

My Life Span Paper

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Studying lifespan development allows us to understand the rhythm and meaning of a person's life. It offers information about who we are, how we came to be this way, and where our future will take us. Our development happens through biological, sociocultural, and individual factors working together. It is the pattern of change that starts at conception and continues through the human lifespan. This pattern results from our biological, cognitive, and socioemotional processes. A developmental period is a stage in a person's life that is marked by particular characteristics. The periods of development that I will focus on in my lifespan will be infancy, early childhood, middle and late childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. This paper will explore my experiences in each process and period of my development. I will also explore Jean Piaget's four stages of cognitive development as it relates to my lifespan development.

The period of development from birth to 18 to 24 months is known as infancy. Infants are utterly dependent on adults throughout this time. Psychological processes, language, symbolic reasoning, sensorimotor coordination, and social learning are just getting started at this time, to name a few (Santrock, 2019). According to my parents, I had a normal, healthy, and stable infancy. I was born at around 9 months in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on August 7th, 1997, weighing almost 9lbs. My mother was 20 years old and married to my father (not biological but took me in as his own) after immigrating from the Dominican Republic. My mother recalls that I was born with a heart murmur, but to her knowledge, it was harmless and did not negatively impact my overall health. During the first couple months of my life, I was breastfed; however, my father recalls changing my formula milk several times because I could not digest it well. I developed sensorimotor skills that helped me process information and connected with the world through my

senses and physical and motoric actions. Examples of these things would be using my fingers to collect or gather food for me to taste and playing with my rattle toy to make a sound.

During the toddler stage, a child is about 1 ½ and 3 years of age and is in the era between infancy and the following stage, early childhood. During this period of my life, my sister was born a year after I came into the world, and because we were so close in age, I instantly built a close and healthy bond with her and did not have a hard time adjusting to having a sibling. We shared the same room and toys and did almost everything together (we were inseparable). Most importantly, my sister and I had stability and felt secure in our nuclear family in Puerto Rico at the time. I recall not being a fan of bobos (pacifiers), and I remember my father would take us to the beach and drive us to different places to have mini family trips and make memories.

Throughout my toddler years, I achieved certain milestones, such as communicating multiple words, clapping my hands when I get excited, and showing affection towards my sister and parents. I was also able to use certain household items correctly, like a cup, book, or phone, and lastly, I took a few steps on my own. Between the ages of 2 and 3, I was also able to climb on and off our couch and chair on my own, run, use more gestures like nodding yes, talk well enough for others to understand, use a spoon and fork, ask “who,” “what,” “where,” “and “why” questions, and follow one-step and two-step instructions. My father described me as being a quiet, caring, sweet, and calm child. My parents shared that I had a wonderful imagination, was very intrigued by nature and animals, and loved playing with my barbie dolls/toys (kitchen set) and the children in our neighborhood.

The developmental period from ages 3 to 5 is known as early childhood or, as some call it, the “preschool years.” Children gain self-reliance and learn to care for themselves a bit more in this time frame. Children also develop skills that will prepare them for school, like

following directions, recognizing letters, and spending a lot of time socializing and playing with their classmates (Santrock, 2019). Early childhood often ends in the first grade. Early childhood, from what I can recall, took a drastic turn when I was 4 going on 5 years of age. The stable and secure family I once had fell apart when my mother decided to relocate us to the U.S. in NYC due to personal preference and our safety. At the time, she believed we weren't living in the safest neighborhood in P.R., and my father did not want to move to the states due to financial and personal reasons. As a result, my mother became a single parent. Years later, my parents decided to get a divorce, and they mutually agreed that my father would financially support us from a distance (child support). During this time, my mother was pregnant with my second sister (her 3rd child). We experienced many different hurdles and transitions; one being having to live in three different shelters before my mother would finally get approved for a two-bedroom apartment in Harlem.

I remember having several babysitters and experiencing separation anxiety, as well as my sister when we first started preschool. When we moved to the U.S., I had to learn a different language from the one I was accustomed to at home. English was not my first language, and my mother knew nothing of English. In addition, I had to get used to the busyness of NYC and adapt to the American culture and public transportation system. Despite going through all of these changes and welcoming a new baby sister on September 19th, 2001, in the middle of the chaos and aftermath of 9/11, my mother still managed to continue to be very nurturing, calm, sensible, and attentive to my needs. I could tell she was trying her best to provide us with a good life here in NYC, but things soon changed during my middle and late childhood. The developmental period between the ages of 6 and 10 or 11, roughly corresponds to the elementary school years and is known as middle and late childhood. Children develop their basic reading, writing, and

math skills this time and receive formal exposure to the larger world and its cultures. The importance of achievement rises, and children exhibit more self-control. According to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, children in this stage of life are in a preoperational stage where they can begin to describe the world with words, drawings, and images. These words, drawings, and images go beyond the relationship between sensory information and physical action and demonstrate greater symbolic thinking. However, children would still lack the capacity to carry out what Piaget refers to as operations; internalized mental acts that enable children to mentally accomplish tasks that they could previously only perform physically (Santrock, 2019).

