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Author: Kerka, Sandra
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Many theorists have proposed models for the stages of human life and of careers. However, the appropriateness of these models for women and minorities and the validity of those based on chronological age are being questioned. Changes in the

composition of the work force and changing work values such as increased emphasis on the interrelationship of family and work require new ways of looking at the life span and career development. This ERIC DIGEST reviews some of the criticisms of prevailing models and presents some elements of new life cycle and career development models that account for individual, gender, and cultural differences in experience.

PROBLEMS WITH PREVAILING THEORIES

Age/stage models form one school of thought in developmental theory. Levinson, Havighurst, Erikson and others describe life as a series of stages linked to specific ages and occurring in sequence. Each age/stage has its developmental tasks, and patterns of stability and transition to the next stage recur throughout life. (See Merriam and Clark 1991 and Schlossberg 1985 for details of these theories.)
In Super's (1986) work, career development follows the principles of human development, and career stages have their developmental tasks. His Life Career Rainbow model defines career as all the roles played by a person throughout a lifetime (child, student, citizen, worker, homemaker, leisurite). In each role one passes through age-linked stages of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. A person's involvement in these roles depends on individual psychology and biology and the social/historical context.

A major criticism of prevailing theories is that they are based on male experiences. Carol Gilligan's work is often cited (Eastmond 1991; Forrest and Mikolaitis 1986) for pointing out the lack of women's perspectives in developmental models. According to Gilligan, such models often define maturation as separation and individuation. However, women's lives are more closely characterized by social interaction and personal relationships and attachment is vital to women's development. Women's lives are often less linear than the theories depict. Their careers may be interrupted by marriage and childrearing, so they may accomplish the same developmental tasks as men but in different periods of the life cycle (Eastmond 1991). Although men's and women's work motivation may be similar, women's career and life choices are affected by different sex-role socialization and available opportunities (Gutek and Larwood 1987).

Researchers are questioning the validity of age-linked phases (Leonard, Mathews, and Bowes 1987). A more eclectic approach is advocated by Schlossberg (1985), who describes four ways of viewing adult experience: (1) the cultural context or social environment; (2) the psychological developmental stages of the individual; (3) life events or transitions; and (4) continuity and change throughout the life span.

Such an approach may be more useful in explaining the life/career experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds. Development is influenced by supporting institutions, role models, and resources that may be lacking for minorities (Eastmond 1991). Environmental influences such as school, work, and home are experienced

differently by minorities; their transitions may not correspond to theoretical age/stage patterns (Hughes and Smith 1985). Non-Western cultures view aging differently, so the developmental tasks theoretically associated with age may not be valid for people from these cultures (Eastmond 1991).

ELEMENTS OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS

The criticisms of existing models point out elements that are needed in revised theories of human development. Gilligan (Eastmond 1991) redefines maturity as the integration of "male" and "female" personality attributes. A fuller theoretical model would include what Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986) call "the relational component of identity" (p. 79)--how one thinks about oneself in relationship to others. Maturity would then mean the development of both the separate self and the connected self.
Peck (1986) elaborates on the importance of attachment and relationships in her model of adult self-definition. Identity is described as a process set within a sociohistorical context. The basis for self-definition is one's sphere of influence (relationships with others, work, group identification), from which self-concept grows in an evolving spiral that widens through time and depends on the extent and quality of relationships. According to Forrest and Mikolaitis (1986), integration of the independent (separate self) and interdependent (connected self) aspects is fundamental in the development of both sexes. As "progress in the direction of equal parenting and nonsexist socialization" (p. 86) is made, the relational component of career development as well as Peck's model of self-definition should have value for both men and women.

In an alternative model, the relationship element could include the interweaving of the individual, family, and work. Studies by Hughes and Graham (1990), Juhasz (1989), and Merriam and Clark (1991) express aspects of this theme. Hughes and Graham's multifaceted approach identifies six life roles (relationship with self, work, friends, community, partner, and family). In each role, individuals pass through cycles of initiation, adaptation, reassessment, and reconciliation, caused by "triggering events"--dramatic changes in life roles. A test of the model with 449 adult community college students found a significant amount of diversity in the developmental stage of each role at a given time in a person's life. Assumption of a new role or change in an existing one might create conflict, prompting a need to modify other life roles.

