individual differences reflect an individual's unique personality, a generation's response to social change, or individual life experiences.

available in the society, and asks whether the patterns of aging will change when the timetable of the life cycle changes due to increased life expectancy (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990).

The **theory of random change** explains that fate, or non-normative events, cause change in identity because of how individuals adapt to their new roles. This model asks whether social change affects the behaviour of a cohort, resulting in the cohort effect (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). American psychologist Klaus Riegel's Dialectical Analysis of Development rejects the idea of age-defined stages and suggests that individuals change over time in response to biological, cultural, psychological, and sociological factors. Patterns of behaviour exist because cohorts are exposed to the same events. Riegel believed that age was not the key factor that determined how people behaved unless it controlled opportunity, such as retirement age (Kimball, 1990). The theory of random change, therefore, suggests that although the behaviour of individuals within generations might conform to a pattern, it is not possible to predict the behaviour of future generations.

A more recent theory that accounts for the changes in aging that have been observed in Canada is the **social construction theory**. Related to symbolic interactionism, it suggests that the actions and feelings of individuals have no intrinsic meaning on their own, but are given meaning by the theoretical perspectives that are developed for their explanation (Gergen & Gergen, 2001). This theory suggests that individuals' behaviour does not necessarily differ from place to place or from generation to generation, but the meaning ascribed to the behaviour changes to reflect the expectations of the society. Therefore, individuals choose an appropriate response to life events based on how they interpret them (McPherson, 1990). The social construction theory and symbolic interactionism are useful for explaining why the empty-nest syndrome that was identified as a crisis for middle-aged women in the 1960s does not appear to exist for women in the 1990s (Borysenko, 1996).

Bernice Neugraten defined the concept of the social clock. She explained that there are common stages in life that are defined according to the expectations of society as to when certain events should occur. Daniel Levinson (1978) and John Kotre (Kotre & Hall, 1990) refer to these stages of life as **seasons**, reflecting the concept that seasons follow each other in a predictable sequence, but that each is different in nature and yet equally important for growth. The seasons are determined to some extent by a biological clock, but also by a **psychological clock**, which determines the meaning that individuals make of their own lives. The seasons of life suggest expectations about what is normal behaviour during each stage of life. Therefore, individuals choose the path of their lives in each season and live with the consequences. Fall is

“When I had journeyed half of our life’s way, I found myself within a shadowed forest, for I had lost the path that does not stray.”

—Dante

the season in which individuals mature and the benefits are harvested to provide for the winter. The patterns of development in later seasons of life will be explored using these research questions:

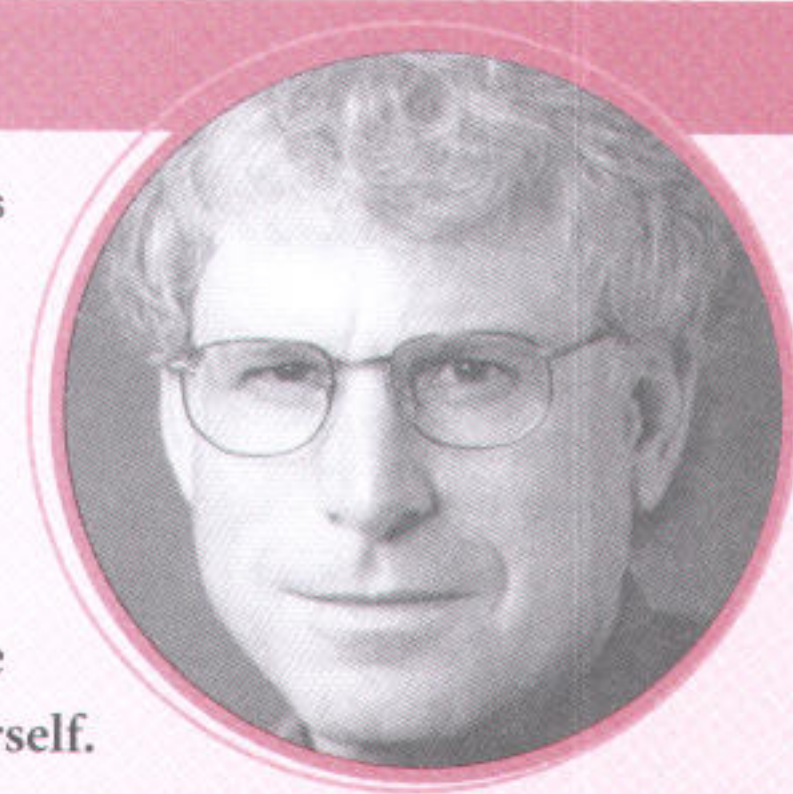
- How do individuals achieve generativity?
- Is there a midlife crisis for men and women?
- What is the effect of aging on marriage?
- What is the nature of development for older people?

research study | The Evolution of Happiness

David M. Buss has made a life study of the strategies that human beings have developed to enable them to compete in a hostile world in order to survive and to be successful in raising a family. His earlier research focused on sexual desire and mate selection. Recently, he has studied quality of life by assessing how people achieve happiness in their lives. His research suggests that happiness is more difficult to achieve in modern society despite the technological advancements that protect us from the “hostile forces of nature” and enable us to live longer. Happiness can be attained by using the following strategies that maintain the social attributes of early human societies, buffer the stress in people’s lives, and reduce competition:

- **Maintain an extensive family network.** A longer life enables individuals to develop relationships with adult children and grandchildren. Communication technology allows people to keep in touch more easily.
- **Develop true friendships.** Acquaintances are useful companions, but only true friends can provide valuable social and psychological support during crises. Unfortunately, it is difficult to tell friends and acquaintances apart during good times.

David Buss explains that all living human beings are evolutionary success stories.



- **Marry someone who is like yourself.** People with homogamous marriages are happier because they are protected against the major causes of family stress: marital conflict, divorce, and stepchildren. Married people live longer, healthier lives.
- **Become more co-operative.** Forming long-term reciprocal relationships at home, at work, and in the community, in which you expect no more than equity, establishes your reputation as a co-operative person and improves your quality of life.
- **Fulfill your desires.** The natural human desires for health, marriage, and aesthetic pleasures are fulfilled by achieving a life structure based on working to acquire and manage the resources needed. ■

Source: *American Psychologist*. (2000, January). Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 15–23. Copyright © 2000 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.

Generativity

Erik Erikson described stages of personality development that focused on the search for identity to give meaning to life. The identity is formed in early adulthood. Having formed an identity, an individual is then able to form intimate relationships with another, and move successfully into adult life. Erikson defined the task of middle adulthood as the desire for generativity. The developmental challenge of generativity, meaning productivity, refers to the range of ways people are able to leave their mark on future generations. By investing in the future and caring for others, individuals can develop the virtue of care. However, by becoming self-indulgent, individuals can cease to develop, a state that Erikson called **stagnation**. Erikson summarized the relationship of identity to generativity in this way:

In youth you find out what you care to do and who you care to be—even in changing roles. In young adulthood you find out who you care to be with—at work and in private life, not only exchanging intimacies, but sharing intimacy. In adulthood, however, you learn what and whom you can take care of (Erikson, 1959, p. 124).

According to Erikson, the seventh stage of life, “generativity versus stagnation,” begins at 40 years of age. This age corresponds to the midlife transition identified by Daniel Levinson from his research on men and women in midlife. At this time, individuals assess their lives so far and ask several questions: “What have I done with my life? What do I really get from and give to my wife (or my husband), children, friends, work, community—and self? What is it I truly want for myself and for others?” (Levinson, 1978, p. 60)

Levinson explains that individuals build a new life structure based on their answers to these questions. They adapt to the ways that they have grown, the changing circumstances of their lives, and changes in society. Individuals continue to pursue their Dreams but look for greater meaning by giving back to their families and communities (Levinson, 1978). Adults who are generative have more meaningful relationships, have stronger attachments to their community, and have a greater sense of political agency. Generativity arises out of the formation of an identity in a desire to achieve some form of immortality of that identity (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998).

