

Lifespan Timeline Analysis

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Part I: Timeline

Part II: Timeline Analysis

“The brain is plastic its whole life span” (Wolf, 2014, as cited by Rosenwald, 2014).

From conception to death, over the course of one’s lifespan, developmental processes produce change in individuals as they progress through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Theorists such as Erikson have created stage theories of development, breaking the course of human development into multiple stages in which people share common characteristics (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Each stage brings new cognitive, psychological, and social influences that affect one’s personality development and continuously-evolving identity. Throughout one’s life, individuals exhibit different psychosocial aspects of behaviors, whether it is the need to develop trust in the first year of life or the desire to come to terms with the successes and failures of one’s life during late adulthood. As a person’s self-concept emerges, he or she interacts with others, resulting in positive or negative feelings that can affect one’s self-esteem. In this paper, I will analyze eight significant events from my life that I believe impacted my identity development.

1972 to 1979: Always Picked Last in Physical Education Class

“We do not, cannot, know the meanings of all their words, for we are nine and ten years old. So we watch their faces, their hands, their feet, and listen for truth in timbre” (Morrison, 1993, as cited by Prager & Glaser, 2016).

In the mid-to-late seventies, my teachers did not worry about protecting children from classroom bullying and ridicule. Like my parents, they were raised in the "children are to be seen and not heard" generation and kids were expected to do as they were told, without complaint. Without fail, whenever we played team sports in my elementary school physical education (PE)

classes, the male teacher would appoint the two most athletic boys as team captains and instruct them to pick teams. As an unusually small, girly girl, I was always picked last, resulting in a six-year-long series of life events that I was forced to endure. In middle childhood, social relationships help a child develop his or her self-concept, a sense of security, and connection with peers (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Children form opinions of themselves based on others' perspectives, as if viewing him- or herself through a looking glass. While standing in PE class, my heart sank as everyone else was invited to join a team. I could feel my relieved classmates' eyes on me as I stood alone and I felt their disdain. As they looked down on me, I looked down on myself and felt unworthy of acceptance. According to Bronfenbrenner, the proximal processes of my developing self-awareness combined with the negative perspectives my peers in my microsystem had of me, severely damaged my self-esteem. Unfortunately, I never told my parents because I did not want them to be disappointed that their daughter did not fit in.

Classifying the grade of influence of these events is tricky. Although many children experience belittling situations during middle childhood, not *all* children do so I would not classify them as normative age-graded development influences (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016). I suppose that I might have been a member of the "small-for-one's age children of the 1970s" sociocultural group which would enable me to classify these events as having been influenced by normative sociocultural-graded influences. I am reasonably sure that the majority of the children of my era who were extremely small for their age enjoyed similar experiences. However, I was the *only* kid that I knew was having these issues, so my experiences were nonnormative but connected to age-graded milestones. Might that be considered a *nonnormative* age-graded development? It is interesting to consider.

According to Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development, between the ages of six to twelve, children experience the "industry vs. inferiority" stage (Broderick & Blewitt, 2016, p. 12). It is during this stage that children begin comparing themselves, putting more stock in how their peers see them as they get older. I developed low self-esteem and became increasingly sensitive to external evaluative cues and social feedback. Low self-esteem in childhood predicts future negative and emotional experiences over time and less satisfaction in relationships and work situations.

I believe that this period of my life set the stage for many negative experiences I had during adolescence and young adulthood. Throughout junior high and high school, a girl by the name of Kelly, would glare at me and make me want to disappear. If I had developed a stronger self-concept in middle childhood, perhaps I would not have been so susceptible to her intimidation tactics and the additional blows they took at my self-esteem. In young adulthood, my romantic relationships suffered, too. I so desperately needed validation and approval to feel better about myself that I altered my identity to fit who I thought my partners wanted me to be. And, when they began to pull away, I became clingy and needy, resulting in the loss of the relationships.

1980 to 1984: Endless, Unsuccessful Tryouts

"At fifteen life had taught me undeniably that surrender, in its place, was as honorable as resistance, especially if one had no choice" (Angelou, 1969, as cited by Prager & Glaser, 2016).

