

PSYC 336

Developmental Psychology II

Session 1 – Introduction to the study of adult development, basic concepts and foundation

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Session Overview

- To understand adult development, there are key concepts that need to be understood. These include the concept of age, ageing, ageism and adulthood. Also relevant are the understanding of the various perspectives in lifespan development, forces of development and methods and designs used for studying adult development. The aim of this session is to introduce students to the basics of adult development.

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Definition of concepts
- Perspectives in life-span development
- Forces of development and aging
- Research methods and designs for studying aging



Reading List

- Read Chapter 1 of Recommended Text – Adult development and aging, Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields (2006).



Topic One

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS



Who is an adult?

- Which of the following persons would you consider to be *adults*?
- A 35-year-old male who is severely mentally retarded.
- An 85-year-old victim of Alzheimer's disease who has a profound memory loss and requires complete nursing care.
- A 40-year-old female who is socially withdrawn and has no friends.
- A 30-year-old male who is financially dependent on his parents.
- A 10-year-old female victim of progeria who looks like a little old woman.
 - Premature aging: a rare condition of premature aging that begins in childhood or early adult life and leads to death within a few months
- A mentally gifted 14-year-old who has just been awarded a college degree in mathematics.
- A 13-year-old female who is married and has a one-year-old child.



A child with progeria



The meaning of age

- When you are asked the question “How old are you?” what crosses your mind?
- Is it the number of years since the day of your birth?
- Is it how old you feel at the time?
- Is it defined more in terms of where you are biologically, psychologically, or socially than in terms of calendar time?
- Age is not a simple construct

The meaning of age

- **Chronological age** is the number of years since the day of your birth
- **Biological age** is assessed by measuring the functioning of the various vital, or life-limiting, organ systems, such as the cardiovascular system
- **Psychological age** refers to the functional level of the psychological abilities people use to adapt to changing environmental demands
- **Socio-cultural age** refers to the specific set of roles individuals adopt in relation to other members of the society and culture to which they belong.
- **Perceived age** refers to the age you think of yourself as.

Back to the question on adulthood

- Adulthood can be viewed from a **biological, legal, psychological, economic, and social or cultural** perspective
- Chronological perspective = 18-20 years of age
 - A, B, C, and D are adults and E, F, and G have not yet attained that status
- Biological or physical perspective, an adult is a person who is fully grown
 - Take into account, different rates of physical maturation
 - E.g., Early maturing boys and girls who act as adults
 - Biology: physical growth varies with the particular organ or organ system
 - E.g., Small percentage of people who are afflicted with physical disorders such as *progeria*

Back to the question on adulthood

- Legal definition vary from place to place
 - Related to the notion of responsibility
 - Between 18 and 21 years
 - Individuals with mental disorders are not considered 'adults'
- Social/cultural perspective: Economic and social changes cause increase in age of dependency
 - Increased in age at job attainment

Stages of adulthood

- **Western societies:**
 - **Early adulthood:** 20-40 years
 - **Middle adulthood:** 40 to 65 years
 - **Later adulthood:** 65 until death
 - Each stage is characterized by certain milestones in the development of physical, cognitive and psychosocial characteristics
- **Non-Western societies and cultures**
 - Stage-grading but different methods
 - E.g., Arusha, East Africa, have six social strata according to age—youth, junior warriors, senior warriors, junior elders, senior elders, and retired elders
- **What are the categories in Ghana?**

The meaning of aging

- **Aging:** gradual and spontaneous changes that occur in maturation from infancy to old adulthood.
 - These changes create a normal physiologic decline seen in middle and late adulthood.
- **Gerontology:** Study of aging from maturity through old age.
- Likewise, aging is not a single process and consist of 3 processes:
- **Primary aging:** is normal, disease-free development during adulthood.
 - Inevitable part of the developmental process
 - E.g., menopause, decline in reaction time
- **Secondary aging:** developmental changes that are related to disease, lifestyle, and other environmentally induced changes that are avoidable
 - E.g., loss of intellectual abilities in Alzheimer's disease

