

My Lifespan Development

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The concept of lifespan development is intimidating, to say the least. There are such a great amount of factors that can either inhibit or assist in one's growth and development. There are so many different paths one could take. Depending on these paths that a person can take, it could alter their lives forever. It is crazy to look back on my own life and see how everything has affected me. Even the little things have made such a lasting impression in my mind, and my body. One never stops developing. It is something that is lifelong and affects mind, body, and spirit. Cultural and biological influence can have a lot to do with one's own development. Everyone develops at their own rate socially, psychologically, and biologically, hence meaning development is multidimensional. Development also happens in different areas, where one will gain in one area they can lose somewhere else. There are many cultural and biological influences that happen over lifespan development, after one peaks physically they start to deteriorate, but learning new things can always continue. Development is also historically influenced by others before us. Lastly, development shows that our minds and bodies have plasticity. For example our physical strength and memory are things we can keep developing.

Infancy/Toddlerhood

My Infancy stage was remarkably difficult, not only for myself but for my parents, as well. When I was born my mom decided not to breastfeed me. Which she regrets to this day. I was extremely colicky and allergic to almost every formula the hospital staff tried to give me. That is also unintentionally when they found out that I had a severe soy allergy. According to my mother, the first few weeks of my life were spent projectile vomiting every time I was fed. This lasted for weeks until they could finally find a very special type of formula my stomach could

tolerate. My stomach had a lot of issues from the beginning, which has affected me into my later years as well.

I was actually pretty ahead of most infants and toddlers with being mobile. I was told that I was so strong that I was doing the army crawl at 3 months old. They had to baby proof everything so early in the house to keep me safe. When I was about 6 months old my mother put me in her bedroom and the floor while she was doing her hair in the en suite. Somehow I had figured out how to crawl down the stairs into the kitchen and I was rolling my high chair around. I was walking for 9 months and my mom was so nervous because of how early I was hitting so many milestones. She said that I was so strong sometimes she could not restrain me if needed. She also tells me that I was extremely hyper active, from toddlerhood on.

I was born with a tongue tie. A tongue tie is a band of tissue that ties down the tip of one's tongue to the floor of their mouth. Tongue ties are known to cause many issues. The first one being feeding. Usually when babies are born with a tongue tie, they cannot latch properly. The doctor will then do a small procedure clipping the tongue tie so the baby can latch, and feed. Tongue ties can lead to other consequences down the road such as problems eating, which leads to malnutrition, speech impediments, and even mouth breathing and sleep apnea. Because the tie is so tight this also caused the jaw to be more tight and constricted causing things like TMJ (Temporomandibular joint dysfunction). TMJ is severe jaw pain, which makes moving the jaw difficult. My tongue tie was never released when I was an infant and my parents thought the tie was pretty normal because it was not as severe as it could have been. But in my toddlerhood this caused a slight speech impediment. I could not pronounce words with the letter "r" ; they sounded more like a "w". This lasted for a couple of years and it took a long time of my parents working with me to get the right sound out.

Erikson's psychosocial stages of development call the newborn/infancy stage trust vs. mistrust. My parents were absolutely outstanding when it came to caring for me even though they both had full time, demanding jobs. They were both extremely nurturing and just wanted me to be okay, and safe. They would have walked through hell for me if they knew that I would be okay. I believe that as an infant I somehow knew that because I never let anyone else hold me unless it was my mother or father.

Early Childhood

When I was three years old, my loving father was diagnosed with stage 4 Colon Cancer. At that point the cancer had spread so much that there was not much more the doctors could possibly do to try and save him. So the next one to two years of my life was a blur. I do not remember a lot of that time due to the trauma. I rarely saw my father during that time, my parents were flying all over the country to find specialists for clinical trials so that he would live. Unfortunately for me, I could not always go with them so I was left with loving family members, and my nanny for days, sometimes even a week or two. I remember telling my nanny "My daddy is going to die". So I always knew what the inevitable fate was going to be. My father's decline was rapid, and he was in and out of the hospital, constantly. It had gotten to the point where we had a hospital bed in the living room for him. A memory that sticks out the most to me is when my father became incontinent he had bed pads under him all of the time, and my mother (who was a nurse) had to help change him. One of the times he needed the pad changed she was busy so I changed it for him instead, unprompted, and they both sat and cried.