Generativity is a driving force throughout adult life. John Kotre (1996) suggests that Erikson’s theory is limited by the ages he specifies for each stage. He states that because of the limits of fertility, especially for women, generativity must be defined as something more than reproduction and parenthood if it



web connection

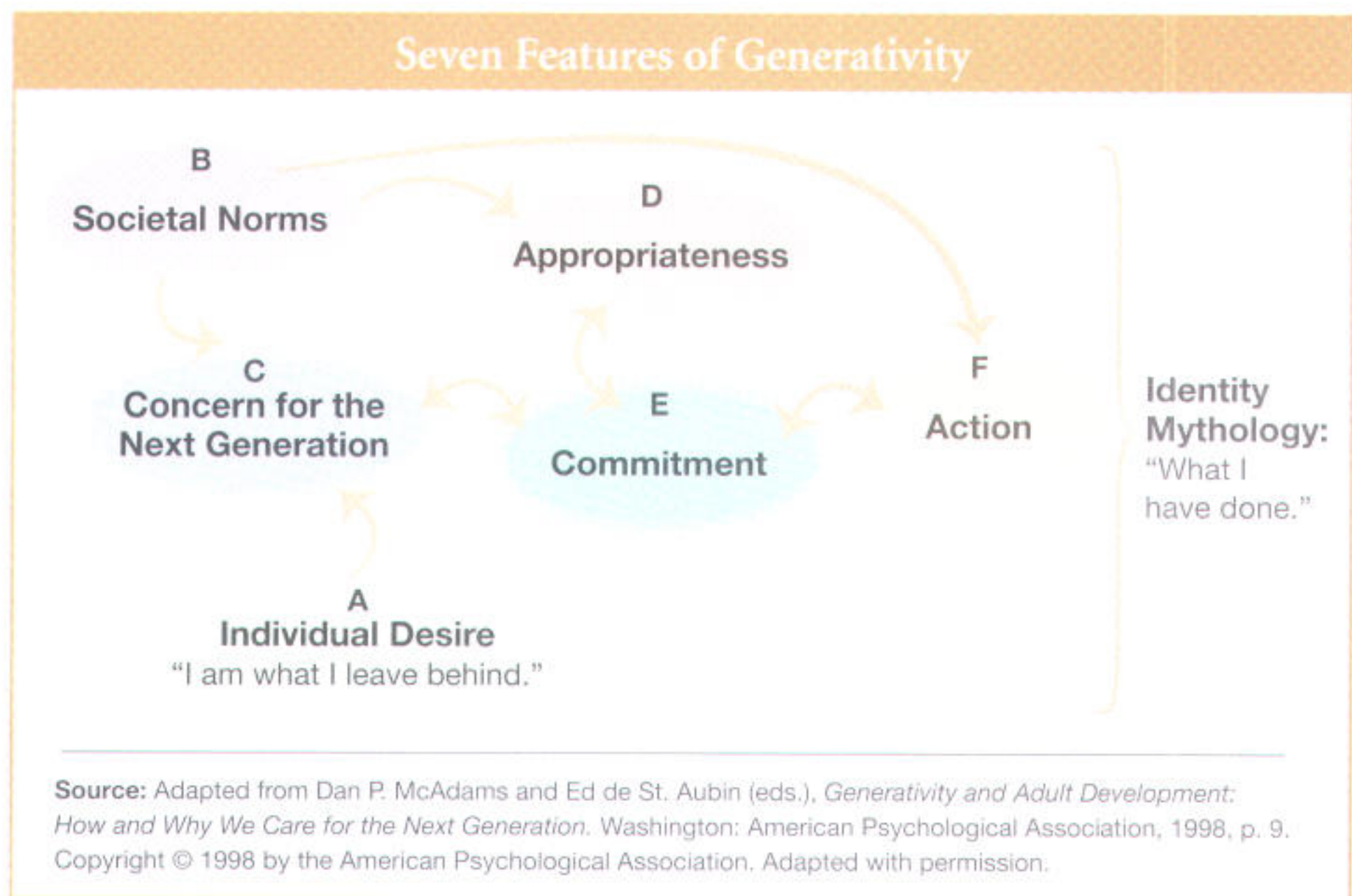
www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12

To learn about Erik Erikson’s theory of the stages of life or about other personality theories, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

is a motivation for the rest of adult life. He offers a broader interpretation of generativity than Erikson does, and identifies four different forms:

- biological generativity, which is parenthood
- parental generativity, which is the raising of children
- technical generativity, which is the passing on of knowledge
- cultural generativity, which is the sharing of culture and tradition (Kotre, 1996)

Opportunities for generativity are affected by social changes that influence the social clock and result in cohort effects. Individuals may have a need to nurture others, but society expects adults to take responsibility for themselves, care for their children, and pass on the culture to their offspring. Therefore, adults in their thirties and forties who are not ready for steady employment and a family are considered to be “out of time” with the social clock (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). Generativity is a universal task of adulthood, but the form and the timing are defined by the society (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990).



Parenthood, the biological generativity that was the focus of Erikson’s original concept, is occurring later in life for most Canadians. As a result of the impact of contraception, parenthood has become a choice. The ability to choose whether or not to have children resulted in the need for individuals to rationalize the decision for themselves. Women are becoming more hesitant

about having children than men are (Borysenko, 1996). John Kotre argues that parenthood declined in importance and became less valued as a role because individuals and couples found it difficult to identify reasons for having children that could be justified in a society that values individual achievement. He also suggests that individuals see less need for children when improved health enables them to live longer, healthier lives in which they can accomplish their goals. Therefore, there is less biological generativity (Kotre, 1996).

Parental generativity is attained through interaction with children, as active participants in parenting. In the past, women bore most of the responsibility for child care and parenting, so parental generativity was assumed to be the motivation for a woman's life in adulthood. Now men have gained greater opportunities for parental generativity as they share an active parenting role with their working wives (Kotre, 1996). Since this opportunity is newly acquired, it is not clear whether a father's role in parenting will be like a mother's or a separate one that reflects a masculine nature. Functionalists suggest that because men have traditionally had the role of authority in a patriarchal family, it can be argued that they are suited to providing, guiding, and supporting a family. They suggest that a role that allows men to focus on these traditional responsibilities would enable them to be better fathers (Zinsmeister, 1999).

Increased life expectancy is changing the nature of parental generativity. A longer life allows individuals to have longer connections with past and future generations within their families. Since most parents will live long enough to see their children mature into middle age, there are greater opportunities to repair and renew relationships with children as adult-adult relationships. Grandparenting provides additional parental generativity roles (Kotre, 1996). Those who did not have children achieve parental generativity by taking on the role of "guardian" and caring for others' children as teachers or child-care providers (Borysenko, 1996). Parental generativity extends the influence of individuals in providing for the future generation beyond biological parenthood.

In a complex society in which life has greater meaning than reproduction and survival, there are other ways of providing for the future and leaving one's mark on the world that extend beyond the family. Technical generativity means teaching knowledge and skills to the next generation so that they can



Having children is an expression of biological generativity. Raising children provides opportunities for parental generativity that last a lifetime.

"Evolution has made man a teaching as well as a learning animal."

—Erik Erikson

develop competence. Parents or aunts and uncles teaching children, teachers instructing students, and older men and women mentoring younger adults are some examples of the ways technical generativity is expressed. Cultural generativity means creating and sharing ideas and artifacts that will contribute to the cultural experience of society. Whether by producing beneficial products or services at work or by expressing creativity by sewing, painting, or dancing, individuals can achieve cultural generativity (Kotre, 1996). Therefore, generativity can be achieved by developing and nurturing ideas as well as children.

Social changes in the second half of the twentieth century are altering how women in Canada are achieving the life task of generativity. Prior to the 1960s, most women were homemakers. Their generativity was attained through motherhood and through the art of homemaking (Borysenko, 1996). When women are employed, they assume generativity through technical and cultural ways in addition to biological and parental ones. When levels of “mastery” and “happiness” were compared in an American study of self-esteem in women, working women scored much higher on “mastery,” but stay-at-home moms scored highest on “happiness.” However, the combined levels of “mastery-happiness” were highest for the busiest women in the study, the employed married women with children (Borysenko, 1996). Perhaps these results reflect the extended opportunities for generativity that individuals have when they combine working with family life.



When people are able to see positive results from their work and find their jobs meaningful, they are experiencing technical or cultural generativity.

Work provides meaningful opportunities for identity formation and for technical or cultural generativity. In Deborah Anderson and Christopher Hayes' study of gender and self-esteem, it was determined that men and women are almost identical in their assessments of the importance of work in their lives, with 88 percent of men and 91 percent of women stating it was important (1996). However, if individuals are to develop responsibility and competence, their work must be purposeful. Only 22 percent of the subjects said that the task they performed itself was important, while others identified the ability to control events on the job or to work with others as rewarding (Anderson & Hayes, 1996). In a society in which individuals believe “I am what I do,” 75 percent of people will change jobs at some time, perhaps to find work that allows them to feel that they are doing something meaningful and giving something back (Kimmel, 1990).

Oral History

Oral history is a research method that uses interviewing to encourage individuals to recall and describe their life experiences. Oral history can be used in several ways in the social sciences:

- Oral histories are used by social historians to gather personal stories to add to the official records and media reports in order to understand the impact of historical events on individuals, families, and society.
- Oral history is used to gather data about earlier behaviour to determine patterns of development. These retrospective studies, in which individuals recall what they have done, can be used when longitudinal studies were not started in the past to observe behaviour.
- Oral history can also be used to enable individuals to reflect on their experiences and behaviour in the past in order to understand them from the perspective of their accumulated experience and wisdom. In this application, oral history supports the life review described by Erikson. This reflects the perspective of symbolic interactionism, because subjects relate the experiences according to the meaning they place on them.

Obtaining Oral Histories

1. Locate subjects whose experiences reflect the issues you want to study. Obtain their permission to interview them and to record the interview.