Another series of meaningful life events occurred during my junior high and high school years. In seventh grade, after participating in a non-competitive, recreational cheer program for four years, I unsuccessfully tried out for cheerleading for the first time. I enjoyed cheerleading,

but in the midst of what Erikson described as an identity exploration, I had hoped that since all of the popular girls were cheerleaders, I would gain peer approval if I made the squad. Erikson saw individuals as active and self-organizing, needing the right social context to move in a positive direction. During my identity search, as I struggled to find my place among my peers, I lived anxiously in the unstable adolescent state of frameworklessness. In 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th grades, I continued to try out for cheerleading, never making a squad. In 10th and 11th grades, I also tried out, unsuccessfully, for the dance team and yearbook staff. Then, in 11th grade, I was selected for the Pep Club Council (PCC) which I grew to love. We were a group of about ten girls who painted supportive banners to hang in the halls and decorated players' lockers, before sporting events. We also planned and ran the pep rallies. Soon after making PCC, I tried out for and made the wrestling cheer squad, followed by again being selected for PCC for my senior year. Happily, when I tried out for the varsity cheer squad for my senior year, I made it! Watching me go through all of that was very hard for my parents who thought I was perfect in every way. They were frustrated that a girl, who wanted so badly to be involved, had such a hard time finding her niche. Today, they mention how unbelievable it was that I just kept trying out in spite of all the rejections. Honestly, I cannot believe it either but, as difficult as it was, I'm glad it happened as it did since the difficulty in achieving my varsity cheerleading dream enhanced the experience of being on the squad and taught me that determination and hard work pay off.

Again, determining the grade of influence of all of the fruitless tryouts I participated in is not easy. But in these instances, the majority of girls were not selected for the squads or groups, making these events lean toward normative age-graded (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2016). Interestingly, there is a sizeable and judgmental sociocultural group of those who believe that cheerleading is ridiculous and superficial, resulting in a separate sociocultural group of those who aspire to join

the squad. So, among girls who want to be cheerleaders, experiences like mine would be considered normative sociocultural-graded influences on my development..

Fortunately, I believe that during this period, in spite of low self-esteem, I developed self-regulation skills and resilience (Dias & Cadime, 2017). Having lost my friend group at the end of middle school, I existed in the “average” sociometric status group and had several average friends (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Several studies have shown that in the face of stressful life events, protective factors are effective in promoting positive psychological adjustments (Dias & Cadime, 2017). The support and flowing positive appraisals of my parents and grandparents along with teacher and school support acted as protective factors in my life as I faced adverse events. These factors contributed to my development of self-regulation (the ability to maintain focus and effort on a desired objective, without giving into immediate impulses) and resilience (the ability to achieve positive outcomes in the context of adversity), thereby increasing my self-esteem. Without self-regulation and resilience, I doubt I would have found the courage to move to Colorado at the age of twenty-three, obtain the ad agency job of my dreams, find the man I love, or go back to school at the age of fifty.

1986: A “Perfect” Sorority Rush

“At eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced” (Bronte, 1849, as cited by Prager & Glaser, 2016).

As I had by becoming a cheerleader, I hoped to gain peer acceptance and approval by pledging a sorority at the University of Kansas (KU). Going into the unfamiliar process, I was nervous, worried and fearful of rejection. Sorority rush was a multi-day process during which rushees visited the various Greek houses for parties that increased in duration each day. During the parties, sorority members engaged in small talk with the hopefuls, rotating so that as many

members as possible could “interview” each rushee. At the end of each day, the sorority girls would vote on the rushees and select who would be invited back the next day. Since rush occurred during the last several days of winter break, rushees were allowed to stay in their dorm rooms before other students returned. Each morning, groups of us would wait together to receive bids from sororities, inviting us back for that day's parties. Much to my surprise, I received invitations to return to every sorority every day. As the other girls cried for being cut from houses they loved, I would go in my room and whisper my happy news on the phone to my mom as I decided which sororities I would cut to meet the maximum we were allowed to visit. It was so exciting and extremely validating! For the first time in my life, I did not feel “less than.” I felt I had escaped the labels of my middle childhood and adolescence and embarked on a fresh start. In just a few days, I experienced positive psychological change in the form of increased self-worth and improved self-esteem.

