

Emotion in adulthood and old age psychology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When asked about how one feels, one's response will be quite different depending on one's age. Depending on how they respond, we can evaluate the individual's self-esteem and determine how they feel based on their age. Positive affect and negative affect can influence one's emotion. There is evidence that " suggests that positive affect rises from youth through young and then older adulthood, but may decline after one's mid-70s. Negative affect appears to decrease steadily from early adulthood to older adulthood, but this decline may taper off in the oldest years" (Mroczek 87-90).

Depending on the person's current state, their emotion will be influenced by the amount of positive or negative affect. Self-esteem also plays a role in one's emotion. During childhood, self-esteem is pretty high, but drops during adolescence. When one reaches adulthood, self-esteem rises gradually, but once old age is here then self-esteem starts to decline. Self-esteem like positive and negative affect can influence one's emotion depending on their current state. Emotion in adulthood and old age is rather complicated because of moderators like marital status or extraversion. To live a better life, one needs to have high positive affect, high self-esteem and low level of stress. However, there are many factors needed to complete such feat. Being married, being in good health, outgoing, occupying positions of power and status will lead to higher positive affect, higher self-esteem, and lower stress which results in a better life. To understand emotion in adulthood and old age, the relationship between age and emotion has to be explored as well as self-esteem, stress and coping over an adult life span, and biological aspect of the brain to know how one's well-being will be affected.

Affect plays a large role in the relationship between age and emotion.

According to the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) survey, “older adults tend to report experiencing more positive affect and less negative affect than younger adults” (Mroczek 87-90). This means that as people move through their youth, they will experience a more balance of affect. This is because “older adults are more motivated to derive emotional meaning from life” (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 56-57). With the goal to maintain positive affect for older adults, they tend to “attend to emotional meaning of information or how information makes them feel” (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 56-57) compare to younger adults. As for younger adults, they “have a tendency to attend to and remember more negative information relative to positive information” (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 56-57). This could explain why older adults are more positive toward life than younger adults. Kolarz and Mroczek proves this with their national sample where “over and above the effects of this wide array of influences, older people reported more positive and less negative affect than those at midlife, who in turn expressed more positive and less negative affect than the youngest members of the sample” (Mroczek 87-90). This holds true until they reach their mid-70s.

For the oldest old, positive affect may drop. According to a Berlin Aging Study, “positive affect declined by as much as half of a standard deviation across several age categories ranging from 70-75 to 95-100. The same study also documented a correlation of $-.22$ between age and positive affect over the age range from 70 to 100 years, in contrast to an association of $.10$ over the age range of 25-74” (Mroczek 87-90). Based on the MIDUS and the Berlin

Aging Study, the results suggest that “ the relationship between positive affect and age is curvilinear, with frequency reports of this emotion rising from young adulthood through midlife before peaking in the earlier years of older adulthood, and then diminishing during the oldest years, when health deficits and other problems become more severe” (Mroczek 87-90). This means when young adults and middle age adults are asked about how they feel, most likely they will give u a positive feedback. However, when the individual is in their older adulthood likes around their early 70s, their feedback would be more negative because of the health problems they have to deal with. Another reason is due to the mixed and complex emotions older adults have to deal with since they are reaching the end points of their life.

As for gender differences, marital status, extraverts vs. introverts, and active vs. non-active people, “ positive affect was higher for men than for women, for married people than for single people, for extraverts than for introverts, and for people in good physical health than for those in poor health”

(Mroczek 87-90). Looking at the negative affect, it was “ higher for women than for men, for unmarried people than for married people, for individuals with high scores on measures of neuroticism than for those with low scores, for people experiencing stress than for those with relatively stress free lives, for introverts than for extraverts, and among people in poor health than in good physical health” (Mroczek 87-90). However, there are exceptions to the age-affect relationship. “ For example, the analysis of positive affect in the MIDUS study showed an interaction between age and extraversion, but only among men. The association between age and positive affect was weaker among extraverted men and stronger among introverted men” (Mroczek 87-

90). This means that for men who are extraverted, age had no difference on their positive affect while age plays a difference for introverted men and their positive affect. " Older introverted men reported higher positive affect than younger introverted men. The effect of age magnified if a man was an introvert, but was lessened if he was an extravert" (Mroczek 87-90). This shows that age is a huge factor for introverted men. As for negative effect, age and marriage are related for men only. For married men, the negative affect is very low from age 25 to 74. However, unmarried men have higher negative affect from age 25 to 74. To sum it up, young men who are married or not will have high levels of negative affect. " However, midlife and older men reported less negative affect if they were married" (Mroczek 87-90). This indicates that being married at least for men will help lowers negative emotion during their middle and older age. Perhaps having someone close to talk to and enjoy life puts men from age 25 to 74 in a more positive way of thinking.

