

Adulthood

Evie Bentley



DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

ROUTLEDGE MODULAR PSYCHOLOGY SERIES

Adulthood

Adulthood is an accessible text which deals with the vital area of adult psychological development in a concise and friendly form. The book's approach encourages engagement with the main theories and evidence of this highly relevant topic, as well as including less well-known models of adulthood for discussion.

The book begins with a definition of lifespan psychology, and further chapters include early and middle adulthood; the life events approach; marriage; parenting; divorce; and old age. It includes some modern slants on the classic research, as well as the up-to-date theories, and alternative theories are introduced. Cross-cultural issues and examples have been included in every chapter, and various biases are identified and explained. The final section has sample essays on this topic with extremely helpful examiner's comments, as well as a useful glossary.

Evie Bentley has written an ideal guide to this topic, which requires little or no background knowledge. It provides a useful introduction for both A-level and undergraduate students of psychology or sociology, and will also be of interest to anyone in the health or social care professions and to those with a general interest in developmental psychology.

Evie Bentley is Head of Psychology at Hillview School for Girls and at Hugh Christie Technology College, Tonbridge, Kent. She is also an Adult Education Psychology Tutor, West Sussex (Burgess Hill and Crawley), and Tutor and Second Year Module Leader in Developmental Psychology for International Correspondence Schools on line Psychology degree.

Routledge Modular Psychology

Series editors: Cara Flanagan is a freelance academic author and an experienced teacher and examiner for AS and A2 level psychology. Philip Banyard is Associate Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University and has 20 years experience as a Chief Examiner for GCSE and A level Psychology.

The *Routledge Modular Psychology* series is a completely new approach to introductory level psychology, tailor-made to the new modular style of teaching. Each short book covers a topic in more detail than any large textbook can, allowing teacher and student to select material exactly to suit any particular course or project.

The books have been written especially for those students new to higher level study, whether at school, college or university. They include specially designed features to help with technique, such as a model essay at an average level with an examiner's comments to show how extra marks can be gained. The authors are all examiners and teachers at the introductory level.

The *Routledge Modular Psychology* texts are all user friendly and accessible and use the following features:

- practice essays with specialist commentary to show how to achieve a higher grade
- chapter summaries to assist with revision
- progress and review exercises
- glossary of key terms
- summaries of key research
- further reading to stimulate ongoing study and research
- cross-referencing to other books in the series

For more details on our AS, A2 and *Routledge Modular Psychology* publications visit our website at www.a-levelpsychology.co.uk

Also available in this series (titles listed by syllabus section):

**ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT AND
ABNORMAL BEHAVIOUR**

**Classification and Diagnosis of
Psychological Abnormality**

Susan Cave

Psychopathology

*John D. Stirling and Jonathan
S.E. Hellewell*

**Therapeutic Approaches in
Psychology**

Susan Cave

BIO-PSYCHOLOGY

**Awareness: Biorhythms, sleep and
dreaming**

Evie Bentley

Cortical Functions

John Stirling

Motivation and Emotion

Phil Gorman

**The Physiological Basis of Behaviour:
Neural and hormonal processes**

Kevin Silber

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Attention and Pattern Recognition

Nick Lund

Language and Thought

Nick Lund

Memory and Forgetting

John Henderson

**Perception: Theory,
development and organisation**

Paul Rookes and Jane Willson

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Adulthood

Evie Bentley

**Early Socialisation: Sociability and
attachment**

Cara Flanagan

Social and Personality Development

Tina Abbott

PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH

Cognitive Development

Lisa Oakley

Controversies in Psychology

Philip Banyard

Debates in Psychology

Andy Bell

**Ethical Issues and Guidelines in
Psychology**

Cara Flanagan and Philip Banyard

**Introducing Research and Data in
Psychology: A guide to methods and
analysis**

Ann Searle

**Theoretical Approaches in
Psychology**

Matt Jarvis

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Interpersonal Relationships

Diana Dwyer

Pro-Social and Anti-Social Behaviour

David Clarke

Social Cognition

Donald C. Pennington

Social Influences

Kevin Wren

COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Animal Cognition

Nick Lund

**Determinants of Animal
Behaviour**

Jo-Anne Cartwright

**Evolutionary Explanations of Human
Behaviour**

John Cartwright

OTHER TITLES

Health Psychology

Anthony Curtis

Psychology and Crime

David Putwain and Aidan Sammons

Psychology and Education

Susan Bentham

Psychology and Work

Christine Hodson

Sport Psychology

Matt Jarvis

STUDY GUIDE

Exam Success in AQA-A Psychology

Paul Humphreys (forthcoming)



Adulthood

Evie Bentley

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2007
by Routledge
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 2FA
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016
*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an Informa Business*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2007.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

© 2007 Psychology Press

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

This publication has been produced with paper manufactured to strict environmental standards and with pulp derived from sustainable forests.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Bentley, Evie, 1947–
Adulthood / Evie Bentley.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-415-25823-5 — ISBN 0-415-25824-3 1.
Adulthood—Psychological aspects. I. Title.
BF724.5.B46 2007
155.6—dc22 2006020887

ISBN 0-203-96647-3 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN: 978-0-415-25823-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-415-25824-1 (pbk)

With affection and gratitude to the Rockin' Rons and Doowoppa Doreens who modelled adulthood for me in my youth; and to all the other adults who have been influences whether as positive or negative role models: thank you!