Studies of the long-term stability of peer group status classifications have been shown to be moderately stable, especially in the case of those who have been rejected being the most stable category of all (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). In other words, a child's reputation, based on early social interactions, endures despite evidence to the contrary (Denham & Holt, 1993, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Even though by my senior year of high school I was a varsity cheerleader with a “popular” boyfriend and a “popular” best friend (both a year younger), my label as “average” stuck. When attending events with my well-liked boyfriend, I was snubbed by his friends. Even though I had achieved several of my goals, I still judged myself via the perspective of my peers and remained deeply insecure and uncomfortable in my skin. In college, based on the opinions of a brand new collection of peers, my “perfect rush” (as it is called when you do not get cut by any sororities) gave me new confidence in myself at an

important time in my life. Schaie labels young adulthood as the achieving stage of cognitive development when individuals must apply their intellectual skills toward their long-term goals (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Although I felt “above average” and likable in high school, I was stuck in my peer-determined average status classification. But since the sorority girls *did* like me, I learned that my judgment of myself was reliable and trustworthy. Socially, the validation that accompanied my perfect rush lessened my fear of rejection and encouraged me to expose more of myself to others.

1988: My First Major Bout of Depression

“I have come legally to man’s estate. I have attained the dignity of twenty-one. But this is a sort of dignity that may be thrust upon one. Let me think what I have achieved” (Dickens, 1849-50, as cited by Prager & Glaser, 2016).

The highest rate of depression during the lifespan occurs between the ages of 15-24, as individuals transition from late adolescence into emerging adulthood, (Blazer, Kessler, McGonagle, & Schwartz, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015; Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). In line with this statistic, I suffered my first bout of depression during my junior year of college because of stressors related to two proximal processes, peers and school. Social identity theory states that belonging to positively valued groups or social categories contributes to more positive feelings of self-worth (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, as cited by Smith & Tyler, 1997) as illustrated by the pride and increased self-esteem I gained as a member of a favorable sorority. But that membership became the first stressor. The sorority environment is one that encourages a focus on physical appearance, body surveillance, self-objectification, appearance anxiety, and disordered eating (Adams, Behrens, Gann, & Schoen, 2017). During this time of developmental transitions, involvement with new peers and dating, college women become more preoccupied

with their physical appearance as they attempt to conform to sexualized gender stereotypes to be “White, young, tall, firm but not excessively muscular, and simultaneously curvaceous, full-breasted, and extremely thin” (p. 140). Past research has shown that the vast majority of college women view themselves as overweight and are in the process of trying to lose weight. As a doctor-verified late-bloomer, I think I was in the end-stages of puberty when I began college, earning my womanly curves my freshman year. Add to that poor eating habits, moderate alcohol consumption, and late-night pizza and doughnut runs, and I ended up adding ten pounds to my five-foot, one-inch frame. My sorority was comprised of almost two hundred beautiful young women making it difficult not to feel inferior. I self-objectified and compared myself to the others, focusing on my faults, damaging my self-worth. My academics, mostly affected by a challenging instructor, served as the second stressor that led to my depression. During the fall semester, I had an art school class called Visual Communications III which was a requirement for my graphic design degree. The teacher was notorious for favoriting specific students, and I was not among them. Class sessions were three hours long and were comprised of critiquing one another’s projects and lectures. With all of our work on display, we would offer each other feedback followed by the professor’s comments. When reviewing my work, his comments were scathing and, by spring break, I was convinced that I had no artistic abilities and would never amount to anything. After the break, I avoided the negative feelings associated with my classes by skipping class for a full three weeks until early April when my mother came to town for the sorority mom’s weekend. The first moment we were alone, I crumbled and told her how far behind I was in school. The social pressures of sorority life and the academic pressure had become too much for me to handle and I was severely depressed. Erikson views the period between the ages of twelve and twenty, roughly, as a time when adolescents and young adults

weigh their values and vocational goals on the path to adulthood (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Feeling incompetent in both my social and academic arenas made it impossible for me to develop my sense of self and I was left hopeless.

In 1997, the World Health Organization stated that depression impacts “an individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns (Trojanowski & Fischer, 2018, p. 68). On the day I opened up to my mom, I doubted myself and all aspects of my life. This nonnormative event caused me to compare myself to my sorority sisters, harshly judging myself physically and socially while academically, questioning my creative abilities and goals. Fortunately, through a connection of my father’s, I obtained an internship at a small design firm in downtown Kansas City for the fall semester and working at “3 Guys Design” renewed my goal of becoming a designer and boosted my confidence as an artist. Psychologically, taking a break from the sorority and its associated pressures had a positive impact as well so that I was able to return to school for the spring semester. This experience with depression helped me cognitively by teaching me that nothing is too big to handle and it is okay to need help. I also learned that depression is a condition that can be treated.

1993: I Bought a Car on My Own

“I was twenty-six. I thought: this is maturity. This is civilization” (Amis, 2000, as cited by Prager & Glaser, 2016).

Arnett (2000) surveyed young Americans to determine the importance of various criteria as definitions of adulthood (as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). He also asked study participants to identify whether they felt they had reached adulthood. Interestingly, he found that emerging adults’ achievement of marker events on their path to adulthood did not adhere to

chronological, age-graded role-transitions such completing one's education, leaving home, getting married, and having children. Instead, the most important qualifications for adulthood are first, taking responsibility for one's actions and second, making decisions independently. The third qualification is becoming financially independent. The first marker event in my life that made me feel like an adult was when I bought a car on my own at the age of twenty-seven. After totaling the car my parents had given me in a roll-over crash (I was not injured), I encountered the ill-defined problem of needing a car. Since my budget was limited, I went to the library and pored over the *1993 Consumer Reports Car Buying Guide* for information. Leasing a car was a newer concept that I determined was worth considering, so I created leasing vs. buying worksheets on which to record financial details provided by the car salespeople. I narrowed my search to a couple of models and researched the base costs of each option and a list of reasonable and unreasonable dealer fees that might arise. Then, armed with my materials, I visited several dealerships, negotiated with each and, finally, leased a car. Never having made a purchase totaling more than a few hundred dollars, the experience was exhilarating! I understood every detail of the car negotiations and felt confident that I had gotten a fair deal. I will never forget how prideful I felt calling my parents and sharing my news. As an only child, I had always leaned on my parents in making decisions, even after I had moved to Colorado after graduating from KU. The subjective experience of becoming an adult is characterized by a psychological shift toward independence and autonomy (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). The nonnormative event of buying a car on my own is the first of my life events that provided me with a sense of adulthood. Cognitively, I demonstrated my capacity for post-formal thought or relativist thinking as understood by Sinnott (1998), since I clearly understood that the problem had many possible

answers (as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Psychologically, my identity had evolved into an autonomous, independent, and more confident entity.

1995: Moved to Denver, Alone, for an Advertising Job

“Twenty-seven! It was a time of sudden revelations. “Heyyyy, know what? This thought came to me” (Oates, 2000, as cited by Prager & Glaser, 2016).

In December of 1995, I experienced my next marker life event when I moved from the Colorado mountain town that I had lived in for five years to Denver. For several months beforehand, I had been involved in the job hunting process, sending letters and resumes and driving two hours to Denver for interviews. I had also been in touch with a friend of a friend, Diana, who might want to share a living space. The week of Christmas, two weeks before my scheduled move, I had not secured a job, and my possible roommate started to waiver. Fortunately, when I returned to Colorado, Diana said she would go with me for ONE afternoon to look for a place to live but, if we did not find anything, she was going to live on her own. Fortunately, we found half of a duplex near a beautiful and popular park and signed a lease. The day before I made the move, I received a job offer from one of the top ad agencies in the city, starting the following week. Moving to new places, forming new friendships, and beginning new jobs are typical in young adulthood so these normative age-graded events were not unusual, but it did create a whirlwind in my life! Amazingly, Diana and I were a perfect match, and we became close friends, eventually standing up in each other's weddings. The ad agency job was my dream job, and I spent four years there, slowly moving up the ladder and learning a lot. By the time I left the agency, at the age of thirty-two and in early middle adulthood, I had moved on to Schaie's responsible stage, in which it was necessary to consider my new husband's needs and goals in addition to my own (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015).