Arrange a time that is convenient and long enough to allow the subject to speak freely in answer to the questions.

2. Develop a series of open-ended questions that will prompt the subject to recall experiences and events and to describe his or her actions, observations, thoughts, and feelings at the time. Secondary questions can be used, if necessary, to encourage the subject to add details. If it is required for your study, ask the subject further questions that enable him or her to reflect on the experiences, based on what he or she now knows.
3. It is important to record the interview. The language used, the tone of voice, and the parenthetical comments all help to convey the meaning of the experiences for the subject. Transcribe the oral history word for word.
4. Artifacts, such as photographs, documents, and letters, can be used to supplement the oral history.

Oral histories can be transcribed for others to read, but the words of the subject belong to the subject, not the researcher. It is necessary to obtain the subject's permission to publish the oral history, or to include citations for any paraphrasing or quotations that are included in other work. ■

Source: Based on *Reminiscence and oral history: ...?* by Joanna Bornat. *Aging and Society*, March 2001, Vol. 21, Part 2, pp. 219-241. Adapted with the permission of Cambridge University Press. Copyright © 1998 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.

The Myth of the Midlife Crisis

Is there such a thing as a midlife crisis? Whether the stereotypical crisis occurs for men, for women, or for both, depends on how *crisis* is defined. The Oxford dictionary defines it firstly as “a turning point,” and secondly as “a moment of danger or suspense.” Developmental theories can be used to determine whether there is a turning point in individuals’ lives during midlife. However, to understand individual and cultural variations, it will be more useful to use the theories of symbolic interactionism and social construction. More recent research has focused on whether some people experience midlife as a time of danger. The research questions that can be considered are:

- What are the patterns of individual development during middle age?
- How does the society in which an individual lives affect his or her development in midlife?

Midlife could be a period of stability in individuals’ lives. After years of working and establishing a career, most individuals have achieved their peak. Both income and level of responsibility in the workplace usually reach their highest point between the ages of 35 and 45. Employees have developed their competencies and they know the work and their co-workers. They usually have more time for family and leisure activities. As children leave home, parents eventually have fewer financial responsibilities, so they can invest money for retirement. This should be a time of peak productivity and security (Baker, 1993). Research by developmental psychologists, however, suggests that even individuals who achieve this level of comfort and stability view it as a temporary plateau that could signal greater improvements in the future, or, more likely, the beginning of a decline. In midlife, individuals begin to notice that they will not live forever and to assess how they have been doing so far (Carter & Peters, 1996).

Daniel Levinson’s research with both men and women defined a **midlife transition** that occurs between 40 and 45 years of age. This changeover marks the passage from early adulthood into middle adulthood. Levinson found that some individuals make the transition with few questions about the meaning and direction of the life structure they have established. However, he found that the majority of subjects in his studies reconsidered the life structure they had formed in light of the self they had become by midlife and the opportunities that were available at that time. Although some made no changes in their work or their family life, most experienced a refocusing of priorities in an attempt to live out their Dream. Others had to redefine their Dream and change their life structure to meet the needs of their personal identities or the circumstances of their lives (Levinson, 1978, 1996). For these individuals, midlife could be described as “a moment of danger or suspense.”

web connection



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To learn about writing oral histories, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

In their long-term study of adult development, Marjorie Fiske and David Chiriboga determined that individuals develop a revised sense of self during the midlife. They explained that an individual's self-concept changes to blend past experience with present circumstances into a psychological reality that reflects the greater wisdom of middle age (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). The slogan of midlife could be borrowed from the 1980s idiom: "Get Real!" Fiske and Chiriboga called their study "Continuity and Change in Adult Life." This title summarizes the idea that while some adults in midlife make changes in their work, family, or community lives, others continue with their lives with a new understanding of themselves and their roles. This reflects psychologist Marie Jahoda's definition of a healthy personality in adulthood, which was quoted by Erik Erikson:

A healthy personality actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly (Erikson, 1968, p. 92).

in focus | The Midlife Wake-Up Call

by Sheryl Ubelacker
Canadian Press

Tim O'Neill knew he had reached some defining moment in life when he was suddenly overwhelmed by a storm of swirling emotions. It felt like sadness. It felt like loss. It felt like panic. It felt as if some internal clock had suddenly kick-started, tick-tocking out the warning: Time . . . is . . . running . . . out. "When it hit me, I was standing somewhere and I leaned against a wall in a corridor and I just started crying," says O'Neill, still surprised at the memory. "And I thought, 'What's going on?'"

What was going on was the beginning of the midlife transition, a time when many in their mid-40s or 50s are struck by a sense of their own mortality and the knowledge there are only so many years left to realize their dreams. It may be triggered by a landmark birthday (like turning 50), the death of a parent or peer, a grown-up child leaving home, or being passed over for promotion by a younger colleague.



For many people in their mid-forties to mid-fifties, the "midlife transition" brings emotional upheaval and critical self-appraisal.

Sometimes it's the relentless signs of diminished youth that set off midlife anxiety: printed words that seem to have shrunk, hair fading to gray or relentlessly

receding, laugh lines deepening into crevices, or an hour-glass figure transforming itself into a pear.

For O'Neill, who asked that his real name not be used, it struck while he was at a career placement centre after being downsized by the Montréal telecommunications company where he had worked for 20 years. Whatever the trigger, such emotional turbulence is common at the half-century watershed, psychologists say. It is even more pronounced in the boomer generation now reaching "middlescence."

"Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s led us to believe that a long, healthy, affluent, and youthful life was our birthright," say the authors of *The Healthy Boomer: A No-Nonsense Mid-life Guide For Women And Men*. "Midlife is a shock. Suddenly, the generation whose motto was 'Never trust anyone over 30' is brooding about unfulfilled dreams (and) the risk of heart attacks."

Romin Tafarodi, a social psychologist at the University of Toronto, says people are usually content as long as they perceive they're on "a certain trajectory. It's when we realize that the trajectory has taken on a slope that's not satisfactory—plateaued, if you will—or we realize that we'll never get to where we want to be before we end our lives, that things get a little dicey." People may feel demoralized, worthless, and withdrawn, he says. Other experts say this retreat into self is necessary. It's a time to "critically re-examine familiar relationships, values, and life choices," according to *The Healthy Boomer*.

O'Neill, 54, says losing his job jolted him into looking back at his life. "It was then that the soul-searching started," says O'Neill, a soft-spoken, self-described people person. He realized he'd settled for a comfortable career, but had paid for it by never feeling really happy. As he goes through midlife, O'Neill has glimpsed what he calls his true calling. He wants to

become a career counsellor and life coach to help others "uncover their real needs."

While many men enter this stage concerned about unrealized dreams, for women it is often linked to the physical effects of aging, especially menopause. Lorraine O'Brien, 52, felt the first stirring of the midlife reckoning in her early 40s and she is still dealing with its many changes. While she isn't in menopause yet, the single mother of a 17-year-old son admits to feeling emotionally topsy-turvy. "I feel a bit weepy sometimes. And sometimes I feel, 'Wow, I have so much responsibility.' All of a sudden, my son is going off to university and I'm thinking, 'Okay, what's next?' For women especially, I think the separation from your children is hard because you spend so many years being a mom."

What may be O'Brien's saving grace is that she confronted "middlescence" head-on, looking inward and deciding how she wanted to spend the rest of her life. "I started reading books. I tried to understand myself and my interactions with the world around me. I changed my relationships with people. The people who came into my life were different because I changed my perspective." She is proud of her accomplishments. She has her own home west of Toronto and is in good financial shape after a varied 30-year career at a company from which she took a buyout in 1997.

Although O'Brien is job-hunting (she figures she has a good 5 to 10 years left in the workplace), she is looking forward to satisfying other dreams. She wants to eventually travel to Europe, buy a cottage, and study classical literature and music. "I think now it's my turn. I want to get on with my own life while I'm still young enough to enjoy these things and healthy enough."

Far from fighting the midlife transition, O'Brien is embracing it because it has forced her to focus on what's important. "I want to learn how to live my best

life every day. Because every day presents me with choices, opportunities, challenges. And the more graceful I can become, the better quality of life I can have. I'm happy with my achievements, but I'm not finished yet."

And O'Neill is aware of Death's footsteps behind him. "That sense of mortality is with me every day. Every day, every week seems to move faster, and yet I look at what I've achieved and I think I haven't really done anything to fulfill my true purpose," he says.

"You think now's the time to do what you want to do, because there isn't that much time." ■

Source: *The Toronto Star*. (2001, Saturday April 14). pp. M6-M7.

1. What are the characteristics of the midlife transition?
2. Summarize the positive and negative aspects of midlife.
3. What coping strategies were identified by the individuals in the article?

