

Script - Young adulthood / Early adulthood

Module 1- Introduction

Begins in late teens/early 20s and lasts through the 40s. Term for the transition from adolescence to adulthood that is characterized by experimentation and exploration

Early adulthood is a time of:

- establishing personal and economic independence
- Identity exploration, especially in love and work
- Instability; Self-focused

The word *adult* comes from the same Latin verb as the term ***adolescence-adolescere*** which means "**to grow to maturity.**" However, the word adult is derived from the past participle of that verb-***adultus*** -which means "**grown to full size and strength**" or "**matured.**" Adults are, therefore, individuals who have completed their growth and are ready to assume their status in society along with other adults.

Various cultures have different ages at which children reach the adult status or the age of legal maturity, in most of the older cultures, they reached this status when their puberty growth was complete or nearly complete and when their sex organs had developed to the point where they were capable of procreation. Until recently, children were not considered legally adults until they reached the age of twenty-one years. Today, adulthood is legally reached at the age of eighteen. With a gradual increase in longevity, adulthood is now by far the longest period in the total life span.

Developmental tasks of early adulthood 1. Selecting a mate, 2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role, 3. Learning to live with a marriage partner, 4. Starting a family, 5. Rearing children, 6. Managing a home, 7. Getting started in an occupation, 8. Taking on civic responsibility, 9. Finding a congenial social group.

Module 2 - Characteristics of early adulthood

Early adulthood is a period of adjustments to new patterns of life and new social expectations. The young adult is expected to play new roles, such as that of spouse, parent, and breadwinner, and to develop new attitudes, interests, and values in keeping with these new roles.

Early adulthood is the "Settling-down age"

Childhood and adolescence are the periods of "**growing up**" and that adulthood is the time for "**settling down**." In past generations, it was assumed that when boys and girls reached the age of legal maturity, their days of carefree freedom were over and the time had come to settle down and assume the responsibilities of adult life. That meant settling into a line of work that would be the man's career for the rest of his life, while the young Woman was expected to assume the responsibilities of homemaker and mother-responsibilities that would be hers for the remainder of her life.

Early adulthood is the "Reproductive age"

Parenthood is one of the most important roles in the lives of most young adults. Those who were married during the latter years of adolescence concentrate on the role of parenthood during their twenties and early thirties; some become grandparents before early adulthood ends. Those who do not marry until they have completed their education or have started their life careers, do not become parents until they feel they can afford to have a family. This is often not until the early thirties. Also, if women want to pursue careers after marriage, they may put off having children until the thirties. For them, then, only the last decade of early adulthood is the "**reproductive age**." For those who begin to have children early in adulthood or even in the closing years of adolescence and have large families, all of early adulthood is likely to be a reproductive age.

Early adulthood is a "Problem age"

The early adult years present many new problems, different in their major aspects, from the problems experienced in the earlier years of life. With the lowering of the age of legal maturity to eighteen years, young adults have been confronted with many problems they are totally unprepared to cope with.

While they are now able to vote, to own property, to marry without parental consent, and to do many things young people could not do when the age of legal maturity was twenty-one years, there is no question about the fact that "this new-found freedom is creating unforeseen problems for the youthful adults, and often for their parents, too".

Early adulthood is a Period of emotional tension

When people are trying to get the lay of a new land in which they find themselves, they are likely to be emotionally upset. By the early or mid-thirties, most young adults have solved their problems well enough to become emotionally stable and calm. Should the heightened emotionality characteristic of the early years of adulthood persist into the thirties, it suggests that adjustments to adult life have not been satisfactorily made. When emotional tension persists into the thirties, it is generally expressed in worries.

Early adulthood is a Period of social isolation

With the end of formal education and the entrance into the adult life pattern of work and marriage, associations with the peer groups of adolescence wane and, with them, opportunities for social contacts outside the home. As a result, for the first time since babyhood even the most popular individual is likely to experience social isolation, or what Erikson has referred to as an "**isolation crisis**".

