

LifeSpan Development

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Life span development from infancy to an individual's current stage of development can look different for everyone. Sometimes privilege can also either positively or negatively influence an individual's lifespan.

Coming To America

My parents came to America as legal immigrants from the Dominican Republic. My father is Dominican and Filipino, and my mother is Dominican. I grew up hearing stories about how they struggled to acclimate to America; the cultural shock was an understatement. My dad told me the story of when he first arrived. He did not know any English or how to get around, and he would walk for miles on end to job hunt. His first job in a factory paid 5 dollars an hour. My father went to college and left the Dominican Republic one semester before graduation because somebody told him that America was the best place to be for success. Still, later in life, he realized that he would've been better off completing his degree and getting employment as a civil engineer.

My mother's stories came with more sorrow and struggle. My mother came to America with my brother. At the time, my brother was around six or seven years old. She did not know any English, and neither of my parents did. They are who I can thank for being fluent in English and Spanish. My mother came to this country with my brother's dad. He dropped her off in America and returned to the Dominican Republic. My mother was left alone to fend for herself as a young single mother in a country she knew nothing about, but she was determined to stay and make a life for her children and herself.

Sometimes, she cried to sleep because of her fear of the unknown. She bounced around with a 6-year-old and managed to get an apartment and a job with a salary decent enough to live paycheck to paycheck. She mentioned that being in this country with the change of weather was also challenging; in the 1990s, snow storms were more frequent. Taking public transportation with a young child presented various challenges.

Infancy

My Parents were impoverished in the Dominican Republic and the United States. When I was born, they could financially provide a decent living for my brother and me. My dad, mother, brother, and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx. Although we did not have a lot of space or money, we were well taken care of, nourished, and nurtured. As an infant, I was well-fed, comforted, and loved. I received lots of attention from my family and have lots of pictures from birthday parties and family gatherings. I have a beautiful smile and seem content in all the images. I was a very bright child, potty trained before I turned two years old. I spoke in 2-word sentences at 1 ½ years of age and was almost always ahead of my milestones.

Unfortunately, other problems arose that did not have to do with finances; these issues affected us greatly. Growing up, my parents fought a lot. I remember waking up in the middle of the night from my parents screaming at each other. My dad would fight with my mother about her work schedule. He would complain that she would never be home to care for the children or the home. I started noticing these fights around the age of 5.

My dad was a heavy drinker then, and I remember pretending to go to sleep early when I noticed he smelled like alcohol just out of fear of experiencing his anger. I developed this strategy to stay out of my dad's way and not to have to deal with the anxiety I would get from the fights. One night I missed some of the cues, and I witnessed my dad slam a glass bowl full of water onto the ground in full rage. I remember screaming in fear and panic, I am not sure why I cried that way, but I remember the anxiety and the lack of control I felt within myself, even at such a young age. I began having consistent nightmares. I would wake up screaming in a panic almost every night and see my parents by my side, trying to console me. Night terrors began around the age of 5 and continued through middle childhood.

The Move To Michigan

Grade school went reasonably well. However, I experienced a lot of bullying from other children due to weight gain and being socially awkward. The bullying created self-esteem issues. I had friends but did not fit in. It was challenging for me, and when I started 2nd grade, my parents decided to move to Michigan. They believed that if we moved to another state, we would have a better life because we would have access to better opportunities. The transition was hard for me, and I had to repeat the second grade because I became a bit delayed due to the change. When we moved away, my brother and father began to fight and have many disagreements, so he decided it was best for my brother to live with his family back in New York.

I remember how terrible my dad made me feel because I had failed second grade. He made me believe it was all my fault. He would tell me I was lazy because anyone who struggled with school at that age indicated they were lazy. My parents did not know any English.

Therefore, I needed someone to teach or help me with my school assignments. I often had to ask my teachers for help when I needed assistance with my reading and science homework. As a child, I would get very embarrassed that my parents could not communicate in English as other parents could, and I would grow even more upset when they could not help or understand me.

Moving Back To New York

Before the year, we were already moving back to New York, and I was beginning to feel as lost as ever. I grew fond of Michigan and even formed some healthy friendships. However, my parents could no longer stand to be so far from family and friends. I had freedom living in Michigan. Life in New York posted its challenges; a lower-class income meant going to school and coming home to do homework, watch television and sleep for school again the next day. We could not afford extracurricular activities or many school trips.

