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Introduction. Interest in development at midlife is experiencing a resurgence. Although the early theoretical work of Jung (1960) eluded to development in the second half of life, most theories failed to address midlife as a unique developmental period. Indeed, middle age as a normative phase in human development is clearly a 20th century phenomenon, resulting from a rapid increase in average life expectancy (from 45-50 years at the turn of the century to approximately 75 years today). Thus, interest in, and study of, middle age is a relatively recent occurrence marked by an increase in theory and research within the latter half of this century.

The pioneering work of Dr. Bernice Neugarten in the 1960's served to focus attention to this phase of the life cycle. Subsequently, theoretical and popular studies of midlife have changed the way our culture thinks about the midlife years. Popular literature has, for example, suggested that normative development in middle age includes experiencing a "midlife crisis". Within the existing literature on midlife, we see two diverging perspectives. One perspective, evolving from a "strong" developmental position, maintains that there are universal stages of development derived primarily from intraorganismic

sources/influences (e.g., Erikson, Levinson) (Erikson, 1963; Levinson, 1976). The second perspective focuses more on experiential and sociocultural influences on development and is, hence, concerned with individual variability (e.g. Neugarten) (Neugarten, 1968).

As psychologists, Dr Willis and myself are concerned primarily with psychological issues in midlife. A lifespan perspective, suggests that there are multiple influences on development. Earlier work (Baltes & Willis, 1979) within the lifespan perspective has suggested three domains of influence (age-graded, history-graded, and non-normative). Although all three domains of influence are considered to operate over the life span, it has been suggested that the relative saliency of the domains may vary across phases of development. In this paper, we explore various approaches to the study of midlife from a life span developmental perspective.

Normative Age-Grading

Within the broad disciplines of both psychology and sociology the impact of age-graded influences on midlife development has received considerable attention. Normative Age-graded influences are highly correlated with chronological age: they include both biological and environmental determinants of development (Baltes & Willis; 1979). Two models focusing on age-graded transitions are central to both psychological and sociological approaches to the study of midlife: the Normative-Crisis Model and the Timing of

Events Model. The Normative-Crisis Model of development is a prototypical example of age-graded psychological theories of development in which intrapsychic transitions influence development at age specific stages. Whereas, the sociological perspective is characteristic of a Timing of Events Model in which transitions are regulated by the social structure based upon chronological age.

The normative-crisis model is represented by theories which postulate that age-graded intrapsychic transitions are; (a) normative and universal- experienced by all individuals across all cultures, (b) involve a set of unidirectional stages, (c) invariant-- experienced in same order by all individuals, and (d) occur at the same developmental periods (chronological ages). Each transition occurs at a "time of special ascendancy". Such age-graded influences are particularly apparent in psychoanalytic theories which conceptualize development as proceeding through a series of organismically driven stages.

Erikson's developmental stage model is the foremost example of a normative-crisis model which extended the study of development into midlife and old age. In midlife, Erikson proposes that all individuals are presented with the need to resolve the conflict between self-absorption and stagnation versus generativity. While the normative-crisis model postulates that a developmental transition or crisis occurs at each developmental phase, some (Jacques, Levinson) have suggested that the transition in midlife is particularly traumatic (e.g. the midlife crisis).

Sociological Literature

In the discipline of sociology, the life-course has been examined in terms of a "timing of events model" (Rossi, 1980) in which individuals experience a series of culturally defined age-related transitions shared by individuals of a given society, of a given age. A life-course perspective stresses "age-related transitions that are socially created, socially recognized, and shared" (Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985 p.35). Whereas, in the normative-crisis model transitions begin at the intrapsychic or cognitive level, in the sociological timing of events model age-graded transitions are socially created and then become represented cognitively as individuals in a given culture assign common meaning to the passage of time (LeVine, 1978; Plath 1982). Hagestad and Neugarten (1985) cite anthropological evidence indicating the universality of assigning social position and making behavioral proscriptions based upon chronological age.

The relative salience of socioculturally determined age-graded influences on development are clearly apparent in childhood. Similarly, entry into young adulthood has been studied in terms of five transition events; completion of schooling, leaving the parental home; entering the job market, marriage, and starting a family. However, in midlife, age related transitions become less apparent. For example, there is considerable variability in terms of parental age when children leave home, or when one becomes a grandparent, making the chronological age at which one experiences these life events and transitions irrelevant.

Neugarten's early work in the 1960's (Neugarten, 1965) indicated that when research participants were asked to identify the ideal age for an individual to experience certain life events and transitions, there was considerable consensus, indicating age graded regularities in the timing of transitions. However, in the past decade a general trend toward loosening of age norms has been observed. In a replication of Neugarten's study, Zepelin, Sills, and Heath (1987) report that there is increasing variability in the ideal age for an individual to experience certain life events and transitions.

Age-norm expectations are less salient in midlife, and it appears that age-graded expectations are in a state of flux. In contrast to childhood and young adulthood where entry and exit transitions are more clearly defined, midlife may not be characterized by such quasi-universal age-related transitions marking entry into middle age. Moreover, although exit from middle age has often been defined in terms of age of retirement, recently there has been trend toward increasing the age of mandatory retirement. Such shifts in retirement policies may redefine the normative age in which one exits from midlife.

In summary, there is little doubt that normative age-grading influences development across the life span. While age-graded models of midlife development have been prominent in both psychology and sociology, such models do not fully explain all of development during midlife. Thus, there appears to be a need to consider other developmental influence during midlife.