Juhasz (1989) condenses the categories into three roles: family, work, and self, which she envisions as a triple helix of three interwoven strands along the horizontal pathway of the life span. The spiral is energized by the need for self-esteem and affected by environmental influences. Each strand forms varied patterns or combinations over time as fluctuations in the amount of energy or attention given to a particular role change the shape of the helix. For example, when children are young, a parent might invest the most time and energy in the family role while the other roles are on hold or maintained. This model accounts for greater individual variation in the timing of life events. Juhasz suggests a need for changing the definition of what constitutes normal or abnormal

development.

Merriam and Clark (1991) describe a process for charting patterns in the life strands of work (productive activity) and love (relationships with others). Although work and love have historically been treated as separate and gender-linked spheres, more theorists are linking the harmony or dissonance arising from their interaction to psychological well-being or maturity. Merriam and Clark cite a "large number of studies that suggest the two arenas are equally important to both women and men" (p. 35).

The model of adulthood they present is based on life events--benchmarks in the life cycle--that may be individual or cultural. The charting process involves identifying work-related and love-related events over a time span; rating them as "good," "bad," or "okay"; and depicting the results on a graph. The graphs, representing life-cycle curves or contours, are similar to Juhasz' concept of the helix. Analysis of the graphs of 405 adults revealed three types of life patterns:

- --Parallel--in which work and love are consciously kept in balance, the two are conceptually fused, or one is taken for granted
- --Steady/fluctuating--in which one of the areas remains relatively stable and the other varies
- --Divergent--in which work and love seem to be at cross purposes and are more independent than in the other patterns, and work is more central.

In Merriam and Clark's framework, the life events may be individual or cultural, the latter being societal and historical occurrences that affect individual lives. The influence of social/historical context is also a feature of Peck's (1986) model in which an adult's self-definition evolves in a sociohistorical setting that she describes as a wall that is flexible and changing. This wall may be lax or constricting; for example, the identity of a woman who became an adult in a period when women had fewer occupational opportunities would be constricted by this context compared to one who grew up with

fewer sex-role restrictions.

The influence of social/historical factors is also apparent in Gollub's (1991) Life Span Framework. Based on gerontological, sociological, and psychological theories, the framework is a means of developing a profile of a generation or cohort. Its four parts are as follows: (1) Time Signatures--significant events affecting each cohort while their values are being formed; (2) Birthmarks--individual personality traits; (3) Rites of Passage--stages of value development; and (4) Weather Report--the effect on values of the external environment (economic, technological, political, and cultural factors).

Cycles of stability and change are a theme of a number of studies of human development (Hughes and Graham 1990; Juhasz 1989; Merriam and Clark 1991; Schlossberg 1985). Linear career models, characterized by career progression through a rigid hierarchy and external definitions of success, may not be congruent with a cyclical life-span perspective, particularly for more recent entrants to career track positions such as women and minorities. Buzzanell and Goldzwig (1991) propose nonlinear models that emphasize flexibility, challenge, and opportunities for self-fulfillment. Examples they give are (1) expansion of the apprenticeship concept; (2) steady-state careers--staying in the same position if fulfilled by it; and (3) spiral patterns--changing careers, having greater freedom of choice.

SUMMARY

From this review of alternative models of life/career development emerge some themes that may serve as elements of new theories:

- 1. The complementarity of male/female characteristics and

  inclusion of both perspectives in a complete model

- 2. The interrelationship of the individual, family, and work

- 3. The influence of social, historical, and cultural factors

  upon individual lives

- 4. The cyclical nature of the life career

5. The redefinition of success as the evolution of the whole

person throughout the life span, with varying needs and

priorities in various phases

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