Between the ages of 6 and 7 I remember we were living in Harlem on the 13th floor of a two-bedroom apartment. My mother would make breakfast, get my sister and me ready and take us to school every morning, which was a short walk from our home. During this time, I was an ELL/ESL student, meaning I was a student learning English as a second language and mainly taught in English at school. ESL was an approach that focused on language skills rather than content. My day-to-day consisted of me speaking two different languages, English in school with my teachers and peers and Spanish at home with my siblings and mom. Despite these circumstances, I successfully learned the new language and did well in school, although I was a timid and quiet kid. Around this time, my mother became romantically involved with a guy she met through mutual friends and shortly afterward became pregnant with my first brother (4th child). I remember being very excited about having a little brother. Soon after that, my mother was approved for a three-bedroom apartment in NYCHA on the Lower east side of Manhattan. However, my mother's relationship with my brother's father was on and off, and it began to affect my relationship with my mother. By the time I turned 10 years old, I had an additional 3 siblings from this guy, making it a total of 7 children under my mother's care. At the time, I

thought our circumstances were normal, and little did I know how much this would change and impact my life for the years to come. There were times when I'd have to be under the care of others for a short time (several days), whether they were with babysitters or childcare centers for mothers who did not have a family to help take care of their children while in labor.

At the age of 10 I remember moving to Florida through a section 8 voucher. My 2 sisters and I went to school there for about a year while the rest of my siblings stayed in D.R. with my grandparents. I had to make new friends and adjust to a new way of living. At the time, my mother was studying to get her GED, and I was helping her learn English and study to get her citizenship in the U.S. Our time in Florida did not last short because it became difficult for my mother to get by. She didn't know how to drive, making it difficult for her to get a job. So, we moved back to our three-bedroom apartment in NYC, and I was able to come back to my previous school and reconnect with my elementary and middle school friends. Earlier in middle school, most of my friends were going through puberty. I remember feeling like an outcast and very insecure about my body because I did not reach that point of development fast enough to feel like I could relate to everyone else around me. Looking back, I consider myself a late bloomer, and I even remember being bullied and teased by this one kid about being flat-chested. I remember being under a lot of stress and constantly feeling anxious. It became a bit difficult to concentrate in school sometimes, and our home began to feel crowded and overwhelming. Our circumstances made it very difficult for my mom to keep a job. For most of our lives, we depended on public assistance and resources that the government could offer, such as cash assistance, SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid, to name a few. Between ages 7 and 10, I developed the skills to learn to read music and play the violin and piano while in school. I continued to master other skills aligned with concrete operations in my classes and extracurricular activities.

Adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and early adulthood, beginning between the ages of 10 and 12 and lasting until 18 to 25. This is the period in which individuals improve their ability to function well so they can fully participate in society. Some of the changes I noticed during my adolescent years were physical, such as growth in height, weight gain/body shape, acne, the emergence of sexual traits like pubic hair growth, and enlarging breasts. Lastly, my first menstruation occurred during my freshman year in high school. My transition to high school caused me to gain some independence and helped shape my identity and explore my interests. I started to take the bus and train on my own to get to school, got my first job working at the NYC public library, and spent more time away from family. According to Piaget, I was in the formal operational stage where adolescents reasoned in more abstract, idealistic, and logical ways and created idealized scenarios as part of their transition to more abstract thought. For example, I considered the characteristics of the ideal parent and evaluated my own parents against this ideal benchmark. I began to consider future scenarios and get interested in what I might become, and I also became more systematic in my approach to problem-solving.

My adolescent years were pretty rough because although I was entering a new period in my life and becoming more independent, my responsibilities had increased. Being the oldest of 7 children with a single parent forced me to take on a parental role earlier in my adolescence. I found myself having to “co-parent” with my parent, provide emotional support, and be there for her in every sense of the word. Parentification is when a child takes on the role of a confidante, mediator, and parental figure. Unfortunately, throughout my high school years, it severed and strained my mother-daughter relationship with my mother. Even in my late childhood to early adolescence, I had trouble with play or “letting loose” because I grew up feeling like I had to be

responsible and a caretaker in some way. There were many scenarios where I thought I needed to be a mature adult. In addition, my mother's physical and mental health began to hit rock bottom. She developed diabetes and suffered greatly from depression and anxiety. I was dealing with all these things while balancing school and working part-time. Recently as an adult, I learned that my mother was also parentified as a child and experienced her own childhood traumas. Looking back, if it weren't for me and my family's faith in God, the community, and the support we had in church and school, I don't know how my family and I would've made it throughout those years.