Normative History-Graded Influences

Normative History-graded influences on development are biological and environmental events which exhibit a fairly high correlation with a historical time period (Baltes & Willis, 1979). It has been proposed that rapid social change will act as a catalyst for differential aging, with successive cohorts experiencing biosocial conditions much different from preceding cohorts. An individuals' life course is characterized by passage through an age-differentiated social structure which affects the timing, duration, spacing, and ordering of events. Such parameters are, in turn, affected by the historical period in which an individual lives. Understanding of cohort effects (Schaie & Willis, 1986) has increased our sensitivity to the differential consequences of historical influences on development.

Single-cohort studies of midlife are problematic because they cannot identify history-graded influences on development in middle age. Rossi (1980) has noted that many of the current stereotypes and beliefs about middle age are based upon studies conducted in the 1970's. These studies were based on a limited set of cohorts (1920-1930) with unique experiences in childhood and young adulthood (e.g. the economic depression, World War II). In fact, these cohorts are the parents of the Baby Boomers. The field of questions regarding differences between the phenomenological and behavioral experiences of baby boomers and their parents when

tested using cohort-sequential designs will be the source of rich data for current investigators of midlife.

As noted earlier, we have observed a general trend toward a loosening of strict age-grading. Of particular interest in midlife may be history-graded influences which have contributed to the loosening of strict age-grading within Western culture. For example, the civil rights movement, which is perhaps best exemplified by the famous Martin Luther King "I have a dream" speech which envisioned a society where 'all....would be free at last' was the emancipation proclamation for all disenfranchised groups. The many social movements of the 1960's were history-graded events which reduced the salience of indices such as age, race, and gender in defining social structure and behavioral restrictions.

As a result of social and political reforms, as well as advances in technology, during the past two decades, entry and exit from midlife roles has become more variable and new social roles in midlife are evolving. For example, divorce is no longer considered rare, men and women are free to marry later in life, or remain single. Middle age women have re-entered the workforce, sought greater educational attainment, and initiated child bearing during midlife. Hence, the onset and duration of various experiences across the life course has become increasingly individualized, and thus, more variable. In addition, the 1970's have witnessed an increased emphasis on personal freedom and individualization. The spirit of the "me generation" can be

characterized by unprecedented personal autonomy for individuals irregardless of age, race, or gender.

In summary, history-graded influences have produced an increased diversity in midlife development. In combination, with an observed loosening of normative age-grading, sociocultural changes have lead to greater variability in social roles for individuals during middle age. Moreover, greater variability in midlife suggests progression toward greater diversity in old age.

Non-Normative Influences

Another category of developmental influences in midlife, are non-normative influences. Non-normative influences are neither age-graded nor history-graded. They operate at the level of a particular individual, and are not experienced by most individuals in their lifetime (Schaie & Willis, 1986). There are two types of non-normative events which can be either positive or negative. The first type of non-normative events are rare events. That is, events such as unusual successes (e.g. winning the lottery), or unusual losses (e.g. developing a rare disease). The second type of non-normative events are those that occur for an individual earlier or later than defined by age-graded norms. For example, very early retirement or very late motherhood.

Midlife can be seen as a time in which there is no overarching blueprint for development. Rather, it is a time characterized by increasing variability among and within individuals. Thus, at midlife, there is a window of opportunity for non-normative

influences to affect development.

The increasing salience of Non-normative events in midlife have at least three sources. The first source seems to be the loosening of age-graded influences. As individuals reach midlife, the normative age-graded influences which were particularly powerful in childhood and young adulthood become less salient. In the absence of age norms, behavioral and emotional events can occur at different time sequences for differing individuals.

Secondly, significant historical events emphasizing personal freedom, individualization, and self-actualization have further contributed to an increasing diversity in experience in middle age. In our increasingly pluralistic society where normative age-graded expectations on behavior have become less powerful, the timing of onset of specific midlife tasks (if they occur at all) becomes increasingly individualized. As a result, people are free to peruse interests and activities which by definition may be non-normative, and in turn, increase the likelihood of non-normative events.

A third source of non-normative events comes from the observation of increasing variability of biological functioning with age. However, these changes in organ system are not normative. In contrast to childhood in which there are genetically programmed age-graded changes in organ systems, midlife is characterized as an extended period where individual differences are observed in organ systems. Indeed, in all organ systems there is a well documented increase in variability with age (Kligman,

1979; Storer, 1965) however, chronic health conditions are not normative until old age. Nevertheless, it is in midlife when some chronic health conditions first become manifest, with myocardial infarctions in men being perhaps the best example. Increasing individual differences in organ functioning sets the stage for wide variability in human performance. In addition, changes in biomedical technology have increased life expectancy for persons experiencing non-normative chronic conditions in midlife. In sum, the increasing salience of non-normative events at midlife may be related to increasing biological variability and diversity of experience.

In conclusion, we have identified three influences on development during midlife (normative age-graded influences, normative history-graded influences, and non-normative influences). Each needs to be considered to fully understand the nature of change and stability among and within individuals. We have proposed, that the relative importance of normative age-graded influences becomes lessened during midlife. Similarly, normative history-graded influences have allowed greater variation in social roles which has made midlife a more liberated period. Finally, it is during midlife when non-normative influences (such as rare events, or events usually experienced earlier or later in life) may become more salient. Thus, in midlife developmental influences become more variable, laying the foundation for differential aging.

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