

Daniel Levinson

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Daniel Levinson was a psychologist and researcher at Harvard and Yale Universities where he became a prominent figure in the area of developmental psychology. He was born in New York City in 1920 and died in 1994. His work expanded the ideas from Erik Erikson and the stage model concept for human development. Levinson was particularly focused on adult development along with the related stages and points of transition. His book *Seasons of a Man's Life* (1978), based on extensive interviews with adults, was extremely influential in the area of developmental psychology. The concepts of midlife transitions and midlife conflict were highlighted in the publication.

In his book, Levinson (1978) has described the research of lives of 40 middle-aged men from different socio-economic backgrounds. His study resulted in a comprehensive psychosocial theory centered around the view of human development as an underlying universal pattern embedded in a sequence of four different *eras* or seasons of the life cycle: Pre-adulthood (0-22), Early Adulthood (17-45), Middle Adulthood (40-65), and Late Adulthood (60-). Overlapping of eras produces transitional periods that on average last for about 5 years. The sequence of eras and transitional periods is expressed in the evolution of *life structure*, the pattern of the most important aspects of an individual's life at a certain period. Different stages and transitions are

characterized by the certain developmental tasks that have to be accomplished to successfully move to a new stage (Levinson, 1986).

Within the framework of his theory, Levinson described the sequence of stages and transitions for men from 17 to 65 years of age with an emphasis on early and middle adulthood. Adult male development, according to Levinson, starts with the Early Adult Transition (17-22) during which the main tasks are separation from pre-adult world (parents, school, peers, etc.), ending or changing existing relationships, formation of adult identity, making initial decisions regarding their adult way of living and putting them to the test. Entering the Adult World (22 - 28) is the time of exploration, experimentation and adventure, yet laden with two major conflicting tasks: (a) exploring alternatives that adult life has to offer, and at the same time (b) building a stable life structure which implies more responsible decisions and behavior. The next stage, The Age Thirty Transition, is the time for young men to re-evaluate the quality of their life, re-align them with their goals and make crucial choices in regard to marriage, family and occupation. The three stages described above comprise the “novice” phase of adulthood (17-33), as Levinson calls it (Levinson, 1978).

The culminating period of Early Adulthood is Settling Down (33-40) which is characterized by self-investment in the most significant aspects of the life structure: family, career, friendships, and leisure (Levinson, 1978, 1986; Aktu & İlhan, 2017). Toward the end of Settling Down period, Levinson distinguishes a period that he refers to as Becoming One’s Own Man (36-40), during which an adult male acquires more independence, confidence and self-sufficiency (Levinson, 1978).

According to Levinson, the next period, the Mid-Life Transition (40-45), which marks the beginning of Middle Adulthood Era, is the time of psychological turmoil, and represents a

developmental crisis. Although for some the transition can be quite smooth, 80% of the participants in Levinson's research reported personal and social difficulties during this period. Mid-Life Transition Period often results in changes in external and internal aspects of life, such as divorce, change of occupation, moving or changing lifestyle, as well as change in values, goals, and attitudes. Levinson views the resolution of the mid-life transition crisis in the integration of four polarities: Young/Old; Destruction/Creation; Masculine/Feminine; and Attachment/Separateness. According to Levinson, an adult person has better chances of adjusting to middle adulthood through finding new ways of reconciling and incorporating polarities into their developing self. The successful transition to the next stage of building Entering Middle Adulthood (45-50) largely depends on the resolution of the previous stage. The adults who build new life structure based on stronger individuation and deeper attachments will pass through the phase with most satisfaction from life (Levinson, 1978). In his book "Seasons of Woman's Life" Levinson came to the conclusion that women follow the same sequence of periods in early and middle adulthood as men (Levinson, 1996). He also published in the areas of personality theory and organizational behavior.

Although later researchers such as McRae and Costa (1990) did not support the idea of a midlife crisis, Levinson's works is still widely applied with regards to stages of development, transition points, and personality.

References

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