About a month before his death he picked me up in his arms for the very last time and rocked me while he sang "You are my Sunshine". I remember telling him he was not allowed to pick me up, and that "Mommy will be upset". A couple of weeks later he went into Fox Chase

Cancer Center in Philadelphia, where he would never leave. I visited him for the last time and his last words to me were “You go get ‘em Kid”. A few days later he lost his speech, and a couple of days after that, he was sent home to be with the LORD. This was August 22nd 2003. Exactly two weeks before I started Kindergarten. I told all of the kids at my Kindergarten orientation “A couple of days ago they put my daddy into a box, and put him in the ground”. All of the parents and teachers just looked at me with tears in their eyes.

In my heart I've always carried so much guilt for my father's death. I always thought it my fault. By the age of six I was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa. With that being said, I had lost over 15 pounds that year, and barely grew. My mom said that on my birthday I blew out the candles, and did not touch my cake. I had to go to a therapist that specializes in childhood eating disorders. After six months the therapist finally got me to come out of it. That really affected the friendships I tried to make with my peers. I was so afraid, so untrusting, and completely miserable with every aspect of life. I was so afraid to lose someone again, that I basically just refused to let anyone else in. So I never really made any friends, I just would shut down. When we compare this to Erikson's psychosocial model of development I would have been in the initiative vs. guilt stage. I always was by myself and so worried about my mom that I never wanted to make her sad and upset so I did not really play too much or when I did, I played by myself quietly. So I believe that I got a little stuck on the guilt side of it

Middle Childhood

At around six to seven years old I was diagnosed with ADHD. My mom had always known I was very hyper active. But at this age she had said I had almost no sense of fear. I would jump off the jungle gym, the lifeguard stands at the beach, and basically run a muck all over the place. I always wanted to be on the go and doing something. In school this made it hard because

I just could not pay any attention, especially to things that did not spark my interest. My grades were slipping a little bit so the doctor put me on Adderall, to calm me down and get me doing better in class. It worked for the most part, but it also caused severe “stomach aches” which I later found out were just panic attacks, but I did not know how to vocalize my feelings.

By the age of 9 my mother got married to another man, and was pregnant with my brother. So a lot of big changes were happening all around me. Where it was just me and my mother now suddenly there’s a new man in the house and a new baby. So much change was happening all around which led to a lot of angst and confusion. But there was also so much excitement because all I wanted was a dad again, and I got one. I remember praying every night for my little brother, and I was elated when he finally arrived. At this point I was still struggling in school. For some reason I always had a hard time in math and science. There were two things I found that I was really good at though were art and sports. I remember being on the softball field as a child and finally feeling like I belonged somewhere. I never felt inferior on the field or like I was not good enough. I felt confident every time I got up to bat, and anytime I got to pitch. I remember being praised so much while playing and I felt like nothing else mattered. Erikson’s psychosocial development phase for middle childhood is industry vs. inferiority. This means that it is important that a child develops a sense of industry (something they are good at or like), because if they do not they will feel inferior to their peers.

Adolescence

My adolescent years went without a lot of problems. I changed schools when I was 12 from a private school to public, and even though I was shy, I felt like I belonged in the world. Life was fine for the most part. I was playing three different sports, I had friends, I was starting to get involved in church again. I also was working two jobs over the summertime outside of

school. Though when I was in highschool I had a small relapse of the same eating disorder I did as a child due to a severely unhealthy relationship with an ex boyfriend. I am so grateful I was able to dig my way out of that and come out on the other side.

