Erikson’s Theory: Intimacy versus Isolation

According to Erikson, what personality changes take place during early adulthood?

In Erikson’s theory, young adults must resolve the conflict of intimacy versus isolation, balancing independence and intimacy as they form a close relationship with a partner. Research confirms that intimacy is a central concern of early adulthood. Young people also focus on aspects of generativity, including contributions to society through work and child rearing.

Other Theories of Adult Psychosocial Development

Describe Levinson’s and Vaillant’s psychosocial theories of adult personality development.

Levinson described a series of eras, each consisting of a transition and a stable period, in which people revise their life structure. Young adults usually construct a dream, typically involving career for men and both marriage and career for women, and form a relationship with a mentor to help them realize their dream. In their thirties, they focus on aspects of their lives that have received less attention. Men settle down, whereas many women remain unsettled into middle adulthood.

Vaillant refined Erikson’s stages, portraying the twenties as devoted to intimacy, the thirties to career consolidation, the forties to guiding others, and the fifties to cultural and philosophical values.

What is the social clock, and how does it affect personality in adulthood?

Although societal expectations have become less rigid, conformity to or departure from the social clock, the culturally determined timetable for major life events, can be a major source of personality change in adulthood. Following a social clock grants confidence to young adults, whereas deviating from it can bring psychological distress.

Close Relationships

Describe factors that affect mate selection and the role of romantic love in the young adult’s quest for intimacy.

Establishing an intimate bond is a major milestone of adult development. Romantic partners tend to resemble one another in age, ethnicity, SES, religion, and various personal and physical attributes.

According to evolutionary theory, women seek a mate with traits that help ensure children’s survival, whereas men look for characteristics that signal sexual pleasure and ability to bear offspring. An alternative, social learning perspective emphasizes that gender roles profoundly influence criteria for mate selection. Research suggests that both biological and social forces are involved.

According to the triangular theory of love, the balance among passion, intimacy, and commitment changes as romantic relationships move from the intense sexual attraction of passionate love toward more settled relationships.

Strategies That Help Dual-Earner Couples Combine Work and Family Roles

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<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Devise a plan for sharing household tasks.</td>
<td>As soon as possible in the relationship, discuss division of household responsibilities. Decide who does a particular chore on the basis of who has the needed skill and time, not on the basis of gender. Schedule regular times to redesign your plan to fit changing family circumstances.</td>
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<td>Begin sharing child care right after the baby’s arrival.</td>
<td>For fathers, strive to spend equal time with the baby early. For mothers, refrain from imposing your standards on your partner. Instead, share the role of “child-rearing expert” by discussing parenting values and concerns often. Attend a parent education course together.</td>
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<td>Talk over conflicts about decision making and responsibilities.</td>
<td>Face conflict through communication. Clarify your feelings and needs and express them to your partner. Listen and try to understand your partner’s point of view. Then be willing to negotiate and compromise.</td>
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<td>Establish a balance between work and family.</td>
<td>Critically evaluate the time you devote to work in view of your values and priorities. If it is too much, cut back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make sure your relationship receives regular loving care and attention.</td>
<td>See the Caregiving Concerns table on page 454.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Press for workplace and public policies that assist dual-earner couples.</td>
<td>Difficulties faced by dual-earner couples are partly due to lack of workplace and societal supports. Encourage your employer to provide benefits that help combine work and family roles, such as flexible work hours; parental leave with pay; and onsite high-quality, affordable child care. Communicate with lawmakers and other citizens about improving public policies for children and families.</td>
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Summary

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