Early Adulthood is a time of commitments

As young adults change their role from that of student and dependent, characteristic of adolescence, to that of independent adult, they establish new patterns of living, assume new responsibilities, and make new commitments. While these new patterns of living, new responsibilities, and new commitments may change later, they form the foundations on which later patterns of living, responsibilities, and commitments will be established.

Early adulthood is often a Period of dependency

In spite of achieving the status of legal adulthood at age eighteen, with the independence This status carries, many young adults are partially or totally dependent on others for varying lengths of time. This dependency may be on parents; on the educational institution, they attend on part or total scholarship, or on the government for loans to finance their education.

Module 3 - Physical development

Early adulthood is, for most people, the time of peak physical capacity. The body reaches full height by the late teens, and physical strength increases into the late 20s and early 30s (Whitbourne, 2001). Manual agility and coordination, and sensory capacities such as vision and hearing, are also at their peak. But change is imminent, even in these basic capacities. Some decline in the perception of high-pitched tones is found by the late 20s (Whitbourne, 2001), and manual dexterity begins to reduce in the mid 30s. In general, people in early adulthood feel robust and energetic, although it is not unusual to see fluctuations around deadlines and exam periods!

On the other hand, people in this age group are also legally able to use damaging substances, such as alcohol and tobacco, and many can obtain access to illegal stimulants or narcotics. Young adults also have increasing responsibility for organizing their own eating habits and exercise regimes. Not surprisingly, the health status and prospects of young adults are dependent more than ever before on their own behavioural choices.

Physical Development

- Physical strength typically peaks in early adulthood (the 20's and 30's)
- Although physical changes are minimal during this phase, the weight and muscle mass change as a result of diet, exercise, pregnancy and lactation.
- Growth and strength in early adulthood, then slow process of decline afterwards
- Decline affected by health and lifestyles

Cognitive development in early adulthood

- Piaget believed that the formal operational stage (ages 11 to 15) is the highest stage of thinking
- Adults gain knowledge, but ways of thinking are the same as those of adolescents
- Some researchers disagree with Piaget and believe that thinking in early adulthood becomes more realistic and pragmatic post-formal thought
- thought that is
 - Reflective and relativistic
 - Realistic, their idealism decreases
 - Emotion & subjective factors can influence thinking
 - Late adolescence to early adulthood is the main age window for wisdom (expert knowledge about the practical aspects of life that permits excellent judgment about important matters).

By the end of adolescence, most people are capable of the levels of reasoning that we would expect for normal functioning in adult society. Although there are wide individual differences in attainment, most young adults are able to deal with cognitive tasks in a more abstract way than before, and to attain solutions to problems by comparing possible explanations. Does this mean that cognitive development has reached a plateau? Many investigators of adult cognition think not.

Riegel's theory of postformal thought Riegel (1975) proposed that adult experiences expose us to a new level of cognitive challenge – the discovery of dialectical (opposing) forces. In other words, we find that many aspects of our environment can manifest contradictory features. This is especially so in the human environment. For example, someone we love can be warm and generous at times, but on other occasions the same person can be self-centred and aloof. Are they generous or selfish, affectionate or remote? There are many other contexts in which we experience contradictory information about a person, group or organization, or we encounter strongly differing points of view on the same issue. There may be no absolute resolution of the conflicts. We simply have to integrate our understanding into a more complex picture.

Module 4 - Brain changes in young adulthood

- Setting the stage--adolescence
- Changes in young adulthood
 - Prefrontal cortex
 - Connections among regions
 - “Executive suite”
 - 20s and beyond

Setting the stage--adolescence: The limitations of the “teen brain” has been well publicized in the mass media, helping parents, teachers, and others understand why it may be difficult for teens to meet our expectations and demands for managing emotions, handling risks, responding to relationships, and engaging in complex school work or employment. In early- and mid-adolescence, the brain undergoes considerable growth and pruning, moving generally from back to front areas of the cerebral cortex.

Changes in young adulthood: At the same time that young adults are experiencing new levels of sophistication in thinking and emotional regulation, their brains are undergoing changes in precisely the areas associated with these functions.

