

In This Chapter

- Setting the Context
- Exploring Personality (and Well-Being)
- Exploring Intelligence (and Wisdom)
- Midlife Roles and Issues

Setting the Context

- **Midlife typically runs from forties to the fifties**
 - Half of people in their sixties and early seventies consider themselves middle-aged
 - Midlife is characterized by diversity regarding lifestyles and perceptions

What do you consider midlife?

Exploring Personality (and Well-being)

Contradictory views about personality changes during adulthood depend on circumstances

No change (personality remains the same)

Change occurs in new stages of life due to life experiences

Tracking the Big Five

- **Personality measured by ranking according to five basic, largely genetically determined temperamental qualities**
- Big Five traits (Costa and McCrae)
 - Neuroticism
 - Extraversion
 - Openness to experience
 - Conscientiousness
 - Agreeableness

Tracking the Fate of Conscientiousness

- **Conscientiousness**
 - Thinking through actions and modulating emotion (executive functions)
 - Important as IQ in predicting GPA
 - Formed by convergence of genetic and environmental influences
- **Conscientious adults**
 - More stable marriages
 - Tend to be affluent or middle class

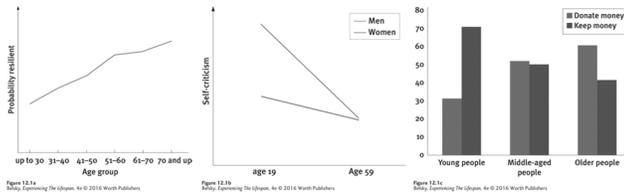
Do we get more mature and happier with age?

- **In every society, agreeableness and extraversion increased from youth into middle age**
 - People with no major negative life events are more distressed than adults who have experienced a few traumatic events
 - After a certain stress threshold (about three major events), additional traumas do impair mental health
 - Research indicates that maximum life happiness is in our early sixties

What to Expect in Middle Age

- Somewhat more reliable and agreeable, although personality will not change much over the years
- Priorities shift toward more generative concerns and to grow in generativity, especially during midlife
- More mature and happier with few (but not too many) stressful life experiences, have prosocial values, and live in a trustworthy society that promotes human equality

Looking at the Evidence



Interesting Forces Promoting Maturity or Distress at Different Stages of Life

Preteen years

- Not being the cool kid crowd

In college

- Having prosocial values

During adulthood

- Experiencing medium amount of stress and coping with difficult life events

Generativity: The Key to a Happy Life

- **Generativity**
 - Focus on nurturing next generation and enriching the lives of others
 - If generativity is not achieved, stagnation occurs, having no sense of purpose in life

Generativity: The Key to a Happy Life

- **McAdams (2001)**
 - Focused on scientifically testing the ideas of Erikson
 - Measures of generativity included
 - Generative attitudes
 - Generative goals and priorities
 - Generative activities
 - Results
 - Few age differences in generative attitudes
 - Age differences in generative priorities

Is generativity the key to happiness during adult life?

- **It depends**

- Is it based on hedonic happiness (i.e., feeling good)?
- Is it based on eudaimonic happiness (i.e., having a purpose and meaning in life)?

Does entering new stages of life or having significant life experiences change personality?

- Highly generative people rate their lives as much more fulfilling than non-generative people
- Highly generative people have a positive impact on their children
- Highly generative people report having positive childhoods

Understanding Highly Generative People

- Exceptionally generative people, such as prize-winning community activists interested in improving society
- Generativity is expressed in different ways depending on culture and gender
 - African Americans are more likely to be unusually generative.



Martin Luther King, Jr.
Making a difference in the wider world

Examining the Childhood Memories of Generative Adults

- **Life stories of highly generative adults**
 - Commitment script: Type of autobiography that involves childhood memories of feeling special; being sensitive to others; having enduring generative mission
 - Redemption sequence: Type of autobiography that involves tragic events that turned out well

LEARN THE TERMS

- Big Five
- Generativity
- Hedonic happiness
- Eudaimonic happiness
- Commitment script
- Redemption sequence

Exploring Intelligence (and Wisdom)

- Mid-twentieth-century psychologists believed that intelligence peaks at age 20 and then begins to decline
 - Studies conducted using Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)
 - Level of education and cohort influence not considered
- Seattle Longitudinal Study conducted in 1960s
 - Researched intelligence and age
 - Used longitudinal and cross-sectional methodology
 - Measured five basic cognitive abilities

Age-related changes in mean scores on the performance and verbal scales of the WAIS

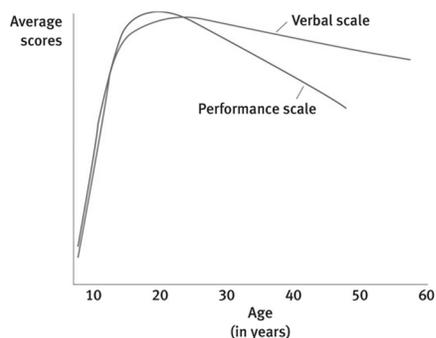


Figure 12.2
Belsky, *Experiencing The Lifespan*, 4e © 2016 Worth Publishers

Improving the Research on Intelligence: The Seattle Longitudinal Study

- **Improvements to the research: combining both longitudinal and cross-sectional methods**
 - Controls for the biases of each research technique
- **Findings**
 - Overall intelligence peaks in the late fifties.
 - Age patterns differ for different tests. On a test measuring knowledge base, scores rose until the late sixties. On tests involving fast performance, abilities decline at a younger age.