Since work outside the home occupies so much of an individual's time, provides the income that defines the lifestyle potential, and identifies the role within society, work is a major component in an individual's identity. Career changes require adjustments in an individual's sense of what he or she does. The motivation for career changes in midlife varies. Some people, such as athletes, dancers, and other performers, know that there is an age limit on their jobs and anticipate a change. Other people experience "career plateauing" and change their expectations for what is satisfying in a job. The pyramidal shape of the workplace means that few people will be promoted to management positions (Ward, 1994). An American study showed that while those in entry-level positions valued advancement highly, those in middle age valued achievement and autonomy highest, reflecting the importance of generativity and, perhaps, the realization that all people cannot reach the top. Balancing the realities of family responsibility with career prospects can help individuals decide whether the career or the family, and what form of generativity, will have highest priority in their lives (Stevens-Long & Commons, 1992). Individuals change jobs because they lose their jobs, new opportunities arise at a time when they are ready to make changes, or they actively seek a change to reflect their revised life structure (Levinson, 1978).

"There is a proverb: 'As you have made your bed, so you must lie in it,' which is simply a lie. If I have made my bed uncomfortably, please God, I will make it again."

—G. K. Chesterton

Between Friends



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When anticipated events, such as marriage, children, or a promotion, do not happen, people may feel that they have been unable to make the contribution they could have.

Because perceptions of the life cycle depend on point of view, it cannot be assumed that the male model fits the female one (Gilligan, 1993). In the past, women experienced middle age as a series of turning points in their lives. As family size declined, women faced the “empty-nest syndrome” when their last child left home, leaving them with a sense of loss and confusion about their role now that motherhood was complete. However, there was the continuity provided by her homemaking role. Now that more women share family and work roles with their partners, they experience the same challenges. The impact on women at the end of childbearing and the empty nest has declined (Baker, 1993).

Abigail Stewart and Joan Ostrove conducted a metastudy of women in the baby-boom generation by compiling the results of several longitudinal studies of American women. Their results suggest that women experience an increased sense of identity and competence in midlife, they made “midcourse corrections” based on a review of their lives, and they reported high levels of generativity (Stewart & Ostrove, 1998). Studies of future generations will be required to confirm that midlife is characterized by “turning points” not “danger,” both for women and men, in a society in which they share family and work roles.

Fiske and Chiriboga examined the stress that adults experience in middle age. They determined that the effects of stress were influenced by the ability of individuals to manage them. Their study revealed that major life events were less stressful than the day-to-day frustrations of life, and much less stressful than **non-events**—those life passages that we want to happen but don’t, such as not marrying or having children (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). Major life events, such as marriage, the birth of a child, children leaving home, or the death of a parent are stressful, but they are anticipated. There is anticipatory socialization, there are role models for coping with major life events, and because they are recognized occurrences, social support is offered. Day-to-day frustrations are more stressful because they are constant, personal, and a threat to an individual’s sense of competence. The most stress results from non-events. Unemployment or early retirement also remove opportunities for living out a life according to one’s Dream. For those who have delayed their generativity while they await these events, who feel they still have something to offer the world, the stresses of non-events can lead to a sense of stagnation in middle age (Kotre, 1996).

“Middle age snuffs out more talent than even wars or sudden deaths do.”

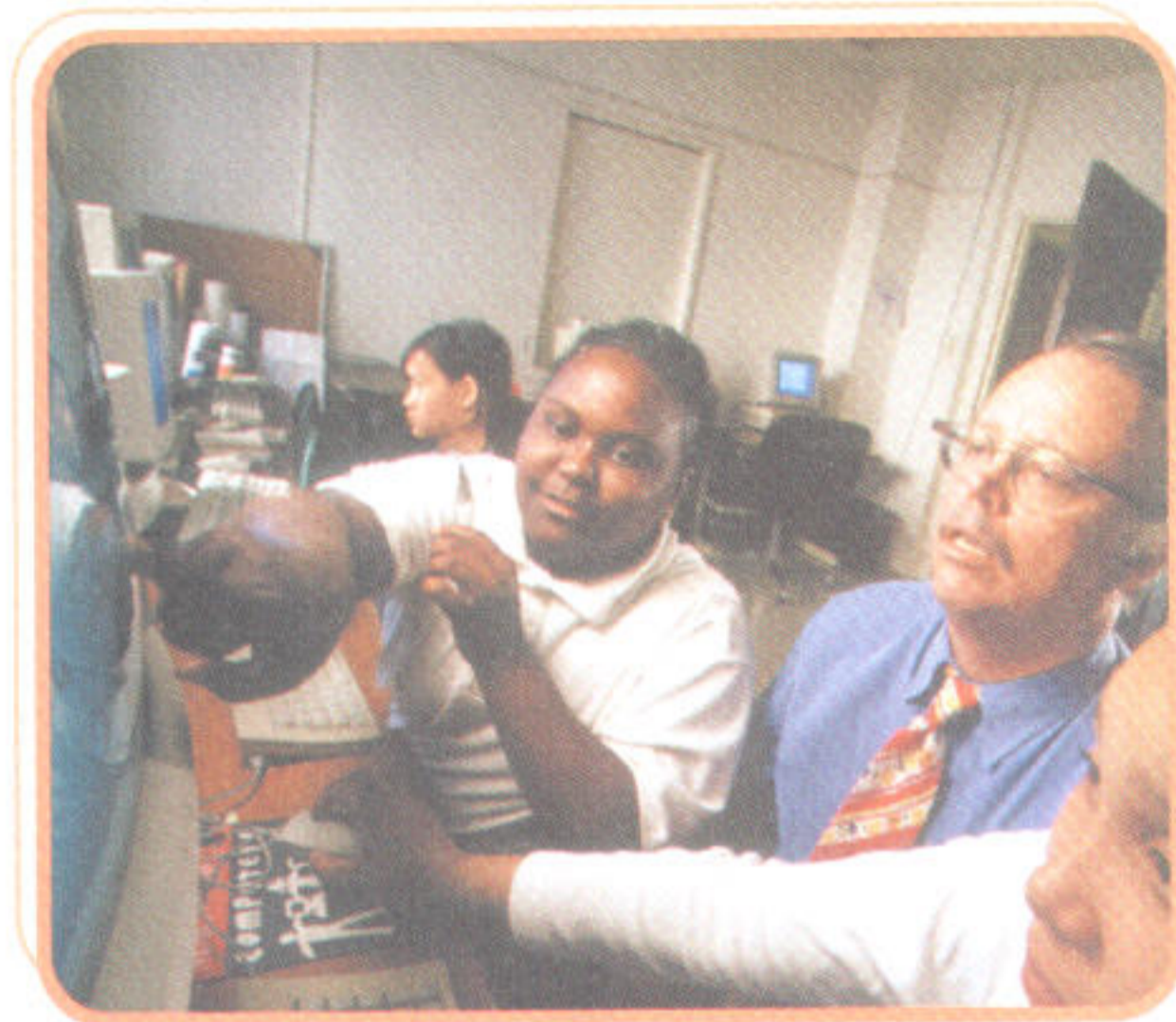
—Richard Hughes

by Stephanie Whittaker

After practising law for 30 years, Jim Wright was ready to make a big career change. “I had enjoyed law, but I wanted to do something different,” he said. The “something different” that Mr. Wright had in mind was a shift to the non-profit sector, where he knew he would earn less money but gratify his need to contribute to his community. With the help of a career-transition specialist, Mr. Wright landed a job two years ago as executive director of EPOC Montréal, an organization that helps unemployed young people acquire work skills and, ultimately, jobs. Mr. Wright says what makes his work most satisfying is to watch the transformation of the students who go through EPOC’s program. “You have to come to one of our graduations and see the results of 21 weeks of work with the staff. [EPOC’s students] undergo a vast life change here. The majority come in on welfare or unemployment insurance and leave with a job.” The payoff for Jim Wright of working in a non-profit organization? “I’m helping people,” he said.

That sense of community service is what drives many of the people who work in the non-profit sector. “There is a personality type that chooses this kind of work,” said Clarence Bayne, Director of Concordia University’s Graduate Diplomas in Administration and Sport Administration program, which offers training for careers in the non-profit sector. “They’re the ones who have a great spiritual sense.”

What is the non-profit sector? “It’s a huge field that takes in everything from the YMCA to the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Canadian Foundation for Human Rights. Revenue Canada says there are 100 000 non-profit organizations in Canada,” said Edith Katz, Co-ordinator of Marketing



People choose to work in non-profit organizations to make a difference in their community.

and Communications in the Concordia diploma program. “A non-profit organization can be as big as the University of Toronto and as small as a local community organization that helps senior citizens.” Moreover, she added, career opportunities in the non-profit sector are burgeoning. “Many of these organizations are realizing it’s worthwhile to have competent managers and to pay them appropriately even if they have a small budget. They need good financial management, resource management, and credibility with external funding agencies and donors. Many non-profits have good people who have professional qualifications. They may be social workers or have some other professional qualification. But they lack training in management skills.”