While it is not possible to determine cause-and-effect, brain and behaviour are changing in parallel. Prefrontal cortex: The most widely studied changes in young adulthood are in the prefrontal cortex, the area behind the forehead associated with planning, problem-solving, and related tasks.

At least two things affect the efficiency in its functioning:

Myelination: the nerve fibers are more extensively covered with myelin, a substance that insulates them so that signals can be transmitted more efficiently, and

Synaptic pruning: the “briar patch” of connections resulting from nerve growth is pruned back, allowing the remaining ones to transmit signals more efficiently.

Connections among regions: At the same time, the prefrontal cortex communicates more fully and effectively with other parts of the brain, including those that are particularly associated with emotion and impulses, so that all areas of the brain can be better involved in planning and problem-solving.

“Executive suite”: The cluster of functions that center in the prefrontal cortex is sometimes called the “executive suite,” including calibration of risk and reward, problem-solving, prioritizing, thinking ahead, self-evaluation, long-term planning, and regulation of emotion. (See Merlin Donald, Daniel Keating, and others in References.) It is not that these tasks cannot be done before young adulthood, but rather that it takes less effort, and hence is more likely to happen.

Module 5 - Social and emotional development

Young adults face some formidable developmental tasks. Many people at the beginning of this stage are concerned with launching a career. They may be studying to gain the critical qualifications, or training at the entry level of an organization. Some will not be so lucky. In many countries, youth unemployment rates have been very high during the last century and appear set to continue. Studying, employment and unemployment each present its stresses. At the same time, young adults tend to be finding their way through the world of romance, which can also lead to stress and anguish.

All of this happens alongside changes in relationships with parents, and the increasing expectation that the young person will take responsibility for her own life – including, perhaps, a shift to a new home. It would be an unusual person indeed who proceeded through these developmental tasks without at least occasionally wondering who she is, or who she is becoming, and how she is faring compared to her peers. For most people, facing these issues brings a range of emotional reactions.

A stage model for personal development several different theories have been put forward to account for personal development during early adulthood. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Erikson and Erikson (1997) see the dominant focus of this stage as the development of intimacy – the ability to love and trust another person. Levinson (1978) extended some of Erikson's ideas, but drew also on social psychological theory to explain the relationship between the developing individual and the demands of society. He emphasized the social role requirements at different life stages, and the interaction between personal growth and relationships. He maintained that all normally developing adults progress through the same stages in the same sequence, and at roughly the same pace.

Friendships

- The focus of adult friendships is somewhat different for men and women
- Female friends tend to:
 - confide in one another about their feelings, problems, and interpersonal relationships
- Male friends typically:
 - minimize discussions about relationships or personal feelings or problems;
 - Instead, male friends tend to do things together that they find mutually interesting, such as activities related to sports or hobbies

Sex-role adjustments in early adulthood

Sex-role adjustments during early adulthood are extremely difficult. Long before adolescence is over, boys and girls are well aware of the approved adult sex roles but this does not necessarily lead to acceptance. Many adolescent girls want to play the role of wife and mother when they reach adulthood, but they do not want to be wives and mothers in the traditional sense-being subordinate to their husbands, devoting most of their time to their homes and children, and having few or no outside interests.

The hope of many of today's young women for an egalitarian marriage is based not on wishful thinking but on the realization that there have been marked changes in the adult pattern of living. For example, wives often work until their husbands finish their education or become established in business or they take jobs in order to acquire various status symbols that the family would otherwise be unable to afford. Most important of all, young women are aware of the breakdown of the "double standard," not only in sexual and moral behaviour, but also in social, business, and professional life.

In fact, the traditional concepts are gradually being modified or even replaced by new, more egalitarian ones-concepts that stress similar behaviour patterns for members of the two sexes. These egalitarian concepts have found acceptance among all social groups, even those which formerly held firmly to traditional concepts of the male and female roles. The traditional and egalitarian concepts of adult sex roles are given below.

Many young women recognize the low prestige associated with the traditional role of Wife and mother, and consequently they have little motivation to learn this role. When they become wives and mothers, they see little opportunity for escape from this role into one they previously found more satisfying and personally rewarding. Conflict between what they would like to do and what they know they must do further weakens their motivation to play the traditionally prescribed sex role.