The meaning of aging

- **Tertiary aging:** rapid losses that occur shortly before death
 - E.g., terminal drop, in which intellectual abilities show a marked decline in the last few years before death
- There are individual differences in the pattern of aging
- Whereas some experience typical pattern of aging, others experience highly successful aging with few signs of change
- Differences result from an interaction of
 - genetics
 - optimal environment
 - flexibility in dealing with life situations
 - a strong sense of personal control
 - maybe a bit of luck

Myths about aging

- Aging is all about decline
 - There are both growth and decline
- Myths lead to negative stereotypes of older people
- The stereotypes in turn lead to ageism
 - Ageing is a form of discrimination against older adults based on their age
 - Can you think of any examples?
- E.g.,
 - Believing that all old people are senile and are incapable of making decisions about their lives
 - Being impatient with older adults in a supermarket
 - Dismissing an older person's physical complaints with the question "What do you expect for someone your age?"

Normal vs. Healthy Aging

Normal Aging

- Diseases & impairments of elderly
- People age differently
- Diabetes may be a common disease of adulthood, but is not experienced by all aging adults.

Healthy Aging

- ▶ Minimize and preserve function
- ▶ Influenced by lifestyle choices
- ▶ One may have a healthy life until senescence (old age) makes life impossible.

Topic Two

PERSPECTIVES IN LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENT



Perspectives in Life-Span Development

- The **life-span perspective divides human development** into two phases:
 - an early phase (childhood and adolescence)
 - a later phase (young adulthood, middle age, and old age)
- Paul Baltes (1987; Baltes et al., 1998) identified four key features of the life-span perspective
- **Multidirectionality:** Development late in life does not only reflect losses but also growth.
 - e.g.: Decline in vision but increased wisdom/perspective on life
- **Plasticity:** Capacity for change & learning.
 - e.g.: Learning to play an instrument.
- **Historical Context:** Environmental and cultural influences. Generational effects.
- **Multiple Causation:** Biological, psychological, socio-cultural & life-cycle influences.



Perspectives in Life-Span Development

- Baltes et al. (1998) argue that life-span development consists of the dynamic interactions among **growth, maintenance, and loss regulation**.
- They identified four critical factors that emphasize the need for resource to maintain functioning
- As people grow older they show an:
 - age-related reduction in the amount and quality of biologically based resources.
 - an age-related increase in the amount and quality of culture needed to generate continuously higher growth.
 - an age-related decline in the efficiency with which they use cultural resources.
 - there is a lack of cultural, “old-age friendly” support structures.
 - Less resource is devoted to continued growth

Demographics on aging

- Globally, more people are aging due to better health care
 - the global rate (60+) is at 3.2% per annum
 - by 2015, 1.5 billion (WHO, NIA & NIH, 2011)
 - highest rates will be in developing countries with over 250% between 2010 and 2050
- Educational levels of older individuals are increasing
 - Linked to well-being
- Europe is the “oldest” area in the world
 - Italy has the largest percentage of older people
- Africa is considered the youngest area in the world
 - due to poor access of health care and higher incidence of AIDS
- Sub-Saharan Africa, aging population is rising @207% (United Nations, 2011)
 - By 2050, the aged will constitute 10% of continent’s population

Demographics on aging: Ghana

- Rapid increase in the population of the aged from 213,477 in 1960 to 1,643,381 in 2010 (Ghana Statistical Services, 2013)
 - 87%
- Ghana has the highest proportions of persons aged 60 years and above in sub-Saharan Africa with 7.2% of the Ghanaian population being elderly (Mba, 2010)

Topic Three

FORCES OF DEVELOPMENT AND AGEING



Forces of development and aging

- Forces explain questions such as:
 - Why do some people develop gray hair in young adulthood?
 - Why do some adults continue to remember everything well, whereas others do not?
 - Why are some older adults very active, whereas others withdraw?
- **Biological forces**
 - *include all genetic and health-related factors that affect development.*
 - *E.g., menopause, facial wrinkling, and changes in the major organ systems.*
- **Psychological forces**
 - *include all internal perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and personality factors that affect development.*
 - Collectively, psychological forces provide the characteristics we notice about people that make them individuals.