I sometimes complained to my parents about feeling trapped in a bubble. I would return to New York to share a room with my brother. In Michigan, we lived in a house where I could explore my backyard, and I had neighborhood friends to play with. Living in N.Y., I needed to learn how to ride a bike or skates to explore nature or something as simple as learning how to ride a bike or skates.

Middle School

Erick Erikson's Fifth stage is identity vs. confusion, which occurs during adolescence. In this stage, from the ages of 12-18, adolescents begin to search for their sense of self and develop their identity through exploring values, goals, and beliefs. In middle school, I started developing my identity. My parents were on the brink of a divorce. They could no longer control their outburst and arguments and were increasingly becoming hostile toward each other. To make matters worse, my brother began harboring resentment toward my father. They would get into constant physical fights. I developed severe anxiety attacks.

My home's unhealthy dynamic drove me to a troubling middle childhood. My grades were starting to decline again, and my friendships were interestingly changing as well. I remember becoming friends with children who had similar issues with their families at home.

Going to a public school in the Bronx meant not having advocacy services for the youth that could help with traumatic events. Most times at school, my friends and I met up in the hallways to discuss all of the abuse that was going on at home. We could not handle the magnitude of the information we would share, resulting in more trauma. I was never comfortable talking to my parents about my difficulties or my classmate's troubles. The language barrier was a very present issue.

High School

My high school experience was full of constant highs and lows. At this point, I had already learned to take the good for good and the bad for bad. My parents had officially decided to divorce, and I was pleased about their decision. I spent weekdays with my mother and weekends with my father. Eventually, I decided I was most comfortable with my father because he worked long hours, which meant I would have more free time to do what I wanted, so I decided to move in with him by 15.

By this age, I had become a 15-year-old with what feels like a 21-year-old mind. I began to think I was an adult and could make my own choices and decisions. I made terrible decisions; I cut classes and left school early daily. I smoked marijuana thrice a day and had not developed any form of healthy coping skills.

Privilege

Privilege is a tricky subject for me; everyone has some privilege. I was privileged to have both parents living. My parents continue to be with me, and I feel privileged to have them. However, in some aspects, I had a very rough childhood. I grew up in an impoverished rural community. Struggles with socialization and social anxieties from having poor communication skills from years of suppression are among my current battles. My parents did their best with what they had. Although I did not understand it before, I comprehend it now. A first glimpse of childhood, I was born into a family who did not have the educational capacity or experience to understand me as a growing child.

My parents loved me but were never loved. I did not know how to display affection openly. Meaning that my parents did not ever say I love you; I do not remember any hugs or kisses or even any deep and intimate conversations. I knew my parents loved me based on the care that I received. My dad and mother worked to provide, they made sure I was fed, clean, healthy, and went to school for an education, and although they could not teach or help me, they did their best. I do feel a sense of oppression in my mind that New York could have had programs accessible for parents who come from other countries. Often, folks immigrate to the U.S. and struggle with developmental and language barriers.

Programs that help parents or individuals progress in language development and mental health services could have helped my parents better communicate with me. Programs for learning adaptivity and healthy coping skills for their children could have helped me. It would have been easier for me growing up. There were many times when I taught myself.

Something as simple as riding a bike or learning how to swim are examples of skills I still need to develop. When I met my husband, we spoke about our previous traumas growing up and how we had become desensitized in areas where we had never seen any differences. We both came from difficult homes; my husband and I met in middle school, and at the time, my husband's father became imprisoned, resulting in growing up without a father figure.

We connected over our trauma and our ability to understand each other through similar hardships. We are the first in our families to graduate college and have completed goals that earlier generations could not. Most of our friends are also much older than us. We build stronger

relationships with people who are more structured rather than disorganized. We also prefer experience and maturity over inexperience and immaturity.

Conclusion

Life span development is different for many people. I have found many blessings, opportunities for growth, and experiences throughout the different phases of my life. With faith, I have made it through life's most challenging aspects, and I continue to learn and grow throughout my lifespan.

References

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