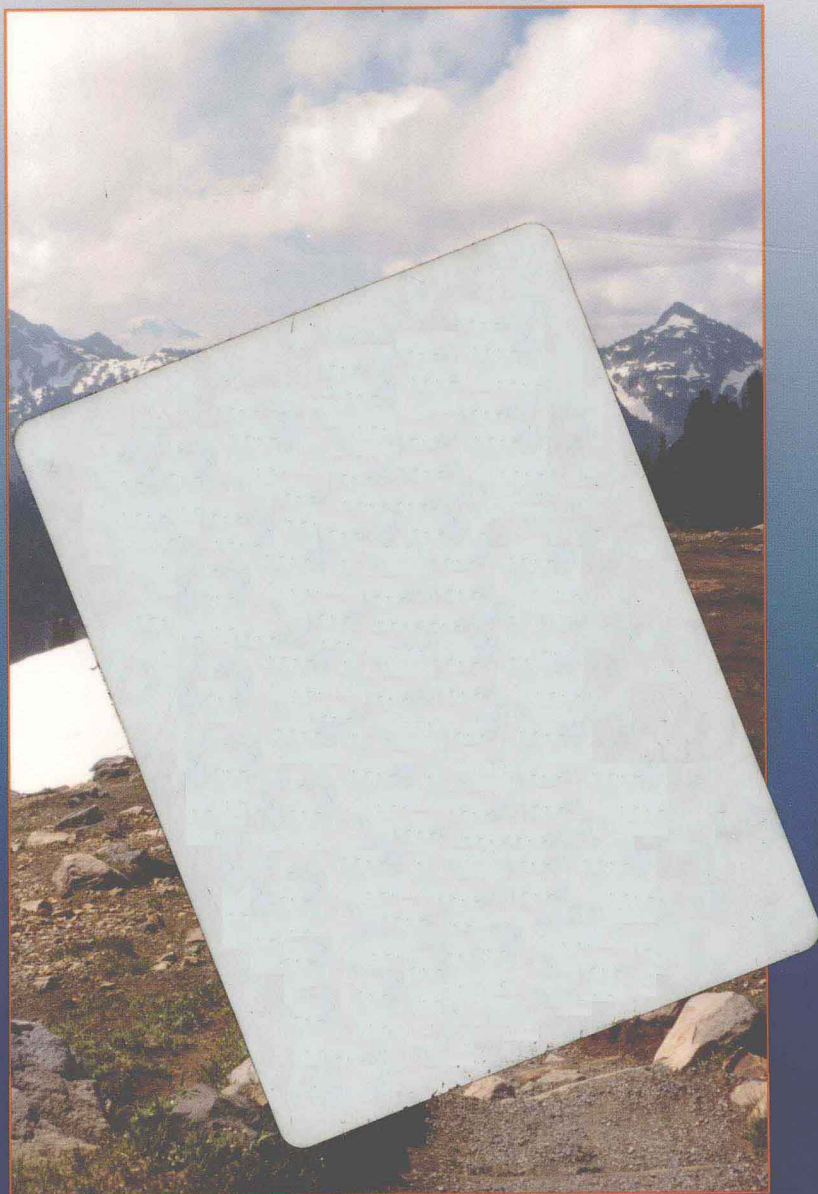


MIDLIFE IN CONTEXT



K.C. KIRASIC

THE MCGRAW-HILL SERIES IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Midlife in Context

K. C. Kirasic

University of South Carolina



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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Domestic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DOC/DOC 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-07-245839-9

Vice president and editor-in-chief: *Thalia Dorwick*

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Cover image: *David Young-Wolff/PhotoEdit*

Manager, Art: *Robin Mouat*

Illustrator: *Rennie Evans*

Compositor: *Carlisle Communications, Ltd.*

Typeface: *Palatino*

Printer: *R. R. Donnelley/Crawfordsville, IN*

Library of Congress Cataloging In-Publication Data

Kirasic, K. C.

Midlife in context / K. C. Kirasic.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-07-245839-9 (alk paper)

1. Middle age—Psychological aspects. 2. Middle aged persons—Psychology. 3. Aging—Psychological aspects. 4. Middle age. I. Title

BF724.6.K55 2003

305.244—dc21

2003048842

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to
Gary for every possible reason;
Rachael, Sarah, and Evan for their encouragement
during the tough times;
My American and Canadian friends for
their unwavering support;
The students, past, present, and future of The
Psychology of the Midlife Woman class;
And finally to Chubby for the constant source of
humor and love.*

About the Author

K. C. Kirasic is a life span developmental psychologist. Trained at the University of Pittsburgh in the Learning-Developmental Program, Dr. Kirasic established an expertise in the area of aging and spatial cognition. During this period in her career, she established herself as one of the foremost researchers in that domain.

