YOUNG ADULT DEVELOPMENT

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

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OVERVIEW

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- Developmental changes
- Brain changes
- Influences on development
THEORISTS & RESEARCHERS

Michael Basseches • Marcia Baxter Magolda •
Mary Belenky et al. • Benjamin S. Bloom et al. •
Uri Bronfenbrenner • Arthur Chickering •
Michael Commons • Erik Erikson • Kurt Fischer •
James Fowler • Carol Gilligan •
Howe & Strauss “Millenials” • Robert Kegan •
Kitchener & King • Lawrence Kohlberg •
Daniel Levinson • Jane Loevinger • William Perry •
Jean Piaget • George Valliant • Leo Vgotsky
BETWEEN ADOLESCENCE & MATURE ADULTHOOD

- YOUNG ADULTHOOD
- EMERGING ADULTHOOD  Jeffery Arnett
- FRONTIER OF ADULTHOOD  MacArthur Research, Network
- THE NOVICE PHASE  Daniel Levinson
MAJOR DEVELOPMENTAL SHIFTS

- ADOLESCENCE  Early & middle teens
- YOUNG ADULTHOOD  Late teens & early twenties
- LATER ADULTHOOD  Mid twenties & after
ADOLESCENCE

EARLY & MIDDLE TEENS

- Abstract thinking
- Increased intensity of emotion
- Increased sensation-seeking
- Sensitivity to alcohol & drugs
- Changes in sleep cycle
LIMITATIONS

- Right & wrong thinking
- “Instrumental” focus
- Emotional regulation
YOUNG ADULTHOOD

LATE TEENS & EARLY TWENTIES

- Greater complexity of thinking
- Critical thinking
- More integration of cognitive & emotional
- Relationships based on shared values, mutuality
- Respect for diversity
- Modified risk-taking
- Decisions based on future consequences & impact on others
LIMITATIONS CONTINUED

• Abstract principles
• Following vs. shaping rules & roles
• External vs. internal basis for decisions
LATER ADULTHOOD

MID TWENTIES & AFTER

- Greater complexity of thinking
- Shaping vs. following rules & roles
- Solving “ill-structured” problems
- Big picture thinking
- Self-correction, self-evaluation
- Internalized commitment of relationships & work
- Evaluation of external expectations
BRAIN CHANGES

- Adolescence
- Young adulthood
- Later adulthood?
BRAIN CHANGES IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD

- PREFRONTAL CORTEX
  Myelination: Adding white matter
  Synaptic Pruning: Decreasing number of connections

- CONNECTIONS AMONG REGIONS
EXECUTIVE SUITE

- Calibration of risk & reward
- Problem-solving
- Prioritizing
- Thinking ahead
- Self-evaluation
- Long-term planning
- Regulation of emotions
CAVEATS

- Not automatic
- Roles for both nature & nurture
- Periods of equilibrium
- Intermediate steps
- Uneven across areas
DEVELOPMENTAL RANGE

- OPTIMAL Spurts
- FUNCTIONAL Gradual
INFLUENCES ON LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING

- Emotional arousal: “cold cognition” vs. “hot cognition”
- Alert vs. sleepy
- Familiarity of context
- Familiarity of content
- Practice
- Support
INDIVIDUAL & CULTURAL VARIATION

- Age, education, gender
- Abuse, neglect, trauma
- Race, ethnicity, sexual identity
- Temperament
- Family background, parenting style
- Illness
- Learning disabilities
- Substance abuse
- Areas of concentrated interest
- Cultural background
INFLUENCES ON DEVELOPMENT

If I were asked to... summarize my reading of centuries of wise reflection on what is required of an environment for it to facilitate the growth of its members, I would say this: people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary.

Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*
POSITIVE INFLUENCES

CHALLENGING OLD THINKING

• Faculty & other adult interactions
• Diversity of peers
• Interdisciplinary & integrative approaches
• Out of classroom experience
• Instruction in cognitive skills, e.g. critical thinking
POSITIVE INFLUENCES

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR GROWTH

• Matching level of challenge with ability
• Scaffolding, balance of structure & flexibility
• Safety net, monitoring
• Tincture of time
THREE TIERS OF INFLUENCE

- Support optimal functioning
- Foster growth toward next steps
- Set the stage for ongoing development
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