Self-esteem like positive and negative affect plays a role in one's emotion. As we age, our self-esteem fluctuates. These fluctuations are caused by our social environment such as puberty or cognitive thinking in old age. During childhood, self-esteem is starts out high but will gradually decline. " Researchers have speculated that children have high self-esteem because their self-views are unrealistically positive" (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). Young children are unrealistically positive because they don't have to worry about death or health problems. Instead young children are carefree and have lots of goals to look forward to achieving. However, as children begin growing up they start to be more aware of their social environment.

They begin to self-evaluate themselves using external feedback and peer comparisons. These feedback children receive tend to change their positive self-esteem to a more negative self-esteem. “ For example, as children move from preschool to elementary school they receive more negative feedback from teachers, parents, and peers, and their self-evaluations correspondingly become more negative” (Robins , and Trzesniewski 158-162). Adolescence is no better as self-esteem continues to decline. The decline is due “ to body image and other problems associated with puberty, the emerging capacity to think abstractly about one’s self and one’s future and therefore to acknowledge missed opportunities and failed expectations, and the transition from grade school to the more academically challenging and socially complex context of junior high school” (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). However, self-esteem changes during adulthood.

During adulthood, self-esteem starts to rise until the late 60s. Self-esteem increases because of the occupation, power, and status individuals have that promote feelings of self-worth. “ Many lifespan theorists have suggested that midlife is characterized by peaks in achievement, mastery, and control over self and environment” (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). With increase self-esteem, adults levels of maturity and adjustment increase due to the levels of conscientiousness and emotional stability. Sadly, when old age is here, self-esteem once again declines. Self-esteem starts to decline around age 70. The decline can be caused by “ dramatic confluence of changes that occur in old age, including changes in roles like retirement, relationships like loss of a spouse, and physical functioning like health problems, as well as a drop in socioeconomic status” (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). These

events can dramatically impact an individual's self-esteem. When one reaches old age there is a shift toward a different self. Older individuals "shift toward a more modest, humble, and balanced view of the self in old age" (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). They have a deep sense of self-worth, but self-esteem plummet due to their acknowledgement of their own faults and limits. Older people begin to review their lifelong accomplishments and experiences to determine their sense of worth. They are coming across questions such as is this how I want to be remember, am I satisfied with the things I have accomplished, is there something else I need to do before time runs out, or how do I want to end this lifelong story. These questions are require older individual to look back into their past and focus on their past actions to determine their own sense of worth. Depending on how the self-reflection goes, it can lead "to more critical self-appraisals and in some cases to increased self-acceptance" (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). Based on this self-reflection in old age, individuals may experience high self-esteem or low self-esteem. For example, when someone reaches old age, important events like retirement and becoming a grandparent may produce higher self-esteem or lower self-esteem depending on the individual. Most importantly older individual wants to be seen in a positive light. This is the reason why older individuals tend to focus and remember the positive events more than negative events.

Self-esteem in both genders is the same. Both have high self-esteem during childhood, decrease during adolescence, increase during adulthood, and decrease in old age. However, the main difference between self-esteem in both genders occurs during adolescence. Even through both genders have a

decline in self-esteem during adolescence; boys have a higher self-esteem than girls. This difference continues through adulthood, but decreases when old age arrives. Typically self-esteem remains stable within an individual. For example, " individuals who have high self-esteem at one point in time tend to have high self-esteem years later; likewise those with low self-esteem earlier in life tend to have low self-esteem later" (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162). During different periods of life, self-esteem is more stable than others. The general trend is " stability is relatively low during early childhood, increases throughout adolescence and early adulthood, and then declines during midlife and old age" (Robins, and Trzesniewski 158-162).

During adulthood, adults are most vulnerable to stress. For example, a single woman with several children may be a stressful event for her. "

Investigations of the relationship between life events and stress, however, provide preliminary evidence that age can alter the probability that certain stressful events will occur, that age can mediate the amount of stress an event generates, and that age can greatly influence how life events are viewed" (Davis 186-210). This means that age plays a role in stress and most importantly can change the amount of stress. Younger adults received a greater amount of stressors in their lives than middle aged adults. These stressors are positive such as having a new baby, or getting a promotion. Newlyweds have the greatest happiness and positive stress. However, middle age peoples experience a period of negative stress and unhappiness. As for older adults, they " perceived fewer stressors in their lives, but the stressors were largely negative and constituted a high frequency of loses" (Davis 186-210). Adult development and aging influence the appraisals use

to determine the amount of stress. During a stress event, " age may be as important as chronological age in determining a person's response to a stressor, because cohort experiences shape an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and values. The developmental of adulthood, with its tasks, roles, and commitments, influence one's appraisal of life events. People gain experience in dealing with stressors as a whole and specific events gain mastery, learn to anticipate, and may be desensitized to the impact of some stressors" (Davis 186-210). For example, if a young adult is separate from their family and achieve independence, the stress might be going back home and losing the independence. Another way age contribute to stress is the social clock. People lives with expectations that certain life events have to occur at a certain time in life. These events are marrying, finding their 1st job, having children, or retiring. For those that fail to complete the life events in time they experience greater stresses compare to those who complete the events in time. Stress can influence one's emotion and can greatly affect one's well-being. To be able to live a better life, stress should be reduced to the minimal.

