

Life Span Paper

Juanita Lowery

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling, Alliance University

GCN 603 OA: Counseling and Human Development

Professor Lesley Washington

May 2, 2023

Life Span Paper

The stages of human development consist of eight stages, Erford (2017) mentions that, “The eight periods most professionals use to characterize development include the prenatal period, infancy/toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and later adulthood/old age” (p. 3). The beginning stage is the prenatal period that begins from conception to birth. The next period is the infancy/toddlerhood stage starting from birth to three years old. The early childhood period is about three to six years old. Middle childhood is the next period that begins from six to thirteen years old. The next period is the adolescence period from twelve to nineteen years old. Young adulthood is the period from nineteen to thirty years old. The middle adulthood stage is based on the ages from thirty to sixty years old. Late adulthood is the period from sixty to seventy-five years old, and old age is anything over seventy-five years old.

The significance of human development is something that most people may take for granted until they reach the stage of middle adulthood. Middle adulthood is the stage between young adulthood and later adulthood; where one yearns their young adulthood years, and cringe at the thought of entering the stage of later adulthood. Some may refer to this as a midlife crisis, Erford (2017) mentions that, “The term midlife crisis can be rephrased as a midlife transition that also includes some positive aspects. Although this period in life can be accompanied by serious unhappiness, it can also mark a period of remarkable growth” (p. 369).

Middle adulthood has been a transition for me as it relates to every area of my life that includes my physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Beginning with physical development, which has been a challenge, because your body transitioned first with no warning

signs to prepare me. After turning forty, I woke up to losing skin elasticity throughout my body. This was followed by strands of gray hair that were mistaken for lent. Erford mentions that:

Wrinkles, gray hair, baldness, and changes in weight are just a few of the physical changes that people in middle adulthood may experience. Visible changes are the defining signs of aging. Although physical changes may vary among people, they are also universal. Wrinkles are caused by changes in skin structure. Skin can begin to show wrinkles and sag due to fat and collagen loss in tissue. (p. 347)

The weight factor affected me too, especially after having my last child in my late thirties. My body never seemed to fully recover; I realized that due to my body changing my metabolism had also changed. Erford (2017) mentions that, "Weight gain can be a problem in middle adulthood due to changes in metabolism, poor diet, and even pregnancy" (p. 347). The next change was my vision, my last visit to the eye doctor, I was prescribed reading glasses – that work very well! The glasses made reading so much better. Erford (2017) stated that, "When a person needs to move a book or newspaper away an arm's length away in order to see the words clearly, it may be quite a shock. This is due to a condition called presbyopia, which is when there is an inability to focus on objects at a close distance" (p. 348).

My cognitive developmental stage became stronger, based on being older and gaining wisdom; which provided me with the tools and ability to solve problems for others. Erford (2017) states that:

People in midlife excel in the area of practical problem solving due to their higher levels of expertise, their use of integrated knowledge, and their increased organizational skills. They have an improved capacity to translate their current skills and knowledge when encountering new problem-solving tasks. (p. 363)

One of the things that I realize is that you may lose in some areas, but gain in others, and for me; I believe that wisdom is one of the cognitive areas that has strengthened for me. Erford

mentioned that, “As people age, they experience stress, pain, and suffering that triggers self-reflection and personal growth. Both are factors attributed with wisdom” (p. 363).

Physical and cognitive development were also a part of my transition at this stage, but my social and emotional development based on my family, career and spirituality also had a major effect on me too. Erford mentions that, “Middle adulthood comes with changes that relate not only to biological and cognitive issues, but also to social and emotional issues as well” (p. 368). External factors at this stage are evident, but internal factors are just as important, because how one learns how to process different transitional periods is vitally important. An example of this would be the sandwich generation, which is exactly what I experienced taking care of both my dad and family.

This was both mentally and emotionally draining trying to care for my children and dad, which left me feeling bad for not being able to provide the level of care that he needed while he was sick. I became stressed and depressed, because I was overwhelmed trying to balance both, in addition to working a full-time job at a family shelter. I became so consumed with helping others that I forgot about myself and the importance of self-care and balance. My face began to break out. I also started to feel pain and numbness in my left arm. Erford (2017) mentioned that, “As mentioned above, adults in the sandwich generation may report an increased amount of mental and emotional stress associated with the elevated level of responsibility, lack of resources, financial strain, and increased need to balance multiple roles” (p. 368).

Even though this has been one of my stressors, I realized that during this developmental stage, I had several stressors. Stressors relating to my friendships, career, finances, in addition to going back to school. I realized that at this stage in one’s life their main concern should be retiring, but for me, instead it was changing my career and going back to school. It has been

hard and challenging, but repositioning myself for this new season has been worth the challenge.

I agree with Levinson's theory regarding seasons of life, his theory explains my personal transition during this season.