The move to Denver impacted me in both positive and negative ways. Cognitively, since I had moved to Denver virtually alone, I learned that I was brave and capable. Socially, I formed secure attachments, forming close and fulfilling friendships with Diana and my coworkers, increasing my confidence and strengthening my sense of self as a likable person. Career-wise, working in an ad agency seemed like a perfect fit for my social, enterprising, and artistic personality type (Holland, Viernstein, Kuo, Karwit, & Blum, 1970, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2016). But, the psychological effects of working in the creative department with amazingly talented coworkers grew less positive over time. Much like I had in elementary school and in the college sorority, I compared myself to the other creatives and felt inferior. I imagined their views of my artistic abilities and judged myself through their looking glass. I am sure that my lack of confidence was visible to all and, as a result, I believe they lost confidence in me, too. Even though I had gotten the job based on a portfolio of my work and I had received gradual promotions, my self-doubt was paralyzing. I was so afraid of failure that I had trouble trying and I was self-sabotaging my career. Dweck & Allison identified two orientations of failure: mastery orientation and the helpless pattern (2008, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2016). Those who exhibit mastery orientation move forward when they fail, convinced they can succeed with further effort, seeing failure as a challenge. Individuals with a helpless pattern diminish their abilities and stop trying to improve. Afraid of failure at my ad agency job, I manifested the helpless pattern, engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Just as Super emphasized that one's vocational identity results from and contributes to an individual's greater sense of identity, the self-doubt I harbored at work negatively affected my self-concept.

2007: The Sudden Death of My Grandmother

“Those we love never truly leave us, Harry. There are things that death cannot touch” (Rowling, Tiffany & Thorne, 2016).

At the age of forty-one, my husband, Darren, and our two young kids, Dallas (5 ½ years) and Devyn (4 years) moved to my hometown, Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City. Darren was traveling a lot for his job and I needed the support of my family. Plus, I wanted our kids to enjoy the special bonds with their grandparents that Darren and I had. I also wanted the kids to get to know my beloved maternal grandparents. Fairly quickly, we decided on the neighborhood we wanted to live in because it was in a good school district, the homes were in our price range and it was close to my parents. Since we had not found a home yet, we put most of our belongings in storage units and moved in with my parents which ended up being a blessing.

Two weeks after our move, my grandmother fell and cracked a vertebra, Doctors injected a cement-like substance into her spine which was to harden and solidify the fracture. Unfortunately, her pain level remained very high so she needed to stay in bed. One morning, her pain was excruciating so my grandfather and my mom took her to the hospital. My mom called her siblings and me to tell us what was going on. My aunt, who lived three hours away, asked if she should come but my mother relayed that doctors did not seem worried so it would be unnecessary. An x-ray of my grandmother’s back showed that she had clots in her lungs, probably due to having been confined to her bed. They gave her blood thinners to dissipate the clots but she developed internal hemorrhaging because her blood could not coagulate. Before my mother could notify our family to get to the hospital, my grandmother died. In the space of just a few hours, her issues shifted from a painful spine injury to death. Our tightknit family was

shocked and devastated. Just the week prior, my grandmother had powered through her pain to make Christmas cookies at her house with my daughter and me, just as we had done throughout my childhood. I do realize how fortunate I was to have had a grandmother who loved me and lived until I was forty-one but it was, and still is, the most painful experience of my life. She and I had a very special, very deep connection.

Bowlby described the process of grieving in four stages: shock, protest, despair, and reorganization, all of which I experienced (1962/1982, 1980, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). As I touched on above, my initial reaction to the nonnormative event of my grandmother's death was disbelief, numbness, and feelings of unreality which are all symptoms of the shock stage. Somewhat simultaneously, I also experienced the protest stage, yearning for it to be untrue. In the days following my grandmother's passing, my husband and I purchased a "fixer-upper" in our desired neighborhood. Almost immediately, my mom, dad, Darren, and I quickly and aggressively gutted the interior. But, I quickly ran out of steam. Most days, while my husband worked, my parents would feverishly work on the remodel while I sat on the couch watching TV in our gutted, empty family room. I was fully aware that I *should* be helping but I felt unable to move. And the less I contributed, the more guilty I felt. I lost confidence in myself as a wife, mother and daughter. I was immersed in Bowlby's third stage of grief, despair, coupled with the shockingly negative impact the loss of my Denver life had taken on me and the guilt I felt from my lack of motivation. It was a perfect storm for depression. Not quite suicidal, I began to think about how I would not care if I were killed by a truck while crossing a street.

Fortunately, I had endured several episodes of depression in my life so I eventually sought out the help of a counselor who increased my medication and helped me to feel better. I entered the reorganization stage of the grief process and came to realize that I could still feel my

grandmother's presence which, in turn, helped me come to term with my grandmother's death (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). The dual process model of grief "depicts an interplay of stressors and coping strategies within a flexible, oscillating framework," meaning that individuals simultaneously alternate between feelings of grief and efforts to heal (Cook & Oltjenbruns, 1998; Rubin, 1981, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015, p. 588). Both considered coping mechanisms called approach and avoidance, I am sure I experienced this process as I lamented the loss of my grandmother while pulling myself out of depression.