Module 6 - Social and personality development in early adulthood

Erikson's theory: intimacy versus isolation

Erikson's contributions have energized the study of adult personality development. His Vision has influenced all contemporary theories. According to Erikson, adults move through three stages, each bringing both opportunity and risk-"a turning point for better or worse". The psychological conflict of early adulthood is intimacy versus isolation, reflected in the young person's thoughts and feelings about making a permanent commitment to an intimate partner.

Those who have achieved the stage of **intimacy** are able to commit themselves to concrete affiliations and partnerships with others and have developed the "ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises". This leads to **solidarity** between partners.

Erikson was found quoting Freud's response when asked what he thought a normal person should be able to do well: "*Lieben und arbeiten*" - "to love and to work." To Freud, then sharing responsibility for mutual achievements and the loving feelings that result from them are the essence of adulthood. Erikson fully agreed with this. Thus when Freud uses the term *Genitality* to describe this same period he does not merely mean sexual intercourse; he is referring rather to the ability to share one's deeply held values, needs, and secrets with another through the generosity that is so important in intimacy.

Erikson believed that successful resolution of intimacy versus isolation prepares the individual for the middle adulthood stage, which focuses on *Generativity*-caring for the next generation and helping to improve society. In sum, both intimacy and Generativity emerge in early adulthood, with shifts in emphasis that differ among young people.

Diversity of adult lifestyles

Today, non-traditional family options have penetrated. Many adults experience not just one, but several options. Some adults make a deliberate decision to adopt a lifestyle, where as others drift into it.

The lifestyle may be imposed by society, as is the case for cohabiting homosexual couples, who cannot marry legally. Or people may decide on a certain lifestyle because they feel pushed away from another, such as a marriage gone sour. In sum, the adoption of a lifestyle can be within or beyond the person's control.

Singlehood

Singlehood-not living with an intimate partner-has increased in recent years, especially among young adults. Besides more people marrying later or not at all, divorce has added to the numbers of single adults. In view of these trends, it is likely that most will spend a substantial part of their adult lives single. Because they marry later, more young adult men than women are single. But women are more likely than men to remain single for many years or their entire life. With age, fewer men are available with characteristics that most women seek in a mate-the same age or older, equally or better educated, and professionally successful.

Cohabitation

Cohabitation refers to the lifestyle of unmarried couples who have an intimate, sexual relationship and share a residence. Until the 1960s, cohabitation in Western nations was largely limited to low-SES adults. Since then, it has increased in all groups, with an especially dramatic rise among well-educated, economically advantaged young people. Young adults are much more likely than those of a generation ago to choose cohabitation as a way of forming their first conjugal union.

Childlessness

Some people are *involuntarily* childless because they did not find a partner with whom to share parenthood or their efforts at fertility treatments did not succeed. There are couples who choose not to have children as a matter of fact that voluntary

Childlessness is not always a permanent condition. A few people decide early that they do not want to be parents and stick to these plans. But most make their decision after they are married and have developed a lifestyle they do not want to give up. Later, some change their minds.

Divorce and remarriage

Divorce rates have increased as financial stability increased and marital satisfaction has decreased. Divorces are also common during the transition to midlife, when people have teenage children-a period of low marital satisfaction. About three-fourths of divorced people remarry. But marital failure is even greater during the first few years of second marriages.

Remarriage: On average, people remarry within 4 years of divorce, men somewhat faster than women. For several reasons, remarriages are especially vulnerable to breakup. First, although people often remarry for love, practical matters-financial security, help in rearing children, relief from loneliness, and social acceptance-figure more heavily into a second marriage than a first. These concerns do not provide a sound footing for a lasting partnership. Second, some people transfer the negative patterns of interaction and problem solving learned in their first marriage to the second. Third, people who have already had a failed marriage are more likely to view divorce as an acceptable solution when marital difficulties resurface. And finally, remarried couples experience more stress from step family situations.