And that, says Ms. Katz, is where the DIA/DSA program comes in. “We’re training managers and administrators,” she said. The program, which operates in the John Molson School of Business, teaches a

raft of management courses that take in such areas as human resources and accounting. Ms. Katz says salaries in the non-profit sector tend to be lower than in the private sector but are “determined by the size of the organization, the level of the position, and the age and experience of the manager. I think people understand that salaries may not be comparable to those offered in large corporations, but those who work in the non-profit sector are there for other reasons. They’re there because they want to make a difference to their communities or because they want to work toward change. They may be interested in the environment, in human rights, or in marginalized groups.”

The reason Danny Lemieux chose to work in the non-profit sector was to give to others what he had received in childhood. Mr. Lemieux, Co-ordinator of Special Projects at the Point St. Charles YMCA, remembers how he frequented the Dawson Boys and Girls Club in Verdun as a child. “My father died when I was quite young,” he said. “I was involved in sports and had some really great teachers who were very important in my life. They would take us places and I just assumed all teachers did that. I wanted to do for others what these wonderful teachers had done for me.” Tight funding often means that people who run non-profit organizations must work as jacks of all trades. “We can’t afford to have everyone doing different jobs,” he said. “Sometimes, you find yourself sweeping the gym before the janitor arrives or painting your own office.” Mr. Lemieux adds that he enjoys a career that creates tangible community improvements and offers flexible hours.

Jim Wright agrees. He says he didn’t experience any second thoughts after deciding to leave his career as a lawyer and head into the non-profit sector. On the advice of a friend, Mr. Wright got career counselling from Robert Potvin at Murray Axmith, a career-transition firm. “I went through some testing

and at the end of it, they decided I should either be running a foundation or working in a community-based organization,” he said. Wright had spent his adult life doing community work, including being a city councillor in Westmount and sitting on the board of governors at McGill University. “Robert told me to visit one or two community organizations a day. The first one I saw was Dans La Rue. EPOC Montréal was the second.”

Careerists who want to obtain management skills before moving into non-profit sector jobs are enrolling in Concordia’s year-long DIA program, which offers management courses specific to the non-profit field. “There is a professionalization taking place in the management of non-profit organizations,” said Edith Katz. “They’re increasingly being run by people with management training. Some of these people are jacks of all trades. They do accounting, marketing, fundraising, and grant proposals. The non-profit sector offers scope for people from a wide variety of academic and occupational backgrounds.”

And in a larger context, said Clarence Bayne, the non-profit sector “makes democracy possible. It’s the sector in which people help redistribute wealth. Our market system is efficient at producing goods and using resources. But it’s not good at egalitarianism and the redistribution of resources. That’s where the non-profit and volunteer sector comes in.” It’s also where people like Jim Wright and Danny Lemieux get to make a difference to society. ■

Source: *Ottawa Citizen*. (2001, July 28). p. K6.

1. Why did Jim Wright decide to change his career?
2. How does his new career contribute to his generativity?
3. Using a social exchange perspective, evaluate whether he has made a good choice.

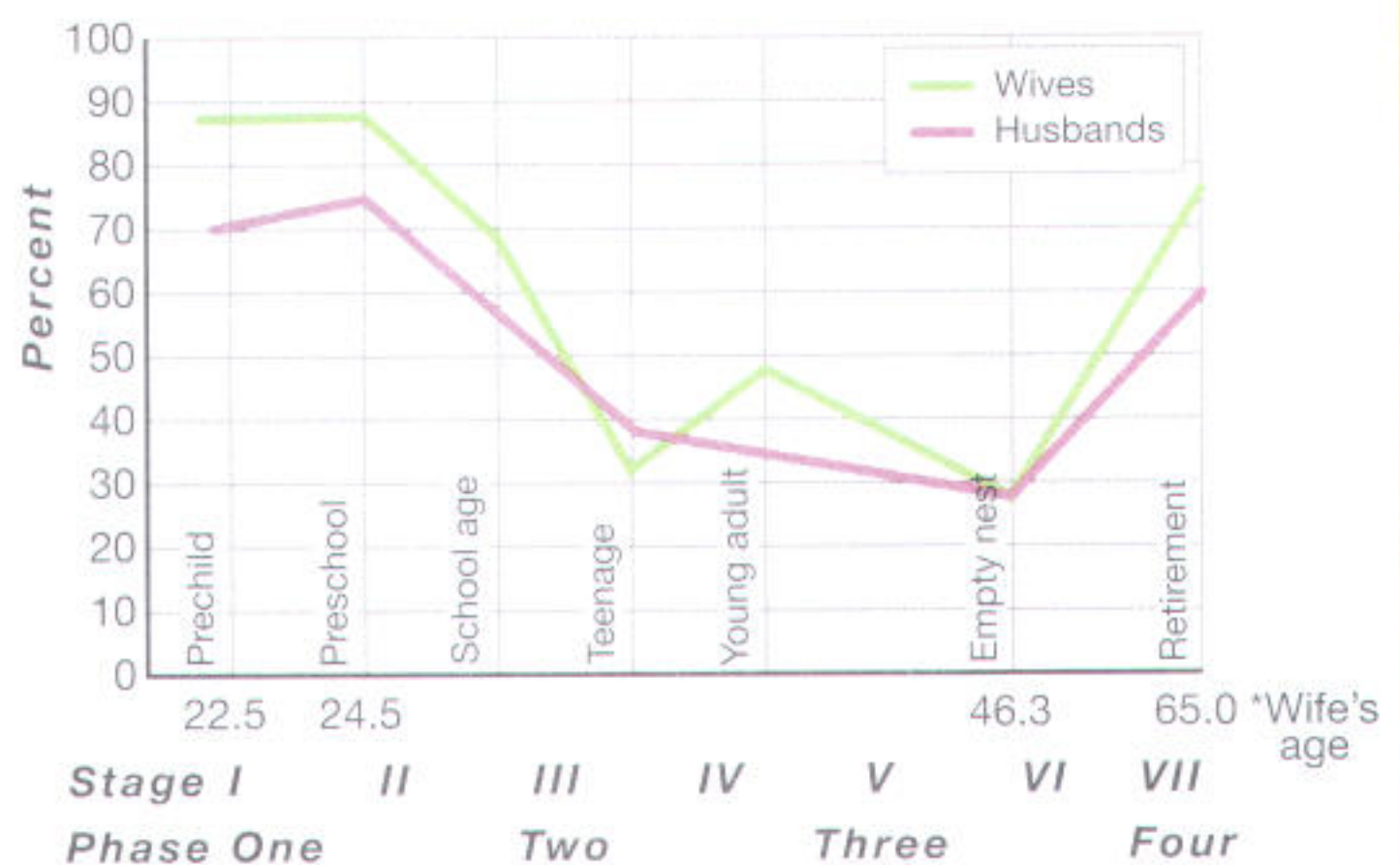
Marriage Satisfaction

Couples enter marriage with great expectations, but the realities of life challenge the durability and quality of marriage. Barry Dym and Michael Glenn (1993) explained that relationships cycle through three predictable stages as they face the crises of family life. Betty Carter and Joan Peters (1996) identified predictable normative crises in life that required adjustments in families. Of these, the teenage years, children leaving home, retirement, and growing old together are the crises of later life. Research in Canada and the United States over the last fifty years suggests that the spiral of marital adjustment identified by Dym and Glenn is a downward one until the turning point at middle age.

Eugen Lupri and James Frideres published the results of a Canadian study of the quality of marriage relationships over the family life cycle in 1981. They identified a U-shaped curve of satisfaction. Both men and women reported that their marriages were very satisfying during the early years, and the level of satisfaction improved slightly in the first years of parenthood. The stresses associated with the adjustment to parenthood seemed to be temporary. However, the number of people who were very satisfied with their marriage began to decline steadily as the children got older. Marital satisfaction was lowest at midlife and bottomed out when children began to leave home. By then, those who would divorce had done so. The level of marital satisfaction improved during the empty-nest stage, reaching almost the same level of satisfaction in retirement as at the newlywed stage. Although the stages were identified with parenthood, the curve of marital satisfaction for childless couples matched the U-shaped curve, although childless couples reported a slightly higher level of satisfaction (Nett, 1993).

The patterns of marital satisfaction seem to be changing. The results of a 17-year American study of marital satisfaction challenge the U-shaped curve theory. Jody VanLaningham, David Johnson, and Paul Amato suggest that the U-shaped curve reflects the differences among generations, not the pattern for individual marriages. They found that the level of satisfaction

Percentages of Husbands and Wives Reporting “Very Satisfying” Marriages at Different Stages of the Life Cycle



*Except for the age at retirement, the figures are median ages for women in the birth cohort 1951–60.

Source: Eugen Lupri and James Frideres, *The Quality of Marriage and the Passage of Time: Marital Satisfaction over the Family Life Cycle*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 6 (1981): 289.

with marriage drops off dramatically after several years of marriage and continues to decline into middle age before levelling off (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). The decline in marital satisfaction is reflected in divorce rates. Zheng Wu and Margaret Penning (1997) determined that divorce rates for Canadian women aged 40 to 49 more than doubled between 1971 and 1991. The increasing divorce rate might support a hypothesis that couples are less satisfied with their marriages now than previous generations were. However, VanLaningham, Johnson, and Amato concluded that there is too little evidence to determine how marital happiness will change in the later years of marriage (2001).