Two Types of Intelligence: Crystallized and Fluid Skills

- **Crystallized intelligence: Accumulated knowledge**
 - Tends to increase with age, until later life
 - Then begins to fall
- **Fluid intelligence: Ability to reason quickly when facing totally new intellectual tasks**
 - Linked to nervous system
 - Flynn effect
 - Because of this link, begins to decline early in adult life

Changes in two intellectual abilities over the decades in the Seattle Longitudinal Study

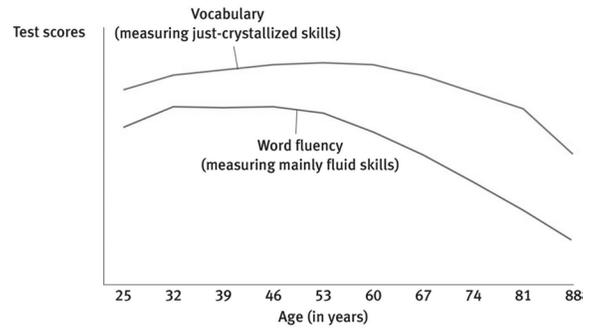
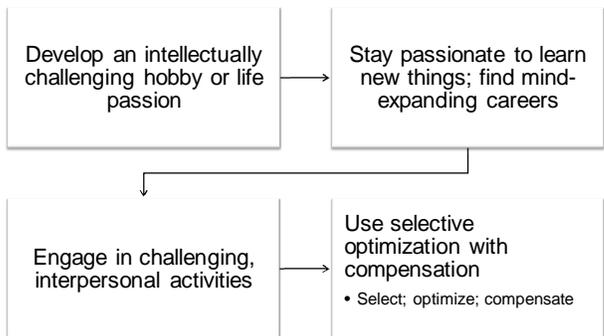


Figure 12.3
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How do we stay cognitively sharp?

- **Healthy mental and physical living**
 - Lack of major health concerns or illnesses
 - Allostatic load
 - Terminal drop in crystallized intelligence can predict existence of a terminal disease
- **Mental stimulation with people**
 - Finding a mentally stimulating partner and/or interesting friends that expand self
 - Engaging in mentally enriching activities (e.g., reading, attending lectures)

Interventions: Keeping A Fine-tuned Mind



Taking a Nontraditional Approach: Examining Postformal Thought

- **Is there an adult stage of Piaget's theory?**
 - Formal operations (adolescents)
 - Postformal thought (adults): Adult form of intelligence that involves being sensitive to different perspectives, making decisions based on one's inner feelings, being interested in exploring new questions

Postformal Thought

- Postformal thought is relativistic.
- Postformal thought is feeling-oriented.
- Postformal thought is question-driven.

Can you describe each of these characteristics?

Age Distribution of "Wisdom" Scores

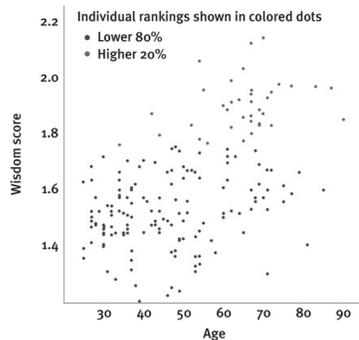


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LEARN THE TERMS

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS)
- Seattle Longitudinal Study
- Crystallized intelligence
- Fluid intelligence
- Allostastic load
- Terminal drop
- Selective optimization with compensation
- Postformal thought

Midlife Roles and Issues

- **Grandparent mission to care**
 - Function as family watchdog and step in during a crisis to help the family
 - Can serve as mentors and mediators
- **Grandparent level of involvement**
 - Influenced by gender, physical proximity, and age
 - Can be enhanced by technology

Midlife Roles and Issues

- **Grandparent problems**
 - Thin line between spoiling versus interfering.
 - Criticizing parents may create risk of being cut off from visits
 - Divorce can impact access to grandchildren
- **Caregiving grandmothers**
 - Have increased in recent decades
 - May assume full-time parenting role



Parent Care

- Parent care: Adult children's care for disabled, elderly parents
 - Highly stressful role; violates the principle: