

Psychology of Middle Age



Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive review of the psychology of middle age. Middle adulthood generally refers to the period between ages 25 to 69. During this period, middle-aged adults experience a conflict between generativity and stagnation. They may either feel a sense of contributing to society, the next generation or their immediate community or a sense of purposelessness. Physically, the middle-aged experience a decline in muscular strength, reaction time, sensory keenness, and cardiac output. Also, women experience menopause and a sharp drop in the hormone estrogen. Men experience an equivalent endocrine system event to menopause. Andropause in males is a hormone fluctuation with physical and psychological effects that can be similar to those seen in menopausal females. The vocational, family and personal adjustments of middle age along with the preparation for old age are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Middle age is generally considered to extend from age forty to age sixty. The onset is marked by physical and mental changes, as is the end. At sixty, there is usually a decline in physical vigor, often accompanied by a lessening of mental alertness. Although many adults experience these changes later now than in the past, the traditional boundary lines are still recognized. The increasing trend toward voluntary or involuntary retirement at age sixty rather than age sixty-five also justifies considering sixty to be the boundary line between middle and old age.

Because middle age is a long period in the life span, it is customarily subdivided into *early middle age*, which extends from age forty to age fifty, and *advanced middle age*, which extends from age fifty to age sixty. During advanced middle age, physical and psychological changes that first began during the early forties become far more apparent.

Individuals differ in the ages at which the physical changes marking off middle age from early adulthood at one end, and old age at the other end, occur. There are two different philosophies about how a person should adjust to middle age: the philosophy that he should try to stay young and active and the philosophy that he should grow old gracefully, deliberately slowing down and taking life comfortably—the “rocking-chair” philosophy. People of the middle class tend to adhere to the former, and those of the lower classes, to the latter; members of the upper class are evenly divided between the two. Women, on the whole, are more likely to adopt the rocking-chair philosophy than men.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE AGE

Freud has said that “Life is not the same at forty-five as at twenty-five; nor are we the same kind of people”. Like every period in the life span, middle age has associated with it certain characteristics that make it distinctive.

Next to old age, middle age is the most dreaded period in the life span and the one the adult will not admit he has reached until the calendar and the mirror force him to do so. As Desmond has pointed out, “Americans slump into middle age grudgingly, sadly and with a tinge of fear”.

The many unfavorable stereotypes of the middle-aged person, the traditional beliefs concerning the physical and mental deterioration which is believed to accompany the cessation of the adult's reproductive life, and the emphasis on the importance of youth in our culture, as compared with the reverence for age found in many other cultures, all influence the adult's attitudes unfavorably as he approaches this period in his life. Most adults dread middle age and become nostalgic about their younger years as it draws closer.

Just as puberty is a period of transition from childhood to adolescence and then to adulthood, so middle age is a time when the individual leaves behind the physical and behavioral characteristics of adulthood and enters into a period in life when new physical and behavioral characteristics will prevail. Sooner or later, every adult must make adjustments to the physical changes that come with middle age and must realize that the behavioral patterns of his younger years have to be radically revised. Adjustment to changed roles is even more difficult than adjustment to changed physical conditions. Men must adjust to the changes that impending retirement and their changed physical condition necessitate in their work, while women must adjust to exchanging the role of housewife for that of a worker in business or industry or of an “isolate” in a formerly busy home.

Radical adjustments to changed roles and changed patterns of life, when accompanied by physical changes, tend to disrupt the individual's physical and psychological homeostasis. Most women experience a disruption in homeostasis during their forties, when normally they go through the menopause and their last children leave home, thus forcing them to make radical readjustments in the pattern of their entire lives. For men, by contrast, the climacteric comes later—generally in the fifties—as does the imminence of retirement with its necessary role changes.

The most common way to interpret “dangerous age” is in terms of the male who wants to have a last fling in life, especially in his sex life, before old age catches up with him. Middle age can be and is dangerous in other respects also. It is a time when individuals break down physically as a result of overwork, worry, or careless living. The incidence of mental illness rises rapidly in middle age among both men and women, and it is also a peak age for suicides, especially among men. These matters will be discussed later.

The threats to good adjustment that make middle age dangerous are intensified by sex differences in the time when upsets in physical and psychological homeostasis occur. Middle age is a time when there is an “unfortunate synchronization of woman's change in life and man's middle-aged revolt”. This not only strains the husband-wife relationship, sometimes leading to separation or divorce, but also predisposes both men and women to physical and mental illness, alcoholism, use of narcotics, and suicide.

Just as the adolescent is neither a child nor an adult, so the middle-aged person is no longer “young” nor is he yet “old.” As Franzblau has put it, he “stands between the younger ‘Rebel Generation’ and the ‘Senior Citizen Generation’—both of which are continuously in the spotlight,” and suffers from the discomforts and embarrassments associated with both age groups.

The middle-aged person's desire to be inconspicuous is reflected in his clothing. Most middle-aged people try to dress as conservatively as possible and yet adhere to the prevailing styles. This conservatism rules their choice of material possessions, such as homes and cars, and their patterns of behavior—whether it is the way they entertain or the way they dance. The more inconspicuous they are, the less out of place they feel in a society that worships youth.

Middle age, according to Erikson, is a crisis age in which either "generativity" or "stagnation" will dominate. The person will either become more and more successful or will stand still and accomplish nothing more. If he has a strong drive to succeed, he will reach his peak at this age and reap the benefits of the years of preparation and hard work that preceded it. Middle age should be a time not only for financial and social success but also "for authority and prestige. Normally a man reaches his peak between forty and fifty years, after which he rests on his laurels and enjoys the benefits of his hard-won success until he reaches the early sixties, when he is regarded as "too old" and usually must relinquish his job to a younger and more vigorous person. Earnings normally reach a peak during middle age.

Middle age is the period when leadership in business, industry, and community organizations is the reward for achievement. Most organizations, especially the older ones, elect presidents who are in their fifties and older. The fifties are also the years when individuals are granted recognition from the various professional societies.

Neugarten has explained this attitude on the part of middle-aged people: "The successful middle-aged person often describes himself as no longer 'driven' but as now the 'driver'—in short, 'in command'.

Since middle age is the time when the individual normally reaches his peak of achievement, it is also a time when he evaluates his accomplishments in light of his earlier aspirations and the expectations of others, especially family members and friends. As Archer has pointed out, "It is in the twenties that we commit ourselves to an occupation and to a marriage. During the late thirties and early forties, it is common for men to review those early commitments".

Many, if not most, middle-aged men and women experience boredom during the late thirties and forties. Men become bored with the daily routine of work and with a family life that offers little excitement. Women, who have spent most of adulthood caring for the home and raising children, wonder what they will do for the next twenty or thirty years. The unmarried woman who has devoted her life to a job or career is bored for the same reasons men are.

CATEGORIES OF STRESS IN MIDDLE AGE

- Somatic stress, which is due to physical evidences of aging
- Cultural stress, stemming from the high value placed on youth, vigor, and success by the cultural group
- Economic stress, resulting from the financial burden of educating children and providing status symbols for all family members
- Psychological stress, which may be the result of the death of a spouse, the departure of children from the home, boredom with marriage, or a sense of lost youth and approaching death

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF MIDDLE AGE

Tasks Relating to Physical Changes

These include the acceptance of, and adjustment to, the physical changes that normally occur during middle age.

Tasks Relating to Changed Interests

The middle-aged person often assumes civic and social responsibilities and develops an interest in adult-oriented leisure-time activities in place of family-oriented activities, which prevailed during early adulthood.

Tasks Relating to Vocational Adjustments

These tasks revolve around establishing and maintaining a relatively stable standard of living.

Tasks Relating to Family Life

The important tasks in this category include relating oneself to one's spouse as a person, adjusting to aging parents, and assisting teen-age children to become responsible and happy adults.

ADJUSTMENTS TO PHYSICAL CHANGES

One of the most difficult adjustments middle-aged men and women must make is to changed appearance. They must recognize that the body is not functioning as adequately as it formerly did and may even be "wearing out" in certain vital areas. They must accept the fact that their reproductive capacity is waning or coming to an end and that they may be losing some of their sex drive and sexual attractiveness. Like the pubescent child who has a childhood ideal of what he wants to look like when he grows up and who must adjust to the reality of his appearance, the middle-aged person must adjust to changes which he dislikes and which, even worse, are telltale signs of aging.

The adjustment to physical changes is made doubly hard by the fact that the individual's own unfavorable attitudes are intensified by unfavorable social attitudes toward the normal changes that come with advancing years.

CHARACTERISTIC CHANGES IN INTERESTS IN MIDDLE AGE

- Interests are more commonly narrowed down with advancing age than expanded.
- There is a shift in emphasis on already-present interests—the middle-aged person now chooses clothes that will make him look younger, for example—and a shift toward interests that are more solitary in nature, such as hobbies.
- The middle-aged person develops an increased interest in cultural pursuits, such as reading, painting, and attending lectures.
- There is a lessening of sex differences in interests. Men are less interested in sports, for example, and increasingly interested in more feminine activities, such as reading or attending concerts.
- There is increased interest in activities leading to self-improvement, such as attending lectures and taking courses, and a decreased interest in activities that are purely for enjoyment, such as dancing and playing cards.

Status Symbols

Because middle-aged people like to think of themselves as the "command generation"—the group that exercises the most power—they want certain material possessions that will proclaim their status to others. As Packard has pointed out, "The status arises from the evaluations many people have in the backs of their heads as to the social worth of such things—address, home, etc.—as status symbols".

Although most middle-aged people have known since adolescence how important a role status symbols play in the judgments others make of them, many were unable to afford these status symbols earlier, when the family income was smaller and the children were a heavy drain on the family budget. When the

financial strains of early adulthood lessen, middle-aged people become keenly interested in status symbols.

While any material possession of value can be used as a status symbol, a home, a car, and clothing are most valuable because they are most visible. A home is generally considered the most important status symbol because others are impressed more by its cost than by the cost of a car or clothing. If it has a "proper" address, its status-symbol value is enhanced. Furthermore, it offers opportunities for the use of other status symbols such as expensive furnishings, antiques, and art objects.

The more anxious the individual is to move up the social ladder, the more important status symbols become. When a socially mobile individual moves to a new neighborhood or a new community, neighbors and business associates appraise him on the basis of status symbols before accepting or rejecting him. The more status symbols he has, especially visible ones, the better his chance of gaining acceptance.

RELIGION IN MIDDLE AGE

Middle-aged men and women show a greater interest in church and church-related activities than they did when they were younger, though this interest may be for reasons other than religious ones. For example, many middle-aged people, especially women, who have more free time and fewer family responsibilities find that religious activities fill their needs, whether religious or social. Increased interest in religion may also develop after the death of a family member or a close friend.

Many middle-aged men and women find that religion is a much greater source of comfort and happiness than it was during their younger years. On the whole, middle-aged people are less worried by religious questions, less dogmatic in their beliefs, less sure that there is only one true religion, and more skeptical about the devil and hell and about miracles than college students. They are not religiously disturbed at this time in their lives, and they are more tolerant in their attitudes toward other religions than they were when they were younger.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Middle-aged men and women, who feel that they are in command of community life as well as their homes and businesses, also regard middle age as a time for service. The middle-aged man is well established in his work, and the average woman's home responsibilities have decreased. Thus they can devote more time to community affairs; they may serve on committees, on church or professional boards, or in leadership roles in different community organizations, for example. In addition, most middle-aged people can now afford to belong to various clubs and lodges.

The middle-aged person may participate in different formal community groups in order to enjoy himself, to be of service to the community, to help others, or to advance culturally or professionally. For example, he may serve on the school board, be active in the church or Red Cross, or participate in recreational activities at a branch of the YMCA or a lodge.

VOCATIONAL ADJUSTMENTS IN MIDDLE AGE

Adjustments that center around work and the family are even more difficult in middle age than personal and social adjustments, discussed in the preceding chapter. Establishing and maintaining a comfortable standard of living, for example, has become increasingly difficult in recent years. As a result of increased use of automation and because of the trend toward the merging of small companies with larger ones, many middle-aged persons are thrown out of work.

They may find that the jobs for which their training and experience have fitted them no longer exist and that they lack the training and experience for jobs that do exist; thus they are forced into the ranks of the unemployed.

Adjustments to changed patterns of family life are equally difficult. It is never easy to adjust to playing the role of adviser to grown or nearly grown children after many years of caring for them and supervising their activities. These difficulties are intensified and prolonged when parents must subsidize a child's early marriage or extended education.

In addition to these areas of adjustment, the middle-aged person is faced with a totally new problem, that of adjusting to impending old age. Like all adjustments for which the individual has had no previous experience, this one is often difficult and gives rise to strong emotional tension.

ADJUSTMENT TO CHANGED FAMILY PATTERNS IN MIDDLE AGE

Physical Changes

The physical and psychological disturbances that accompany the menopause and the male climacteric often intensify the other adjustment problems of middle age which, in turn, heighten these physical and psychological disturbances.

Loss of Parental Role

Like all habits, that of centering one's life around one's home and children is hard to break. Middle-aged people who are able to occupy their time with activities they find satisfying will be able to adjust to the loss of the parental role.

Lack of Preparation

While most middle-aged people are prepared for the physical changes that accompany middle age, few are prepared for the role changes that take place in both their family and vocational lives. Adjustment problems are greatly intensified if role changes and physical changes occur simultaneously.

Feelings of Failure

The middle-aged person whose marriage has not turned out as he had hoped or whose children have not come up to his expectations often blames himself and feels that he is a failure.

Feelings of Uselessness

The more child-centered the home was earlier, the more useless the middle-aged person will feel when parental responsibilities diminish or come to an end.

Disenchantment with Marriage

Disenchantment with marriage is often caused or intensified by unforeseen changes in the marital situation, such as the husband's loss of a job or lack of success or the failure of children to come up to parental expectations.

Care of Elderly Relatives

Most middle-aged people resent having to care for an elderly relative because they do not want to be tied down, as they were when their children were young, and because they fear that strained relationships with the spouse or adolescent children will result.

Sexual Adjustments

Women, it has been found, can enjoy coitus without orgasm more during middle age than they could during the early years of marriage.

While poor sexual adjustment does not necessarily lead to marital unhappiness and divorce, it has been found to be an important contributing factor to the disenchantment with marriage

that so often occurs during middle age. Thus poor sexual adjustment is a serious interference with good marital adjustment.

One of the major causes of poor sexual adjustment in middle age is differences in the sex drive at this time. Studies of the pattern of development of the sex drive have shown that the male's sex drive is stronger in adolescence and reaches its peak earlier than the female's sex drive. The woman's sex drive and interest in sex, by contrast, become stronger as she approaches middle age. The fact that husband and wife are at different stages of development of the sex drive during middle age, combined with differences in interest in sexual behavior, may result in marital discord.

Poor sexual adjustments also result the man becomes concerned about his sexual vigor. He may develop feelings of inadequacy or go to the opposite extreme and have sexual relations with younger women to prove to himself that he is still virile.

During the forties and early fifties, many women lose their earlier inhibitions and develop more interest in sex. Because this occurs at the time when the man's interest in sex is declining, middle-aged women may be sexually unsatisfied and unhappy.

Some middle-aged women, knowing that it is their last chance, decide to have a child. This often complicates their adjustments to their husbands, who may not want a baby now that they have won freedom from their parental responsibilities or who may be embarrassed at having a baby the age of their grandchildren.

The middle-aged woman who derives little satisfaction from intercourse or who feels that it is no longer interesting to her husband or a necessary part of marriage may take the initiative in stopping it. This intensifies an already-existing belief that she is no longer needed or wanted, a belief that neither adds to her happiness nor contributes to good adjustments with her husband.

In spite of the difficulties involved in sexual adjustment during middle age, there is evidence that many middle-aged men and women make satisfactory sexual adjustments, which contributes to their marital satisfaction. A woman's decline in satisfaction from sex during middle age is due primarily to the attitudes and behavior of her husband. By contrast, a man's lessening of satisfaction with sex is due primarily to conditions within himself.

DIFFICULTIES IN ADJUSTING TO CHILDREN'S SPOUSES

- The expectation on the part of the middle-aged couple that they will continue to have the same relationship with their children that existed before marriage and that their relationship with a son- or daughter-in-law will be the same as their relationship with their own children
- The necessity for married children to live with their parents or in-laws
- The tendency of the middle-aged couple to offer too much advice to a son- or daughter-in-law
- Dissimilarity of socio-cultural background of in-laws, leading to criticisms and strained relationships
- Elopement, which leads to parental embarrassment and resentment
- Residential propinquity, which encourages frequent contacts and parental over protectiveness and interference
- Psychological dependency of a married daughter on her parents, which may make her husband resent them
- A lack of grandchildren, which may be a disappointment to the middle-aged parents and which may also give the married children more independence

and thus cause them to neglect their parents, which adds to parental resentment

ADJUSTMENT TO CARE OF AGING PARENTS

Role Reversal

The elderly parent does not find it easy to relinquish the authority and autonomy he enjoyed in his or her own home, even to a grown child, especially not to an in-law.

Place of Residence

The adjustment to care of elderly parents is eased if the parents can remain in their own home and receive only financial aid from their children, rather than moving in with them or living in a home for the aged.

Degree of Responsibility

Many middle-aged people become resentful if the care of elderly parents represents a heavy financial burden or greatly restricts their activities.

Relationship of Aging Parent to Middle-aged Person

Although both husbands and wives are more resentful about caring for an in-law than a parent, the wife is especially resentful because she has the major responsibility for this care.

Role Played by Elderly Parent

When the elderly parent is physically able to help with household chores and does not disrupt the family routine, the adjustment will be far better than if he expects to be waited on and interferes in the lives of other family members.

Sex of Elderly Parent

Regardless of whose home the elderly parent lives in, men cause less work and interfere less than women.

Earlier Experiences with Elderly Parent

Middle-aged people whose earlier experiences with their parents or in-laws have been favorable make far better adjustments to the care of these elderly relatives than those whose earlier experiences have been unfavorable.

Attitude toward Elderly Parent

The middle-aged person's adjustment to the care of an elderly relative depends greatly on his attitude toward him, which may range from loathing to love, depending partly on earlier experiences and partly on the behavior of the elderly person now.

ROLES PLAYED BY TODAY'S GRANDPARENTS

The Formal Role

The grandparents follow a "hands-off" policy as far as care and discipline are concerned, although they may enjoy providing treats for special occasions.

The Fun-seeking Role

The grandparents enjoy an informal, playful relationship with their grandchildren, but do not want to assume any responsibility for them.

The Surrogate-Parent Role

The grandparents assume responsibility for the care of grandchildren in the event of divorce or the death of a parent, if the mother must work outside the home, or when the parents want to take a short vacation from the children. Usually the grandmother is more active in this role.

The "Reservoir of Family Wisdom" Role

The grandparents dispense special knowledge to the grandchildren or teach them certain skills. The grandfather is usually more active in this role.

The Distant-Figure Role

The grandparents appear only on special occasions and have fleeting and infrequent contacts with their grandchildren. This role is especially common when grandparents are geographically or socially remote.

ADJUSTMENT TO LOSS OF A SPOUSE

The loss of a spouse, whether as a result of death or divorce, presents many adjustment problems for the middle-aged man or woman, but especially for the woman. The middle-aged woman whose husband dies or who is divorced experiences extreme feelings of loneliness. This is intensified by frustrations of the normal sexual desires, which are far from dormant. A person who loses a spouse and remains alone for ten or more years generally makes satisfactory adjustments to being single, although he may tend to be lonely and to find the single state unsatisfactory.

Loss of a spouse as a result of divorce affects middle-aged people very differently, depending primarily upon who wanted the divorce. A woman whose husband divorced her to marry someone else will have very different reactions from those of a woman who found her marriage intolerable and initiated the divorce herself. This will be discussed in more detail later in connection with the hazards of middle age.

The man whose wife dies or who is divorced experiences a disruption in his pattern of living unless a relative can manage the home for him. A woman who is widowed or divorced in middle age often must give up her home, go to work, and live very differently from the way she did when her husband was alive or before her divorce. The woman alone also encounters social complications which men do not face. She may be reluctant to go out by herself, and the problem of entertaining is likewise awkward.

For the divorced woman, the social complications are even greater. Not only may she be excluded from social activities, but, even worse, she often loses old friends. While some will remain her friends, many will ostracize her or rally around her husband.

Perhaps the most serious problem that loss of a spouse in middle age presents to women stems from the fact that their chances for remarriage become slimmer as they grow older. And since women can expect to live longer than men, this means a long period of loneliness complicated by financial and social problems.

ROLE CHANGES IN MIDDLE AGE

As has been pointed out role changes are a serious hazard for the woman. When the children leave home, she finds herself in much the same position that the typical man does at retirement—unemployed. Few women, however, receive preparation for this, as many men now do from their employers. As one woman has put it, "Freshman have their advisers to help them to adjust to the changes that college life brings, but who helps the parent emeritus?"

While most mothers want their children to be independent when they are developmentally ready, to have homes and families of their own, and to be successful in their work, many put roadblocks in their children's paths when the time actually comes for them to be on their own. Instead of gladly relinquishing the burden they have carried for so many years, many mothers cling to it because they fear that their lives will now seem empty and futile. For such women, the ending of the parental role is a traumatic experience, and neurotic difficulties are often the aftermath.

Opposition to a Child's Marriage

Another serious problem arises when a child marries someone of whom his middle-aged parents do not approve. They will oppose the marriage, which militates against their making satisfactory adjustments to the child's departure from the home. This opposition also generally creates a barrier between them and their child, with the result that their contacts with the child after marriage are few and their relationships with the child's family are unfavorable.

Inability to Establish Satisfactory Relationships with the Spouse as a Person

One of the important developmental tasks of middle age is that of establishing satisfactory relationships with a spouse. This is especially difficult for the woman because of the problems she faces in making satisfactory adjustments to the new role she must play now that the children have left home. This hazard to good marital adjustment affects men as well, however.

While many men and women do make this adjustment successfully and are even happier in their marriages than they were during the child-rearing years, for others it is a hazardous transition. Many of these unfavorable "attitudes have developed over the years, and by middle age they are often so deep-rooted that they are impossible to eradicate.

CONCLUSIONS

- Middle age is commonly subdivided into early middle age, which extends from age forty to age fifty, and advanced middle age, which extends from age fifty to age sixty.
- Middle age is a dreaded period, a time of transition, a "dangerous" age, an "awkward" age, a time of achievement, a time of evaluation, and a time of boredom.
- The developmental tasks of middle age are related to physical changes, changed interests, vocational adjustments, and changes in family life.
- Adjustments to physical changes in middle age include adjustments to changes in appearance, in sensory abilities, in physiological functioning, in health, and in sexual drive and behavior.
- Of all the physical changes that occur in middle age, the menopause and the male climacteric are the most traumatic and also the most difficult to adjust to.
- The middle-aged person's adjustment to physical changes can best be assessed by the effect of these changes on his self-concept.
- Contrary to popular belief, intellectual abilities do not decrease in middle age, but may even increase slightly, especially among those of high intelligence.
- Changes in interests during middle age are due primarily to role changes resulting from social expectations or from physical changes or reduced income.
- The middle-aged person's interests most commonly change in the areas of appearance and clothes, money, status symbols, religion, community affairs, and recreational activities.
- Because there is often a renewed interest in social life during middle age, adjustment to a changed pattern of social life becomes a major developmental task for many middle-aged people.
- The major personal hazards of middle age come from acceptance of the cultural stereotypes about middle age, from rebellion against the restrictions age places on the individual's usual pattern of behavior, and from the necessity for changing roles.
- The major social hazards of middle age are conditions that militate against good social adjustments,

such as an unattractive appearance, a lack of social skills, social mobility, and a preference for family contacts.

- Adjustments centering around work and the family are even more difficult during middle age than during early adulthood because many conditions over which the individual has little or no control arise to interfere with these adjustments.
- Vocational adjustments during middle age are complicated by increased use of automation, problems arising from the merging of small companies with larger ones, group work, the necessity for the wife to play a role in her husband's climb up the vocational ladder, and unfavorable social attitudes toward older workers, which affect hiring policies.
- The most important conditions complicating adjustment to family life in middle age are physical changes which interfere with adjustment to other changes; the difficulty of changing a habitual pattern of life; lack of preparation for the changes in family life that occur during middle age; feelings of failure or of uselessness; disenchantment with marriage; and problems arising from the necessity of caring for elderly relatives.
- The major adjustments to family life that the middle-aged person must make are in the areas of changed family roles; new relationships with the spouse, necessitated by these changed roles; sexual relationships; relationships with in-laws, especially the children's spouses; caring for aged parents; and problems of grandparenthood.
- By middle age, most unmarried men and women have made reasonably good adjustments to being single and are happy with the pattern of life they have established for themselves.
- Loss of a spouse, whether due to death or divorce, disrupts the pattern of life for middle-aged men and women, and many try to adjust to this change by re-marrying.
- The four criteria used to assess the individual's adjustment to middle age are his achievements, his emotional states, the effect of physical and role changes on his self-concept, and how satisfied and happy he is with the pattern of his life.

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