In recent years, the period between 18 and 25 years of age, known as emerging adulthood, has been used to describe the passage from adolescence to adulthood. The emerging adult is known for their experimentation and exploration. During this time, many people are still figuring out what career they want to pursue, their personality/identity, and the lifestyle they want to achieve at this stage in their growth. The era of development known as early adulthood spans the early twenties to the mid-thirties. It is a time of achieving financial and personal independence, progressing in one's work, and, for many, choosing a companion, learning to live intimately with that person, beginning a family, and raising children (Santrock, 2019). Today I consider myself to be in this particular era and period of my lifespan. At the age of 17, I graduated from high school and entered a four-year college majoring in Biology and minoring in Psychology. During this time, my grandparents were able to come to the U.S. for the first time. The adjustment of having them live with my mom, siblings, and me in a 3-bedroom apartment was a struggle and drastically changed the dynamic and conditions of our home. However, their presence and support helped alleviate some of the familial stressors and responsibilities I had while attending college.

While in college, I developed a close friendship with a guy from the church I was attending then, and we later developed a romantic relationship. About two years later, we decided to get married and move out of our parent's home to live and start a new life together. It wasn't easy at first because my spouse had a child from a previous relationship, which caused our first year of marriage to look different than those who did not yet have children during their first year of marriage. We learned to find a balance with co-parenting, set healthy boundaries with family members and the other parent, surrounded ourselves with other married couples and leaned on our support system in the church. Marriage, in a way, has also been healing for me because it's taught me a lot about myself and what it means to build a healthy, secure, and stable relationship. It has also helped me redefine my relationship with my mother and siblings in a good way because I was no longer playing the caregiver role or was in the same environment that I was in before being married. About a year and a half later, after getting married and going through the Covid-19 pandemic, I became the first person in my family to graduate from college with my bachelor's degree. It was a huge milestone for me, and I felt proud.

Now at 25, I am pursuing my master's degree to become a licensed mental health counselor one day. I think many of my experiences, both the good and the bad, including my experience with receiving therapy, have led me to pursue this career path of counseling others. During the global Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, a challenging year for many, I was fortunate enough to meet with a counselor who happened to be a Christian during my last year as an undergrad. Over time healing and transformative work was being done in my life from receiving professional counseling by a Christian counselor. I gained a greater appreciation and understanding of not only the growing need for counselors at this time but also for counselors who can address a person's most profound spiritual needs. I hope to see myself mentoring and

supporting people in their own personal development and providing guidance and counseling, particularly to young people who experienced childhood trauma, anxiety, and depression. I may also want to open up my own private practice someday.

My counseling lens has impacted how I've reflected on my own development because I've become more self-aware and empathic towards myself and the experiences, I've dealt with throughout each phase of my lifespan up until this point. It has also given me a better understanding of my experiences and helped me put into words what I feel and the meaning behind why I behave or think the way I do. Additionally, it's made me understand and empathize with my mother's experiences from a socioeconomic and cultural standpoint and understand why she may have made the decisions she did and behaved or thought the way she did. In other words, viewing lifespan development through the lens of a counselor will help me become an effective counselor in how I relate to my clients. I also learned from a socioeconomic standpoint that many lack the opportunity to get the proper mental health care they need to deal with their mental health concerns. Now that I am in my early adulthood, I realized that growing up in a Hispanic home, issues related to mental health were taboo. Furthermore, meeting a child's emotional and mental needs and expressing feelings and deep emotions lacked importance or were not acknowledged and understood in a Hispanic household.

Understanding and exploring a person's lifespan development can help a counselor have a solid foundation and holistic approach when dealing with the complexities of human beings, such as their social experiences and changes in their emotional, physiological, and cognitive state. Human beings will experience different developmental changes depending on where they are in their lifespan. This is important because it will demand a different and unique way to counsel a client. When a counselor explores their client's past up until their present situation and

period of development, they can work together to establish goals and expectations for their therapeutic relationship. A counselor will also feel compelled to have a broader perspective and approach in assessing the different factors that may have had an impact on their client's normal development such as poor access to quality food and education, family trauma, relocation, poverty, and their caretaker's mental health.

References

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