It is difficult to explain the decline in marital satisfaction during midlife. The functionalist perspective considers the roles and structure of the marriage. When couples are conforming to the traditional gender roles of marriage and parenthood in early parenthood, couples are more satisfied with their marriages than during the so-called “crowded years,” when dual-career parents are balancing non-traditional work and family roles. However, the decline in satisfaction was first identified in the United States in 1960 when very few women worked outside the home (Nett, 1993). Recent research in the United States by Stacy Rogers and Paul Amato found that dual-income couples reported more conflict than couples in earlier generations but no less overall happiness. On the other hand, another American study found that wives’ employment improved the quality of marriage because it increased the family income and buffered financial stress for the couples (Barnet & Hyde, 2001).

Social exchange perspective explains that individuals assess the costs and benefits of relationships to determine whether they are satisfied. The decline in



Many couples have discovered that combining work and family leaves little time for their marriage.

satisfaction suggests that people assess the costs of the marriage as greater than the benefits. Various reasons have been suggested for this. The financial costs of raising children in a consumer society have resulted in dual-career families. Couples are working longer and harder, yet the real income of families has decreased and couples are experiencing financial stress. Also, the time demands of working and raising children limit the time available for the intimacy of marriage (Nett, 1993). However, couples without children have fewer demands, yet their level of satisfaction also declines. This suggests that adults’ age, not children, might be the independent variable.

Family therapist Claude Guldner supports the second explanation for the decline in satisfaction with marriage using a systems perspective. He says that couples do not realize that they may be putting too much time and energy into children and work commitments and not enough into their marriage. Some couples have chosen not

to have sex anymore because the passion is gone (Chisholm, Atherley, Wood, & McClelland, 1999). Couples are staying together longer despite problems with their sexual relationship, but they are less satisfied with their marriages. A long-term commitment and a willingness to make the marital relationship a priority are essential for maintaining love in a marriage that includes intimacy and passion (Adams, 1996). However, lifestyle issues, such as lack of leisure time, demands of children, lack of privacy, and discrepancies in workload, might reduce the levels of passion and intimacy in marriage. Guldner argues that it is important to make the marital subsystem a priority, even when other matters interfere, because an active sex life is important for maintaining the intimacy and passion in marriage (Chisholm, Atherley, Wood, & McClelland, 1999).

Marital happiness can increase when children leave home. With fewer parenting and financial responsibilities, couples are free to indulge in spontaneous activity, such as dining out more often, and to enjoy life. The merging of gender roles in middle age results in men taking a greater interest in the home, thus reducing the conflict over household tasks (Baker, 1993). However, if couples have limited pension and investment income, the decline in income at retirement can reduce the level of satisfaction in the marriage because it increases financial stress and reduces the opportunities for activity. Couples who move away from their communities to smaller homes or who spend winters in warm places also experience more conflict (Myers & Booth, 1996). Thus, those who maintain their marriages into old age are healthier, live longer, and are happier than their widowed, divorced, or single contemporaries, so, from a social exchange perspective, marriage is a long-term investment that provides rewards in later life.

in focus | “Honey, I’m Home!”—For Good

by Kirk Bloir

“At first it was great having George around all of the time, but now he’s into everything. He’s rearranged my cupboards, moved the linens from one closet to the other, and has started giving me his own Hints from Heloise. When he was working, I never heard a peep about how I ran my home. If I have to hear one more time about how much he misses the ‘guys’ I’m going to scream. You know, I really thought it would be different, better somehow.”

Retirement has its own challenges, and may not turn out to be what a couple expected.

“For the past couple of weeks, things have been great—Ginger and I were really enjoying each other’s company. Now all we seem to do is fight. The other day



when I helped her out by maximizing our storage space and offered a more efficient way to do the dishes, man did she hit the roof. And I really miss my pals at the shop. It seems as if my usefulness has run its course.”

Retirement is one of life’s milestones. However, many people view retirement as a loss of roles, income, and socially recognized productivity (Nock, 1992). Retirement itself has no predictable negative effect on physical health, self-esteem, or life satisfaction. The manner in which couples learn to adjust to retirement depends on circumstances, such as whether retirement was taken voluntarily or involuntarily, and their health (Hanks, 1990).

Adjustment Takes Time

For most couples, retirement progresses in stages (Hanson & Wapner, 1994). At first, couples experience a short-lived honeymoon in which everything seems to come together nicely. As soon as the reality of retirement hits, however, many find they’re not quite as excited about the prospect of being a senior citizen or “stuck” with each other as they previously were (Smith, 1991). This is especially true when they’ve been “forced” to take retirement because of corporate downsizing, poor or diminished work performance, or failing health.

Men and women experience retirement differently (Hanson & Wapner, 1994). Men, many of whom have spent more than 40 years honing their identities as providers, are suddenly reliving the identity crisis of their adolescence. Women, many of whom have spent much of their lives independently keeping house and raising children, are now confronted with an intruder in their ordered world. The challenge becomes how to achieve a peaceful and successful integration of two lives into one living space. This integration depends on the couple’s ability to grow, both individually and together. Adjustment is largely an individual thing;

however, the dynamics of the couple relationship vary as a function of each partner’s progression. To date, no concrete evidence points to some magical time period couples can expect to spend adjusting. Most retired couples, however, report high levels of marital satisfaction (Vinick & Ekerdt, 1991).

Old Dogs and New Tricks

Initially, retired couples may find themselves invading each other’s space. Wives may explore the world hidden under the hood of the car. Husbands may rearrange in attempts to maximize space. Spouses who have previously had little opportunity or desire to explore the other’s domestic spheres find themselves with time on their hands and curiosity in their minds. This curiosity may cause much frustration. If one does adopt a new task, it will most likely be in an area they are more interested in and have a better aptitude for than their spouses (Szinovacz & Harpster, 1994).

Communication Is Essential

Both wives and husbands have ideas, opinions, likes, and dislikes. Attributes that attracted them to each other may now be the very things that spark frustration. Whatever the issue, couples need to talk about it in an open and honest way. If you don’t like George rearranging the cupboards and linen closets, break the news to him lovingly. If you would like to do the cooking Ginger has done for years, express your interest and work out an arrangement. A few minutes of heated discussion is better than weeks of repressed anger and resentment.

Capitalize on Interests

Work typically occupies 33 percent of an average day. Without work, many find themselves wondering what’s left to do. Everything’s been washed, rearranged, waxed, and buffed. You’ve watched all the TV you can stand, and couldn’t possibly read or knit anything else. After

years of a regimented and regulated schedule, many are suddenly faced with a void (Cude & Jablin, 1992).

In an attempt to fill the space, brainstorm activities you would like to do as a couple, as well as things you would like to do individually. Look around your community for groups and clubs that you may want to join. Volunteer. Enroll in a college course. Start with the day, then work on the week and month, and finally plan for the years ahead. This is one of the joys of retirement—planning the rest of your life together.

Enjoy the Years Ahead

Stop and think about all the transitions you've navigated: marriage, having children, raising and launching your children, dealing with a boomerang child (one you sent out of the nest who somehow found his or her way back home), discovering the wonders of being a grandparent, coping with economic uncertainty. Now think about the happiness all of those times have brought you. Realize that there were some

hurts and heartaches along the way, too. You're still together, so you must have done something right. Be proud of your accomplishments! Allow yourself and your spouse time to adjust to this new life phase—just as it took you time to get to where you are today. Remember, as a 65-year-old, you have more than 37 percent of your adult life ahead of you! Enjoy it! ■

Source: Blair, Kirk. "Honey, 'I'm Home!' – for Good: The Transition to Retirement." HYG-5159-96. Families . . . Meeting the Challenge, The Ohio State University Extension. <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5159.html>

1. What causes of marital conflict are suggested in this article?
2. Using a systems perspective, explain the adjustment that is required when one or both spouses retire.
3. From a social exchange perspective, what are the costs and benefits of retirement for each spouse?
4. Analyze the effects of retirement on generativity, and evaluate whether the activities suggested allow opportunities for generativity.