Fast Forward to my senior year of high school was when Donald Trump ran for office for the first time for the 2016 Presidential election. I come from a small conservative town in southern New Jersey. I remember at the time my peers were driving to school with Confederate flags flying from the beds of their trucks. That was the first time I had ever thought about race and privilege on a deeper level than just “my skin is white”. I was so unaware of how privilege affected me, and the people around me. I remember seeing those flags hanging out of the trucks and it hurt my heart. What was even worse is that I'm sure those people flying the flags did not even know what they stand for. I remember thinking of the Bible verse “Then Jesus said, ‘Father forgive them; for they know not what they do’”. Luke 23:34 (ESV).

I could not have imagined what it must have felt like or the few African American classmates I had to see that. I remember taking a good look at my life though that day. I realized that not once has my family ever struggled with money, my parents both had amazing jobs, we lived in a big house with a pool and a big yard, and we all had more than enough growing up. It never dawned on me what that meant. That there were so many out there who faced the exact opposite of me. That there are people at that point that probably did not even feel safe going to my highschool every day. That they had to worry about what was going to happen to them and their own if/when Donald Trump was elected.

In Erikson's psychosocial stages of development in adolescence we deal with identity vs. role confusion. I feel like this might be the most important stage. It is all about figuring out who you are and what you stand for. Thinking back I could have just been a part of that crowd and

could have easily been influenced in what they were standing for, and believed in. I knew I had a voice, and my own mind, and my own opinions. I decided that I would not be just another bystander who did nothing.

Young Adulthood

My young adult life has been nothing less than chaotic. All of my childhood trauma that I did not deal with then has come back to haunt me now. I have not been able to talk about what happened to my father or that time period for all of my life without crying, and truthfully I still cannot. This has caused a lot of anxiety regarding relationships. I used to feel like I could not get close to people or trust them, because if I did then they would leave. I have always been so afraid to lose the people that are the closest to me, so I hang on to them as tightly as I can. On the contrary I would hurt people in relationships, before they ever got the chance to hurt me.

Because of my father's death my anxiety has manifested into something a lot bigger, such as gastrointestinal issues. In the last two years I have had a colonoscopy, an endoscopy, a CT scan of my abdomen, and my gallbladder removed. I have lost over 25 pounds since this past November. No doctor could give me any answers or relief, medication did nothing for me. I decided it was finally time to let it go. I was finally ready to dump my trauma off on the side of the road and never look back. I found a wonderful therapist who I really admire, and shockingly enough, my stomach is finally healing.

Another thing that I did not realize would affect me so much in my young adulthood is my tongue tie. This is crazy to me because I found out that it is the reason why I still have trouble with my pronunciation, and enunciation. It is also the reason why I have TMJ and cannot seem to open my jaw all of the way. So my doctor booked me in for surgery to have it removed to give some relief to my jaw.

In Erikson's psychosocial stages of development young adulthood from about 18-4 years old is supposed to be the time where people are ready to share their lives with somebody. But as we all know some people do not reach certain stages of development, or milestones. I am 25 now, and I would say I am definitely at the point where I am ready to settle my life down. I am ready to open up to someone and commit to them. I think now I am mentally, and physically healthy enough to build a healthy relationship, as opposed to a toxic one.

In closing, I turned 25 in October. At the age of 25 is when one's frontal lobe becomes fully developed. It is amazing now to see all of the pieces coming together now. Things that used to not make sense, or areas where I could not connect the dots. I am finally able to see the whole picture, as opposed to little snippets of it. I recently started thinking how it feels like I do not have tunnel vision anymore, I can finally take the goggles off. It is also weird to see what has affected me in my childhood are the same things that are affecting me in my adulthood, either just magnified, or in the same way. I feel like I have lived a thousand lives, but in reality it's only one and I'm still the same little girl. When I think of development I always think of Erikson's psychosocial stages of development because to me they are the most simple way to piece the puzzle of life together. It is so interesting how much some of life's events can hinder some of those stages.

References

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