

Developmental portrait

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Developmental Portrait Linda Wetherspoon Capella University Advance Research in Adult Human Development and Behavior U04a1 M. C. Cooper November 02, 2011 Abstract This paper presents an interview conducted with a 52 year old woman. The focus is on identifying the changes or events experienced during midlife years and how these changes affects physical, social, emotional, cognitive, intellectual and spiritual development. The most noticeable change is physical appearance, change in body weight, the eyes increased sensitivity to glare and the inability to distinguish between blues, purple and greens, just to name a few.

Socially, how she feels restricted and going through the menopausal years with self-taught remedies due to the lack of information and much needed resources. There are many complicated emotions of midlife ranging from anxiety and fear, to courage, hope and a sense of freedom never before experienced. Change can bring stress, depression, helplessness, loneliness, even hopelessness, or in that same respect, can heal. Behavioral study of midlife has shown very predictable changes. There's a greater calmness that comes during midlife when you accept that change is inevitable.

Intellectually, transitions are very different from those made in your twenties and thirties. The recognition of mortality diminishes the importance of status, success, money and meeting the expectations of others. At this stage, we tend to reflect on the gap between the reality of our lives and the dreams we once had. With the sum of all parts included, this interview uses Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Crisis Theory of Human Development to focus on an individual approach of human development, psychosocial conflict or crisis that must be resolved by every individual to exist in their final stage of life

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(Erickson, 1959, p. 1). During the interview, Jori specified many changes she had gone through during middle age. These included an increasing sense of boredom with her career which caused her to take an early retirement at 54 years. Her husband makes good money and so she felt that she no longer needed to work. She said he agrees with her decision. Jori likes being at home but she states that she has put on a lot of weight and that scares her because she knows that being overweight when you are older can lead to health problems.

Losses in strength and endurance in old age have much the same psychological affects as changes in appearance (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006, p. 45). No one dreams about being ugly. Indeed, she worries a good deal about her health and goes to the doctor frequently for various aches and pains. Her doctor has found nothing wrong but she still worries a lot about her aging and attributes a good deal of her worry about health to her parents' deaths. Both of her parents died within the last three years and she feels that their deaths reminded her of her own mortality.

She informs that this concern about death has led her to have a series of panic attacks for which she is now in therapy. During the middle age period, her two sons moved out of the home but they never went far; both of them only live about five or six miles away. One son was divorced and has not remarried since; while the other son is married to a woman who Jori detests. She worries a lot about this son and what she perceives as the negative effects his wife has had on him. However, she has a good deal of interaction with both sons and they visit her often.

As to how these life changes (death of parents, early retirement, stress over her sons, gaining weight, aging body) have affected her, she reports that physically she has tension headaches a good deal and difficulty sleeping sometimes with many nightmares. Emotionally, she states that she often feels doubtful about what to do with the rest of her life as well as very anxious and fearful. However, both she and her husband do like to socialize and she spends a good deal of the time when she is feeling okay planning big parties for her family and friends.

According to Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields 2006, as people age, they become better at managing their lives so as to avoid problems in the first place, so they do not need to cope with stress (p. 89). She said she always feels pretty good when she makes a good meal and she sees the people she cares about enjoying themselves at her house. On the other hand, she seldom likes to go out to parties elsewhere as she fears she might have a panic attack. She still goes, but far less frequently than she did before having panic attacks.

Regarding her spiritual development, she reports that in the last year she has really started to think about God and things spiritual. She reads spiritual books and watches ministerial television. She states that it has helped her tremendously and that for the first time, she really has hope that she is going to overcome the fears, concerns and anxiety attacks that she has been experiencing. She put it this way, “ God is sending me people who are teaching me a new way of thinking about myself, life, and others. I’m still in the early learning stages, but I have hope for a life-altering change. Human

development, according to Erik Erikson (1959) consists of a series of physical, emotional and psychological stages extending from birth all the way to death,(p. 24). Each of these stages requires that the human being solve a particular developmental work or task. Middle age, which Erikson conceptualized as running from 35 to 65 years, was said to be a time in which one struggled with life changes, such as career changes, job changes, children leaving the home, and even the death of parents; all of these have been experienced by Jori.

Whether the outcome of this struggle is overall positive or overall negative, according to Erikson (1950, 1974), is dependent on whether the adult becomes more generative or stagnates. It should be noted here that the development of a psychological problem or difficulty (such as Jori's anxiety attacks) is sometimes part of the stressful life transition associated with this stage of development and does not mean that overall the psychosocial crisis associated with this stage will not ultimately be resolved positively.

Regarding the generativity or stagnation conflict, Erikson associated this with the integration of personal goals with the larger goals of community(Erickson, 1959, p. 24) He said it involved guiding the next generation, and becoming engaged in activities that outlive the self and ensure society's continuity and improvement. Adults were said to feel as if they are needed at this stage and desire to make a contribution that will survive their death.

On the other hand, stagnation was associated with becoming self-centered, self-indulgent, and self-absorbed. Clearly, Jori is showing some evidence of

self-centeredness and self-absorption as in her constant fears about herself. On the other hand, she is in the process of building a spiritual foundation to her life which is a generative gain, making a person at this stage of life more open to experiences, more extraverted, and more conscientious—all of these being attributes that are said to be fundamental to the attainment of generativity.

The foregoing idea is strengthened by Sadler and colleagues (2006) who state that having a good spiritual foundation leads to an exchange of support with others, and improves social relationships with others in the larger community (pg. 44). Thus, despite the self-centeredness and withdrawal that characterizes Jori's response to some of her middle aged life changes, there remains good reason to think that she has the positive elements in place that make for her attainment of generativity once she is completely through the middle age developmental crisis.

The findings and subsequent analysis show that while Jori is still struggling with the psychosocial conflict of middle age, she is slowly building a good foundation for attaining generativity. She is in therapy for her anxiety problems and presumably this will deal also with her tendency to withdraw and stagnate. Also, she is developing a spiritual life. She enjoys entertaining and reaching out to a larger community at the domestic level.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that despite negative elements in her life that could hinder her successful resolution of this conflict; she will indeed overcome it and succeed in gaining generativity. Human development theory can be very helpful in terms of assisting a clinician or

other relevant party to understand the developmental aspect of middle age. As noted by Thomas (2000), human development theory provides a framework for better understanding the goals people of this age set for themselves as well as how they attain these goals (p. 27).

It also provides useful models for understanding the psychoemotional and social conflicts they must deal with as part of being in this particular age group. The foregoing does not mean that theory is not without problems, problems that can impair understanding of this time period. For one thing, models and theories are general and people can have quite unique and individual aspects of the conflicts they encounter in any age group. Thus, theory is really more of a guide than a clear and definitive delineation of what will occur with any given individual.

Furthermore, there are many theories of human development (Thomas, 2000), leaving the clinician and others working with the middle-aged individual in the position of selecting which theory seems right for the person or people they encounter (pg. 48). Unfortunately, this means that there can be selection mistakes in which those working with the middle-aged lose some in their understanding. This is one of the reasons why the recent research on theories of human development should be constantly reviewed and checked for new and more expanded understandings. References
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