Forces of development and aging

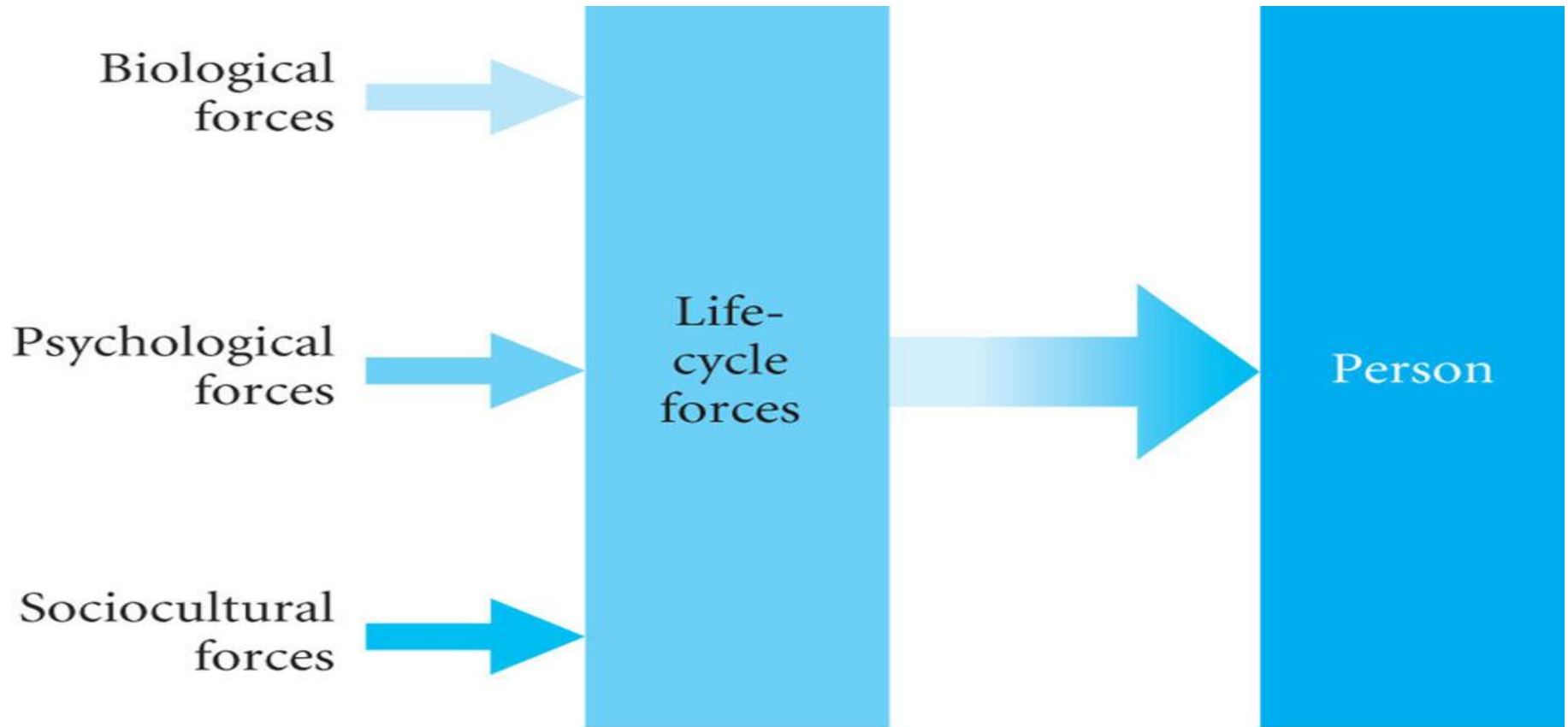
- **Socio-cultural forces**

- include interpersonal, societal, cultural, and ethnic factors that affect development.
- Socio-cultural forces provide the overall contexts in which we develop.