Post-Adulthood

Because aging has a negative connotation in the Western world, people tend to avoid identifying themselves as old. In North America, there is no clear sense of meaning or purpose to the last stage of life, and no clear role expectations. The development of pensions and retirement savings plans supports early retirement and the notion that old age is a reward for working hard in youth and middle age. On the other hand, media images of a lifestyle focused on leisure suggest that the senior years are a return to the simple pleasures and freedom from responsibility associated with childhood (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1998). Another perspective suggests that death is the purpose of life, so older people focus inward to determine meaning and wholeness in life and to accept death (Kimmel, 1990). As life expectancy increases, individuals will spend a longer period of their lives in what British gerontologist Midwinter has dubbed "Post-Adulthood" (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1998).

by Jay Ingram

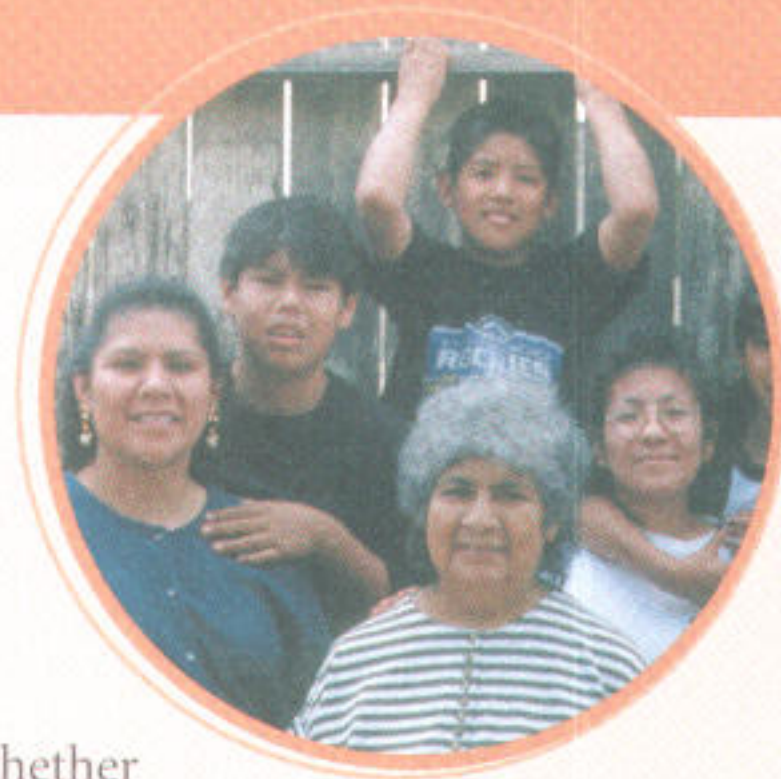
We humans are similar in many ways to the great apes, a similarity that I think is sometimes exaggerated. Yes, we share more than 98 percent of our genome with chimpanzees. And yes, as far as we know, chimps are the best of the rest intellectually. But there really is not much comparison between the brain power of an adult chimp and an adult human.

But we differ from chimps and gorillas in other ways that say something about our respective evolutionary pasts. Our uniquely human attribute is a prolonged menopause. Human females live a very long time after they become infertile, which at first glance is difficult to understand. After all, the lifestyle characteristics that survived to the present are those that enhanced our ancestors' fertility and increased the numbers of offspring they had. How could living well past one's ability to have children at all qualify as such a trait?

One theory (which has been around for 40 years) is that fertility began to end earlier as ancestral human mothers needed to devote more and more of their time to their offspring. The more dependent the child, the more time the mother must invest, and continuing to give birth would simply have compromised the survival of the already born. In the evolutionary game, it's not how many you give birth to, but how many survive to reproduce.

This theory, however venerable, has its shortcomings. One is that chimps apparently contradict it. Chimpanzee females need to care for their offspring, yet many keep on giving birth, even though the later babies born to them have much lower rates of survival. It would seem that they, too, should give up fertility earlier, but they have not. A closer look reveals that, in fact, human females do not abandon fertility earlier than female chimps or gorillas. It's just that humans

The role of grandmothering results from a biological end to childbearing many years before the end of human life expectancy.



live much longer, whether those humans are urban dwellers with medicare or hunter-gatherers without.

The rare chimp that lives 50 years in the wild dies at about the time it would become infertile. So it appears as if menopause is not the result of an abbreviated fertility but of longevity. If so, what, then, is the evolutionary advantage involved? A team of scientists led by Kristen Hawkes at the University of Utah has come out with a new suggestion, the "grandmother hypothesis." They argue that menopausal women were of great value in our evolution because they helped gather food for their daughters and their daughters' children. The argument is based on the premise that much of the shaping of our species happened while we were hunting and gathering creatures. Among hunter-gatherers today, post-menopausal women are able to find and dig up food items like tubers that children can't cope with. So these grandmothers can actually help ensure the survival of their grandchildren, a good thing in an evolutionary sense because those grandchildren carry about 25 percent of her genes. In what must have been a difficult hand-to-mouth existence for our ancestors, having a pair of extra hands for food-gathering could have made a significant difference.

This new theory is more than just guesswork. It makes some predictions, one of which is that childbearing women should produce babies faster than you'd expect because the grandmothers could initiate

the feeding of infants, allowing them to be weaned earlier. In fact, the data show that human babies are weaned earlier than most other mammals, including primates. It is also true for mammals in general that larger mothers produce larger—but fewer—babies. Yet even humans are outliers, producing more babies for their size (by a factor of two) than the great apes. The explanation? The childbearing mother has food-gathering help.

There is scant mention in all of this of the role that the male hunters may have played. In fact, Hawkes and her colleagues argue that there simply

wasn't much of a role. But I like to think that somewhere, someone is dreaming up the “grandfather hypothesis.” ■

Source: *The Toronto Star*. (1998, March 1).

1. What explanation do evolutionary psychologists suggest for the fact that human women live many years after they can no longer reproduce?
2. Does a longer life provide benefits for one's children and grandchildren in our post-industrial society?
3. What would you suggest as a “grandfather hypothesis”? Give your reasoning.

Late in his life, Erik Erikson described the challenge of an eighth stage of life as “integrity versus despair.” Individuals complete the formation of their identity and develop the ego's strength, **wisdom**, which to Erikson means “insight and enlightenment.” Adults review their lives to assess whether they have become who they wanted to be and achieved the generativity they desired in order to achieve integrity, “the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted no substitutions” (Erikson, 1950, p. 252). By integrating their past and present identities, individuals develop wisdom. It enables people to have an “informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself” (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 61). Individuals who have not achieved integrity feel **despair**, a sense that they have not done what they wanted to do with their lives and there is no time left to make changes (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). American gerontologist Dan McAdams suggests that older people who have high self-esteem frame their identities as life stories connecting the past and the present (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1998). Integrity clarifies the meaning of life for older people who can and do maintain a grand-generative function (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

When Erikson completed his work on development over the life span there were few who lived into very old age, so they were viewed as wise, the recipients of a divine gift, and having special obligations for living so long. In his later years, Erikson concluded that the life course as he described it was no longer accurate, and that there was probably a ninth stage. Old age in one's eighties and nineties presents new challenges. The physical decline is more noticeable, and the body begins to weaken and function less well. Erikson explained that the decline in

“The closing years of life are like the end of a masquerade party; when the masks are dropped.”

—Arthur Schopenhauer

by Peter G. Coleman, Christine Ivani-Chalian, and Maureen Robinson, Department of Geriatric Medicine, University of Southampton, U.K.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the principal themes underlying an older individual's identity?

HYPOTHESIS

Self-esteem stays high for older individuals because they have formed an identity based on consistent themes.

METHOD

The researchers investigated the lives of older subjects using oral histories from the theoretical framework of "identity as story." This framework suggests that the development of a life story reflects the developmental tasks identified by Erik Erikson: identity, generativity, and integrity. They defined identity as "that aspect of self and personality which expresses the overall unity and purpose of the individual's life" (p. 391).

A longitudinal study was conducted in Southampton over 18 years. A sample of 339 people over the age of 65 were interviewed three times between 1977 and 1980. The survivors were re-interviewed by the same researchers in 1988 (n=101), in 1990–91 (n=70), in 1993 (n=43), and in 1995–96 (n=28), with "n=" meaning "the number of subjects." The recorded interviews were transcribed and then analyzed and compared to determine the content of the answers, using grounded theory principles, in which the researcher assumes no theoretical perspective but allows the organization to be determined by the data.

Case studies were written to summarize the changes in self-esteem over the period of the study.

RESULTS

The majority of the subjects spoke positively about their present and past lives and saw them as a connected story worth telling.

Present and past lives were connected by long-term relationships with family and friends, by paid or voluntary work, and by maintaining the same home or community.

Several identity themes were prioritized by the oldest surviving subjects:

- long-term relationships with family, including spouse, children, grandchildren, and siblings
- other interpersonal relationships
- interest activities
- health and independence

CONCLUSIONS

Family relationships were the main source of life themes for the men and women in this study. The researchers concluded that losing a family is much harder to come to terms with than leaving work. The other major theme was independence or maintaining one's home.