To understand how older adults think we have to explore the biological aspect of the brain. Our emotions are control by the amygdala. As adults age, they " experience less negative emotion, come to pay less attention to negative than to positive emotional stimuli, and become less likely to remember negative than positive emotional materials" (Mather 259-263). The brain reacts to negative information when the amygdala show decreased reactivity and positive information when the amygdala increases its reactivity. When older adults were shown positive and negative emotional

pictures, older adults showed an increase of amygdala activity toward positive pictures than negative pictures. This proves that older adults experience more positive affect than negative affect. “ Older adults showed a selective diminishment in their amygdala response to negative information. Age differences do not reflect an overall decline in the functioning of the amygdala, but instead reflect a shift in the type of emotional stimuli to which it is most responsive” (Mather 259-263). The relationship between arousal and amygdala activation for older adults are negative images were less arousing to older adults than younger adults. However, older adults showed more activity toward positive images even though positive images were less arousing. According to socioemotional selectivity theory, “ boundaries on time shift goals. When time is perceived as expansive, as it typically is in youth, acquiring information and expanding horizons are prioritized. When constraints on time are perceived, as is typically the case in old age, negative experiences are no longer useful investments in the future” (Mather 259-263). This means that when time is limited older people no longer look into the future and instead diminish negative information to preserve positive affect.

During a person’s life span they will undergo a roller coaster ride of emotions. To live a better life one must have higher positive affect, higher self-esteem, and lower stress. During adult development, young adulthood have to go through “ finding a direction for work, establishing independence from parents, getting married, having children, etc. Older adulthood, is when developmental tasks focus on dealing with the losses of work, family, and friends; yielding of positions of authority; acceptance of the approaching

death of self; viewing one's past life as inevitable and meaningful; disengagement and acceptance. Middle age is a time of many transitions with reworking relationships; new expectations of what it means to be male/female; new caretaking roles of aging parents, grandchildren, adult children; changes in work roles; and shifts from time since birth to time left to live" (Davis 186-210). To reduce the stress from these activities one must learn the four pillars of stress management. They are relaxation, breathing and stretching exercises, and mini-relaxation. Relaxation techniques are the most use stress management tools. One of the new psychologically based approaches is ABC Relaxation. " The central idea of ABC Relaxation Theory is that relaxation evokes special states of mind, R-States (relaxation states). R-States determine how and when relaxation is effective" (Smith 41-84). Breathing exercises can help reduces stress by " learning to breathe more with the diaphragm, and at a pace that is slow, even, and deep" (Smith 41-84) can calm the body down. Stretching is also useful in dealing with stress. " Yoga stretching involves slowly relaxing muscles through gentle stretching" (Smith 41-84). With yoga stretching, tense muscles would lighten up. Lastly, mini-relaxation only takes one to five minutes. Unlike relaxation which requires one to practice at least five days a week to receive the maximum benefit, mini-relaxation is a short exercise that can help reduces stress in lesser time. If one uses the four pillars of stress management, one can reduces the amount of stress they face and live a better life.

With so many things going on from young adulthood to middle adulthood to older adulthood, one must be able to maintain positive affect, self-esteem, and reduce stress. For achieving high positive affect, one should be in their

middle adulthood, married, being in good health, and being an extravert. To have high self-esteem, one should also be in their middle adulthood, have a position of power and status to have a feeling of self-worth. Lastly, to have minimal stress, one should follow the four pillars of stress management. With high positive affect, high self-esteem, and minimum levels of stress, one can live a better life and enjoy a better adulthood in which one can look back and have no regret in life.

Work Cite

Cavanaugh, John, and Fredda Blanchard-Fields. *Adult Development and Aging*. 6th. Belmont, CA:

Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011. 56-57. Print.

Davis, Gaynel R. " ProQuest Dissertations & Theses." *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses*. 10. 46

(1985): 186-210. Web. 4 Nov. 2012. .

Mather, Mara. " Psychological Science." *Psychological Science*. 15. 4 (2004): 259-263. Web. 4 Nov.

2012.

.

Mroczek, Daniel. " Current Directions in Psychological Science." *Current Directions in*

<https://assignbuster.com/emotion-in-adulthood-and-old-age-psychology-essay/>

Psychological Science. 10. 3 (2001): 87-90. Web. 4 Nov. 2012. .

Robins, Richard, and Kali Trzesniewski. " Current Directions in Psychological Science." Current

Directions in Psychological Science. 14. 3 (2005): 158-162. Web. 4 Nov. 2012.

.

Smith, Jonathan. Stress Management A Comprehensive Handbook of Techniques and Strategies.

New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2002. 41-84. Print.