Contents

List of illustrations	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
1 Introduction to lifespan psychology	1
How this book is organised	1
What 'lifespan' means	2
Adolescence as the link from childhood to adulthood	3
Concept of adulthood	3
Methods of research	4
2 Early and middle adulthood	7
Introduction	7
Erikson's conflicts theory	7
Levinson's transitions theory	16
Gould's consciousness theory	24
3 Family and relationships in adulthood	33
Introduction	33
The life events approach	33
Marriage and partnering	35
Parenthood	49
Divorce	59

4 Late adulthood	69
Late adulthood: Introduction	69
Social theories of late adulthood development	71
Retirement	77
Bereavement	80
Cognitive changes in late adulthood (memory and intelligence)	84
Cultural variations in ageing	88
5 Alternative theories	91
Humanistic theory and adult development	91
Psychodynamic view on ageing	94
Alternative approaches explaining ageing	95
6 Student essays with examiner's comments	99
Glossary	107
References	110
Index	119

List of illustrations

Tables

1.1	Kastenbaum's types of age	5
2.1	Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development	9
2.2	Levinson's seasons of a man's life	17
2.3	Gould's four false assumptions	25
3.1	Life events: ten examples from Holmes and Rahe	34
3.2	Bohannon's model of six stages of divorce	63
4.1	Burnside's decade approach to growing older	74
4.2	Atchley's retirement phases	78
4.3	Bowlby's four stages of grieving	82
5.1	Richard <i>et al.</i> 's five personality types	96
5.2	Family stage theory	97

Figures

3.1	Frequency curve showing changes in satisfaction/happiness during marriage	44
5.1	Maslow's hierarchy of needs	93

Box

3.1	A traditional Egyptian marriage	42
-----	---------------------------------	----

Acknowledgements



Cara Flanagan and the people at Routledge including Lucy Kennedy and Tara Stebnicky for astonishing patience and encouragement; and my wonderful friends including the whole Downes family, Jill Keogh, Julia McLean, Nicola Meakins, Kristenne Pickles, Linnie Rawlinson, Ted Vallance, and my secret support crew, for the same.

Introduction to lifespan psychology

How this book is organised
What 'lifespan' means
Adolescence as the link from childhood to adulthood
Concept of adulthood
Methods of research
Summary

How this book is organised

The organisation of this book is in six chapters. First, there is this introductory chapter which looks at what psychologists mean by 'lifespan' and 'adulthood', and also at how this area of psychology has been researched. Chapter 2 deals with early and middle adulthood, and three important theories of human development during this time: the theories of Erikson, Levinson and Gould. Each of these theories views adulthood from a different stance, a different point of view, and these alternative approaches are all very interesting. Chapter 3 takes a fourth approach and looks at some of the main life events of adulthood, namely marriage and partnering, parenthood, and divorce from a psychological angle. Chapter 4 is about late adulthood, with sections on social psychological theories of ageing, the psychological effects of retirement and bereavement, cognitive changes in older adults, and some cross-cultural ageing studies. Chapter 5 has some alternative psychological perspectives on ageing, and Chapter 6 gives a senior

examiner's comments on two student essays, showing where more marks could have been gained and therefore a higher grade obtained. This last chapter is a particularly useful one!

What 'lifespan' means

Lifespan psychology or development are relatively new terms. Psychologists used to refer to developmental rather than lifespan psychology, but the former term became equated with childhood development and so a new name was coined to include our psychological development throughout life. This is important, as it would be entirely wrong to imply that our personal, psychological development ceases at some point in the teens. We are dynamic individuals, and can and do continue to develop psychologically throughout life. Our environment and experiences continue to influence and perhaps shape us throughout adulthood.

Why was earlier research focused only on childhood? Well, several famous and influential psychologists thought that little or no further psychological development occurred after adolescence or from an even earlier age. Piaget felt that we developed stage by stage but once puberty had been gone though we remained wherever we were, psychologically speaking, for the rest of our lives. He did suggest an adult-type final stage, but went on to suggest that few of us reached it! You can read more about this in Lisa Oakley's *Cognitive Development* (Routledge 2004). Freud came from a different psychological direction, what we now call psychodynamic psychology, but he too felt that our psychological development was closely tied to childhood years, in fact to very early childhood. His fascinating theories are excellently described in Matt Jarvis' *Theoretical Approaches in Psychology* (Routledge 2000). Even the Behaviourists such as B.F. Skinner had one of their rare moments of agreements with other psychologists over this matter. Psychological development was not a concept they supported, as they considered any behavioural change to be the result of learning, i.e. responding to stimuli; and conditioning, classical or operant, as the mechanism for that change.