I experienced much developmental change as a result of my grief, too. Cognitively, I learned how to live without my loved one (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Since then, I have experienced death several more times and each time, I further accept that life will go on and I can, too. Psychologically, my depression had an impact on me but so did my recovery. My confidence in my ability to take care of my mental health increased and it felt good. However, the guilt I felt in shirking my responsibilities to my husband and parents remained. I beat myself up saying, "Poor Darren. This isn't what he signed up for." The one area I feel I never dropped the ball in was parenting. Socially, my lack of friends in our new community proved to me that, as an extrovert, I need friends!

2018: Began Graduate School to Become a Counselor

"You may be sick of what you did the first half of your life, but you don't have to just walk around a play golf or do nothing. It's not like fifty is the new thirty. It's like fifty is the new chapter" (Stone, n.d.).

Super recognized that career development is an ongoing process resulting in one's vocational self-concept and factors that influence job choices (1972, 1984, 1990, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Erikson classified middle-age as the generativity vs. stagnation

stage of development, during which midlife individuals are seeking meaning and purpose in their lives (Erikson, 1960/1963, as cited by Broderick & Blewitt, 2016). An important time for transition, middle age is a period during which people seek their calling, reassessing their life's purpose (Chuang, 2019). Sometimes called a midlife crisis, this is the stage in which I currently reside. For the last couple of years, as my kids have become increasingly autonomous, I have thought a lot about "What comes next?" I worked as a graphic designer for twenty-eight years and, although I love to be creative, doing so for work was no longer enjoyable. In my mid-twenties, I developed an interest in psychology and experienced regret for not pursuing a career in the field. The idea of going back to school with young kids at home was daunting so I shelved the idea. But as the kids grew older, I decided that it was too late and that "my ship had sailed." Then, last spring, as I was lamenting that my youngest would be off to college in four years, I came to the stark realization that, with no children at home, I will no longer have a meaningful purpose. As I thought about it, I also realized that in 2022, when Devyn graduates from high school, I will only be fifty-five, MUCH too young to essentially retire! My husband predicts that he will work until age sixty-five, giving me a full ten years, at least, in which to work and contribute to our household income. So, here I am! Just a week shy of my fifty-first birthday, I embarked on my path to becoming a marriage, couple, and family counselor. My atypical decision, most definitely is a nonnormative life event.

Going back to school has positively affected me cognitively, psychologically, and socially. Middle age adults experience many age-graded cognitive and physical changes such as decreased range of movement and slower processing speeds (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Physically, other than persistent back pain, I am doing fine but I can feel cognitive changes. During my first week at Walden University, I felt like my brain was full of cobwebs and I

struggled to take in the vast amounts of educational material I was assigned to read. I felt panicked but decided to stick it out for at least a semester. Almost a year later, I have experienced a cognitive reawakening and am happy with my performance. I do wonder if my mostly much-younger peers can remember things better than I can. And, as I earn more wrinkles and it becomes harder to maintain my physique, I am feeling more and more invisible as a woman, so the psychological boost to my self-worth has been invaluable. Finally, my first pre-practicum experience resulted in developing amazing friendships with those in my cohort who continue to offer support any time it is needed.

Summary

“Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond to it” (Holtz, n.d., as cited by Economy, 2015).

As a middle-age woman, I have enjoyed many life experiences, gaining knowledge and wisdom from each developmental stage I passed through. Looking back, I can appreciate the effect each event had on my developing identity without the depth of emotion I felt at the time. Human lives are filled with normative age-graded, normative history-graded, nonnormative, and sociocultural-graded events that influence who we are to become. In this paper, I have shared eight events that had a profound effect on who I have become, causing my self-esteem to bounce up and down and back again. Midlife is a time for life reflection and the seeking of purpose and meaning (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). Many of my peers are grandparents and empty-nesters, looking forward to retirement, grandchildren, and quality time with their partners. I, on the other hand, am not ready to slow down and look forward to becoming a counselor. Possessing knowledge of the many factors that affect one’s development will be beneficial when working with clients in that it will enable me to understand their life view based on lifespan theory.

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