Erford (2017) mentions that:

The middle adult years (40s) are a period of reevaluation of one's life goals as well as evaluation of how one envisions oneself over the remainder of their lives. Each season consists of a transition period, followed by a stable phase in which individuals tend to make crucial life-changing decisions. Middle adulthood is entered into as a transitional period in which one reevaluates the successful attainment of early life goals. (p. 371)

The other theory that resonated with me was Maslow's theory on self-actualization. Erford (2017) mentions that:

There are eight steps to achieving self-actualization. The first step involves experiencing life fully. Being completely absorbed in an act allows the individual to live vividly and selflessly. The second step is to take risks. Taking risks as opposed to choosing safety fosters progress and growth. Step three involves the emergence of the self. It is positive to shut out external clues to what "should" be thought or done, rather than what the individual truly is in the person's best interest to disregard outside judgements. Step six involves the use of intelligence to complete things soundly. Step seven involves making peak experiences more likely and removing misconceptions and fabricated notions to lead to the acknowledgement of what the individual is truly capable of accomplishing. Finally, step eight involves self-exploration and self-discovery, where the individual recognizes his defenses, which leads to the eventual release of those defenses. (pp. 374-375)

The next stage before middle adulthood would be the young adulthood stage. This stage beginning with physical and cognitive development. Looking back, I was healthier and more disciplined in my twenties. I was very conscious about my health, I maintained a balanced diet that consisted of vegetables, fruits, lean meats and plenty of water. Erford (2017) mentions that, "Individuals are often healthiest during young adulthood and are seemingly exempt from health issues caused by serious diseases (e.g., cancer) and senescence" (p. 292). As it relates to my cognitive development, I never had any concerns in this area. The areas that I could relate to

would be social, emotional, as well as career development. My life prior started off as fun, represented freedom, and independence. At this stage, you get a glimpse of what it means to become an adult with selective responsibilities. I was in college, working a full-time job and partying every weekend. In my early twenties, I had several friends that I hung out with, and as I got older those friendships began to become distant. Erford (2017) mentioned that:

In young adulthood, friendships are often developed through work or parenting activities, and we often seek out friends who are experiencing similar life events. Friends tend to be less stable during this time due to the transient nature of young adulthood. Most individuals leave friends behind to pursue educational opportunities or take a new job; others may relocate to be closer to a potential spouse or partner. (p. 320)

This was very difficult because I was friends with them for a long time, and we provided social support for each other. Looking back, I realized that people come into our lives for reasons and seasons. I also learned to embrace the new seasons and became open to making new friends, which I did through working and in college.

Another challenge for me at this stage was being a single parent at the age of twenty-five. Erford (2017) mentioned, “For many young adults, the decision to become a parent is planned in advance and coordinated with the couple’s financial situation, but may be a complete surprise to others. Regardless, the arrival of a child marks a major transition in the lives of new parents” (p. 330).

Being in a relationship and in love with a person that was not ready to start a family with you. I had to learn how to co-parent and raise our daughter at the same time. My priorities had changed overnight, I had to think about someone other than myself. Erford (2017) also mentioned that, “Single parents often face more barriers to raising their children than do married parents. They often have fewer financial resources, minimal coping resources, and increased responsibilities. Specifically, single parents are responsible for childcare, maintaining a

household and providing economically for the family” (p. 332). I started to focus on my career, so I went back to school to get my bachelor's degree. I started working at American International Group and began seeking housing. As I look back, those were some hard times, but it was all worth it; because now my daughter is a junior at an HSBC studying criminal justice.

My middle adolescent years regarding social identity and development as it related to romantic relationships, dating, peer relationships, intimacy. During this stage, even though I was young, they were some of my most memorable years, especially as it related to my dating experiences and romantic relationships. This one relationship in particular was with this young man who was a street pharmacist - which was known as a drug dealer in the early 90's. Growing up in the projects, this was the norm, because around 80% of the young men sold drugs. It was unfortunate, but our reality! We were both in love and planning on a future with each other, until he was arrested. Erford (2017) mentions that, “Typically, girls start dating earlier than boys and are more interested in dating than boys. As they move through mid-adolescence, dating relationships become more intimate, usually around age 17, with some teens actually “falling in love,” or at least thinking so” (p. 279).

Fast forward, he was sentenced to 40 years in prison. I was in shock and devastated too! That was the first time I experienced an unjust law system that was unfair. This was my first experience witnessing an unjust system, I'm not saying that committing a crime does not have its consequences, but this was too much time. This experience for me was similar to ‘encounter’ in the Black Racial Identity Development model. I was angry for a long time and considered pursuing a degree in criminal law, and now my daughter is pursuing her degree in criminal justice. My relations with my peers growing up in the projects were filled with love for one another. I met some unforgettable peers between junior high school and high school. We served

as support groups for each other, because we experienced similar things, and were able to confide within one another. Erford (2017) stated that, “As you may recall from your own adolescence, peers can be a tremendous source of intimacy and support, as well as empathy and understanding” (p. 278).

The middle adulthood stages of development for me were pretty linear, except for some traumatic experiences within the community relating to the crack epidemic. I witnessed substance abuse users being beaten, gun violence, and people that I grew up with getting killed. Now that I'm older and think about that experience, as a child we were taught to be quiet and forget what we may have witnessed. This made you conditioned to violence, and it became a normal behavior.

As for my preschool years, I remember very little, except going to a predominate white school, where they called me nigga and chocolate milk. I never realized the effects that it had on me until years later. I believe that I have an inferiority complex from this experience, which I plan to work on with my therapist.

One of the most challenging things for a person in their mid 40's to do is complete a life span paper that reflects their personal life. This is challenging for several reasons, beginning with regrets, followed by should haves, and could of's, or maybe ifs, but the main reason is because it reflects one's life up until now. After completing my life span paper, I realized that these development stages are significant, because they provide us with the precious gift of wisdom. Wisdom that also reminds us that we still have time to do things differently like a second chance at life.

Reference

Erford, B. T. (2017). *An Advanced Lifespan Odyssey for Counseling Professionals*. (1st Ed.). Cengage Learning, Inc