Dr. Kirasic finds her recent interests in midlife to be an extension of her early interest in the field of aging. The period of midlife has become central to her current research and teaching efforts. As an associate professor at the University of South Carolina, Dr. Kirasic has been able to broaden her interests to include attachment-related issues as they impact midlife self-esteem and multigenerational attachment relations in female family members of African American, European American, and Peruvian families. This multigenerational, cross-cultural research endeavor was sparked by her popular university course, *The Psychology of the Midlife Woman*.

In addition to her continued work in attachment and her teaching of life span courses, Dr. Kirasic is working on an interdisciplinary effort to develop a clearinghouse for the establishment of midlife women and elderly women mentors. She considers the period of midlife to be pivotal to success in the later stages of one's life. Midlife, and its many dimensions, deserves recognition and thorough investigation. For this reason, *Midlife in Context* is offered as a first step in that direction.

Preface

A book is a tool. Like every tool, there was a specific purpose for which it was designed. This book was designed as a tool to aid the student build a better understanding of the period of the life span known as midlife. The presentation of the material was crafted with the student as the primary consumer. The format is congenial and conversational without sacrificing rigor in content or demands for critical thinking skills.

This book was designed for use by individuals in a variety of fields as an upper level undergraduate or first-year graduate course. Students in a variety of psychology courses, developmental, clinical, or life span, social work, nursing, women's or men's studies could use this as the primary or secondary text. Other audiences in sociology, human relations, cultural anthropology, ministerial training, or human social services could also employ this text in their training. This book is meant to serve as an introduction to a relatively new domain of academic and social investigation. Anyone interested in humans or the process of human development will benefit by familiarizing themselves with this content.

A field sample of approximately 100 students, both undergraduate and graduate, have read and commented upon a variety of aspects of this text. The material, in general, was considered to be accessible and useful in a practical everyday sense. The text insert boxes were said to give the student greater perspective on midlife individuals familiar to them. The miniexercises also gave the student the opportunity to view life from an interactionist perspective. However, the unquestionable favorite section of the text was the "Voices of Our Parents" essays found at the end of each chapter in sections 2 and 3. Students couldn't get enough of these readings. The essays were rated as rich in diversity, eye-opening in experiences, and clearly honest and unguarded. These writings forced the students to realize the many layers that constitute the individual. From these, the students gained a sense that as the world continues to change, so does the realization of one's goals.

The impact of culture, when mentioned where appropriate and if available, forced the student to develop a greater appreciation of cultural diversity. Culture's impact on the many aspects of midlife development became increasingly apparent. It helped the student understand the relative nature of age and the manner in which it is enacted.

This text should also be considered as a pedagogical tool for the instructor. Considerable flexibility is provided to allow the instructor to organize and introduce the material congenial to the course and student needs. In this way, the professor and the student can engage in coconstructive examination of midlife. The chapters are written to afford the creative instructor the latitude to shape particular chapters in the manner most agreeable to their domain of study.

Most important, however, is the recognition of the period of midlife. It is hoped that it will become apparent that this period of the life span is critical to the design of the individual's present and future. The introduction provides the student with the rationale for the development of this book.

Overview and Structure of the Text

This book is divided into fifteen formal chapters with an introduction (Chapter 1) and conclusion section (Chapter 15). The focus of section 1 is theory (chapters 2 and 3), empirical approaches to midlife (chapter 4) and cultural influences (chapter 5). Section 2 focuses on the perception of men and women currently experiencing midlife (chapter 6), physiology and health and fertility and menopause (chapters 7 and 8), and cognitive processing (chapter 9). Section 3 emphasizes relationships with others and one's self—in the family (chapter 11), in the workplace (chapter 12), in educational settings (chapter 13), and in the community (chapter 14). The conclusion (chapter 15) attempts to provide an integrative statement regarding the impact of gender, culture, and history on the life of the maturing adult. Throughout the text, theoretical statements and empirical findings will be presented separately for women and men. This intentional division of the sexes is being used to highlight the fact that although all of the previously mentioned issues are experienced by both men and women, they experience each differently. These differences should be clearly noted and understood, not merely relegated to a footnote.

Also, important terms will be highlighted in each chapter and defined in a glossary at the end of the book. Critical thinking boxes will be selectively placed within certain paragraphs to encourage discussion and reflection. Finally, the appendix has been included to provide the reader with a listing of the questions asked of those responding to the "Voices of Our Parents" essays.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the editors of McGraw-Hill, as well as the reviewers of this manuscript for their invaluable help. Without the following reviewers the development of this book would not have been possible.

Deborah S. Carr,
University of Michigan

Gypsy Denzine,
Northern Arizona University

Lauren E. Duncan,
Smith College

Tracy X. Karner,
University of Kansas

Jan Sinnott,
Towson University

Perry G. Thompson,
University of Arkansas

Bonnie Wolkenstein,
Antioch University, Los Angeles

Elaine Worthington,
Cornell University

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