Adolescence as the link from childhood to adulthood

This stage in development is sometimes regarded as a western concept, an example of **ethnocentrism** and cultural bias. It is true that many other cultures do not have an intermediate stage between childhood and adulthood, meaning that adult life either begins on the day childhood ends or that there is such a gradual transition from childhood to adulthood so that adolescence is an irrelevant concept. But it is also true that in Eurocentric or western culture there is this intermediate stage starting from around the time of puberty, and this stage has been named and studied as adolescence. The psychology of this stage is covered in *Social and Personality Development* by Tina Abbott (Routledge 2001).

Concept of adulthood

This concept does not seem a difficult one until we try and define what we mean! It can be the time or age when a person has to take on legal responsibility for themselves – currently in the United Kingdom that would be on their eighteenth birthday. It can be when a person is judged mature enough to marry (16 years old in the UK), ride a small motorbike (16 in the UK, 14 in France) or buy alcohol in a public place (18 years old in the UK and 21 years old in the USA). Or it can be considered as reaching a state of maturity (Whitbourne and Weinstock 1979) – another term which is difficult to define! Whitbourne and Weinstock saw this as being happy to act responsibly, accept one's own social role, think logically, be emotionally aware, and cope reasonably well with life's smaller frustrations. Ten years later, Turner and Helms (1989) developed this particular theme further, adding that the mature/adult state promotes physical and psychological well-being by the person having sorted out their values, achieved a realistic self-concept, being stable emotionally and in relationships, and so on. Both these sets of ideas look very idealistic! I wonder how many of the over-eighteens in UK culture would agree that these describe their own behaviour. I suspect these criteria would disbar many people, perhaps even the majority, from being classed as adults!

Further difficulties are to do with the completely normal individual differences between people. Puberty itself is a moveable feast, and it is normal for this to start any time between the ages of 10 and 15 – or

maybe in an even wider age range. If the biological clocks controlling this side of development vary so much, then it is not unlikely that psychological development also varies considerably and normally in its timing.

Another focus of individual differences is on the two sexes. It is true that most of the classic research, done in the twentieth century, focused on male psychological development. This is of course no surprise to anyone with knowledge of psychology. But we now acknowledge that we cannot just assume that because something has been researched in males we can apply the findings to females. There are similarities between the two sexes but there are also very important **gender differences**, and a great plus of current lifespan development research is that many researchers are clearly aware of this.

When psychologists research lifespan development they are today making several assumptions, as Sugarman (1986) has pointed out. We are individuals, with individual thoughts and individual choices – what he calls active agents in our own development – but we are also members of social groups such as our families, friends, school/college/work colleagues, neighbourhood. We have an impact on them and they on us, it's a reciprocal influence, and it's a dynamic one as well since relationships of any sort are rarely static. We are also, as human beings, highly complex creatures with highly complex brains and behaviours. No simple line of research and no simple set of explanations are ever going to be able to explain our development through life, even in distant years when lifespan development is no longer a new discipline.

Methods of research

This area of psychological development in adulthood has real research difficulties. Adulthood lasts such a long time, six decades and increasing, so that problems with good research build up fast. **Longitudinal studies** are by their very nature time-consuming and therefore very expensive. Also, people don't always stay put, and the original sample in such a study may be seriously depleted as some participants move away, lose interest in cooperating with the researchers, or die young. Another set of problems is to do with context as outlined above. A person's adult development will be closely linked with their cultural, social, political and financial context so that many different groups need to be studied if we are seeking a general picture of human adult

development. A third group of difficulties comes with the type of research methods being used. Researchers have their own ideas, otherwise they could not be doing the research. But if they are interviewing and observing people, the problems of validity, reliability and bias are bound to be there too. Ann Searle's book *Introducing Research and Data in Psychology* (Routledge 1999) has good sections on such research issues. And it is very hard indeed, some would say impossible (Popper 1969), for any human to be truly objective, especially when following their own ideas as in research, so we all need to be cautious in interpreting research findings.

So how old is 'old', and how adult are you? Probably we all know of younger people who seem set in their ways, old before their time; conversely we also probably know older adults who are busy in their minds if not physically and who have a lively interest in things. Kastenbaum (1979) suggested that we have several 'ages' (see Table 1.1 below) with which we coexist, and this certainly has face validity as so many people report acting or feeling older or younger than their years, depending on what they are doing and so on. One 2001 issue of the UK magazine for retired people, *Saga*, put a photo of the ageing rock musician Mick Jagger on its cover, which resulted in much amusement – and also a statement from Mr Jagger's team that they were 'horrified' at the photograph's use. This supports the view that adulthood and perhaps older adulthood is a concept interpreted differently by different groups of people.

Table 1.1 Kastenbaum's types of age

Chronological age	This is how many years you have lived
Biological age	This is how old your body seems to be, it's the sort of shape you are in physically
Subjective age	This is how old you actually feel yourself to be
Functional age	This is the age associated with your job or role, your responsibilities, etc.
Social age	This relates to the age-group you mix with, how others see you, your personal 'style'