Life stories enable individuals to have a heightened awareness of the themes of their lives, as Erikson suggested. The researchers noted that many older people want to tell their stories but lack the resources for writing them, and suggest that initiatives to help them do this could be developed. ■

Source: *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 18, Part 4, July 1998, pp. 389–419. Adapted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

abilities results in individuals moving through the negative aspects of personality stages. Increasingly, individuals experience mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, and role confusion (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Coping with very old age requires an

acceptance of death and a willingness to set aside despair. Joan Erikson, in completing the work of Erik Erikson after his death, described the ego strength of very old age as **gerotranscendence**, a sense of rising above the difficulties of age. Individuals at what might be the ninth stage focus on the here and now. They accept that physical disabilities constrain their mobility and that time is limited. They have no sense of future. In a sense, they begin to withdraw from the world, knowing that the last step must be taken alone (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

A longer life is a reasonable expectation for Canadians, but whether they will have satisfying ones depends on the quality of their lives in old age. The strongest direct influence on the quality of life is the opportunity for social and physical activity. This prospect is affected by an individual's cognitive ability and his or her personal perception of health. Social status, determined by levels of education and income, affects whether individuals have access to activities (Fernández-Ballesteros, Zamarrón, & Ruíz, 2001). The **activity theory of aging** supports the value of social and physical activity as a contributor to self-esteem. It suggests that individuals are reluctant to give up roles unless they can substitute other meaningful ones (McPherson, 1990). Maintaining close relationships with friends and others is also important. If individuals are married and can remain living in the same home or in the same community, their quality of life is better. For many people, the opportunity to tell their life story in old age allows them to determine that they have lived a satisfying life (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1998).

Significant changes in Canada and the world during the twentieth century have affected the roles that individuals play at all stages of life. Men and women have greater freedom to form an identity and to develop life structures that enable them to pursue their dreams, but they have had to develop new roles. The large numbers of Canadians who can anticipate living into old and very old age have few role models to provide the anticipatory socialization needed to prepare them. Socialization for aging is an active process as individuals anticipate the changes in their lives and make plans for the financial and social changes. Resocialization for old age is more concerned with revising existing behaviour and developing specific skills than with learning new values or traits, but can only occur with opportunities to participate with role models in appropriate activities (McPherson, 1990).

*“To keep the heart
unwrinkled, to be
hopeful, kindly,
cheerful, reverent—
that is to triumph over
old age.”*

—Thomas Bailey Aldrich



Individuals who live to a very old age achieve continuity in their lives through relationships with family, interest activities, and maintaining their residence.



www.mcgrawhill.ca/links/families12

To learn about old age in Canada, go to the web site above for *Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society* to see where to go next.

Dan McAdams suggests that individuals' identities are defined in their evolving life story, the life structure they develop and live (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1998). Perhaps it would be beneficial to clarify what the last stage of life should be to facilitate the development of individual life stories. Erik Erikson, who outlined the developmental pattern over the span of human life, argued that "lacking a culturally viable ideal of old age, our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole of life" (Erikson & Erikson, p. 114). What is the role of old age in Canada and how does it reflect the lives of individuals and families in Canada?

case study | Carol's Generativity

Carol Mehisto, who has been married to her husband Steven since 1977, is a mother of two. When she graduated from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Carol expected to become a high school English teacher, but her year at the Faculty of Education in Toronto convinced her that she would never do that. Carol took a job as a library assistant to help cover living expenses for herself and her husband, Steven, who was a full-time student at the School of Social Work at University of Toronto. Carol did not find the job particularly challenging, but she and Steven both appreciated the income she brought into their partnership after four years of being students. When Steven took a job in Sault Ste. Marie a year later, Carol was happy to leave her job, since she was ready to move on to something else.

At first she was happy in Sault Ste. Marie, and she and Steven saw their move as a shared adventure and as the beginning of the next part of their life together. She was pleased when they could afford to buy a house, and spent a great deal of time with the real-estate agent before purchasing a small bungalow. When she was unable to find work of any kind, Carol kept herself busy painting and decorating their new home, and eventually began to pursue her interest in crafts. At this point, Carol and Steven began to talk

Carol has taken on a variety of jobs and activities throughout her life to keep herself happy, to pursue her interests, and to remain socially active.



seriously about starting a family. Although they were both in their twenties, the time seemed right, particularly to Carol, but as the months went by and she did not get pregnant, she became more and more frustrated.

When Steven received a promotion and a transfer back to Toronto, Carol saw another opportunity to make changes in her life. By this time, she felt that her future involved working with children, so she applied for a job as a library assistant again, but specified that she wanted to work in the children's division. She began to work part-time, and she enjoyed her job, especially when local elementary teachers brought their classes to the library for storytelling. She and Steven began attending services at a local church, and both of them eventually volunteered to teach Sunday-school classes, which Carol in particular found satisfying.

The next three or four years passed by quickly as

she kept house and worked part-time at the library. Still unable to get pregnant, she and Steven began to discuss the possibility of adopting children. They made several inquiries and got interviews with various agencies. They became involved with several couples, all of them in various stages of the adoption process. Along with two other couples, they formed an association that provided support and information for infertile couples, an organization that continues to operate today. Carol and Steven believed that working in the organization together and their active membership in the church enabled them to maintain a strong marriage despite their disappointment about not having children.

Eventually, their perseverance paid off and they adopted a baby boy whom they named Jeremy. Life finally seemed satisfying for Carol. She quit her job and happily became a full-time mother. She enjoyed becoming part of a stay-at-home mothers' group in her community over the next few years and made many good friends. She volunteered in the local elementary school two mornings a week and increased her activities in the local church. When she became pregnant with Kaitlyn six years later, her life seemed complete. However, like many women her age, Carol eventually found that life as a full-time mother became less rewarding as her children got older and began to attend school. She saw other mothers in the community less often, as many of them returned to work. She found it more and more difficult to fill her days and began to think about going back to work.

Family obligations delayed her return to work. Her mother had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease a few years earlier, and her dad was reluctant to arrange institutional care for his wife, feeling that it was his duty to care for her as long as he could. He was getting older as well, and found that some of the physical demands required were more than he could

manage. As her mother's condition continued to deteriorate, her father began asking Carol to help him more and more. She helped out as best as she could, but found that she was emotionally drained. Seeing her once vibrant mother unable to care for herself physically, and more and more not even being aware of the people around her, was very stressful for Carol. Comforting her father over the loss of his life partner was equally difficult. The emotional strain on Carol and her immediate family was immense, as she sometimes felt torn between her role of wife and mother and of daughter.

When her father finally arranged for her mother to be institutionalized, Carol was both saddened and relieved, as it marked a new stage in her life. By then Kaitlyn was almost eight years old and was becoming more independent. Carol began to volunteer with a local women's group, driving older, housebound women to medical appointments and making home visits. This eventually led to a part-time job. She found her experience there very fulfilling, and it did not interfere with her family responsibilities. Recently, she began taking a night school course in gerontology at a nearby community college, and has plans to complete the diploma requirements for geriatric studies. ■

1. What life structure had Carol established for herself in early adulthood and what circumstances led to the adjustment of her identity and life structure?
2. How has Carol achieved generativity in her life?
3. Evaluate whether Carol experienced a midlife crisis as a "turning point" or a "moment of danger."
4. Predict whether Carol and Steven would report a high level of satisfaction in their marriage using the functionalist, systems, and social exchange perspectives.
5. Describe the factors that are affecting the quality of life for Carol's father. How has Carol contributed to his quality of life?

chapter 13 Review and Apply

Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry

1. Create a chart in which you compare the stages of adult life and the behaviour expectations for traditional Chinese and a culture of your choice. Using a functionalist perspective, discuss whether contemporary Canadian society is organized to support the stage behaviour defined by the two descriptions.
2. Summarize the similarities and differences among Charlotte Buhler's, Erik Erikson's, and Daniel Levinson's theories of development in midlife. Identify research questions for testing the validity of the common features of the three theories.
3. Identify and explain Kotre's four forms of generativity. Give examples of how men and women could achieve each form of generativity in Canadian society. Arrange the four forms in order of the value each has in Canadian society, and provide evidence to support your ranking.
4. What are the two definitions of *crisis*? Discuss which definition is supported by the research on midlife crisis. In conclusion, what can you anticipate in midlife?
5. What factors contribute to the decline in satisfaction with marriage? Using social exchange theory, suggest why most people stay married when they are less satisfied with it after ten to twenty years.
6. Explain the meaning of integrity, despair, and wisdom in the eighth stage of life as described by Erik Erikson. Describe how he suggests the outlook on life changes when individuals enter the ninth stage.

Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry Communication

7. Develop a description of the contemporary stages of adult life as they occur for Canadians. Give each stage a name that reflects the meaning of the stage, and describe the role behaviour expected.
8. Write an essay presenting and supporting an opinion on the role of employment in generativity for women in midlife.
9. Write a letter to the editor in which you respond to the article "The Midlife Wake-Up Call" on page 429, using the research presented in this chapter.

10. Investigate the activities available within your community that contribute to the quality of life for older people, and design a brochure promoting participation.

Knowledge/Understanding Thinking/Inquiry Communication Application

11. Using the oral history method, conduct research to assess how individuals now in their fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties achieved generativity in their lives. Compile the results and determine whether they are consistent. Present the results as a brief article, using quotations from the oral histories.
12. Using the oral history method, write a brief life story for an older person in your family or community. Illustrate the life story with photographs and other artifacts.