- **Life-cycle forces**

- reflect differences in how the same event or combination of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural forces affects people at different points in their lives.
- Life-cycle forces provide the context for the developmental differences of interest in adult development and aging.

Forces of development and aging



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All the forces combine to create people's developmental experiences

Interrelations among forces

- Baltes et al. (1998) identifies 3 sets of influences that interact to produce developmental change over the life span
- **Normative age-graded influences:** Experiences caused by biological, psychological, and socio-cultural forces that are highly correlated with **chronological age**.
- These events typically correspond to major time-marker events, which are often ritualized
 - Biological: puberty, menarche, and menopause
 - Psychological: Middle-aged person's concern with socializing the younger generation
 - Socio-cultural: the time for first marriage and retirement

Interrelations among forces

- **Normative history-graded influences:** Events shared by most people in a certain culture at a **certain point in time**.
- These events may be:
 - biological (such as epidemics),
 - psychological (such as particular stereotypes), or
 - Socio-cultural (such as changing attitudes toward sexuality).
- These events give a generation its unique identity
 - such as the baby-boom generation: 1946-1960
- These influences can have a profound effect
 - E.g., the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 changed attitudes towards safety and security

Interrelations among forces

- **Non-normative influences:** Random or rare events that are specific to the life of an individual but are not experienced by most people.
 - E.g., winning the lottery or an election, accident or layoff.

Topic Four

RESEARCH METHODS IN ADULT DEVELOPMENT



Research methods in adult development

- In gerontology, some of the main approaches/methods used include:
- Systematic observation
 - Naturalistic or structured (researcher creates a setting)
- Sampling behaviour with tasks
 - E.g., to study memory, researcher can ask older individuals to memorise and recall information
- Self-report
- Interviews



General designs

- **Experimental design:** manipulating a key factor that the researcher believes is responsible for a particular behavior and randomly assigning participants to the experimental and control groups
- **Correlational design:** examine relations between variables as they exist naturally in the world
- **Case study:** may be able to study a single individual in great detail

Designs for studying development across time

- **Longitudinal Designs:** same individuals are observed or tested repeatedly at different points in their lives.
 - Disadvantages include:
 - carryover effects
 - Mortality due to moving, dying, or refusal
 - Changes in researchers
- **Cross-Sectional Designs:** developmental differences are identified by testing people of different ages at the same time.
 - Disadvantages include:
 - Matching difficulties
 - Cohort effects: Difficult to explain whether findings are due to aging process itself, by generational or cultural differences (cohort differences), or by time-related changes in the attitudes and values of society
- **Time-lag/Sequential designs** represent different combinations of cross-sectional or longitudinal studies
 - Advantage: Correct errors from longitudinal and cross-sectional designs

Designs for studying development across time

- Such designs have three key variables:
 - Age, cohort, and time of measurement
- **Age effects** reflect differences caused by underlying processes, such as biological, psychological, or socio-cultural changes
- **Cohort effects** are differences caused by experiences and circumstances unique to the generation to which one belongs
- **Time-of-measurement effects** reflect differences stemming from socio-cultural, environmental, historical, or other events at the time the data are obtained from the participants.

Designs for studying development across time

- **Retrospective and prospective studies:** are used to study **risk** factors associated with diseases
 - determine changes and stability in physical and psychological characteristics over time.
- **Prospective studies: individuals without disease** are followed over a period of time to
 - determine what characteristics and behaviors differentiate between people who eventually develop the disease from people who remain free of it.
- **Retrospective studies: the life history of individuals who have the disease are examined**
 - identify correlates and causes of the disease.

Sample Questions

- Using relevant examples, describe three ways in which adulthood can be defined?
- Distinguish between primary aging, secondary aging and tertiary aging
- Citing relevant examples, expatiate two forces of developing and aging.

References

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