



The Impact of Life Course Transitions

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Introduction

This research was conducted to identify the impact that life course transitions have on the aging process. Erikson's Theory and Stages of Identity Development, social networks, theories of aging, and successful aging are analyzed in relation to life course transitions.

This research is important because it shows whether or not this individual is successfully aging in relation to the information being analyzed. The interviewee is Jeanne Irving, a close family friend. She is 70 years old, was born in New Jersey, and currently lives in Nelson County, Virginia.

Methods

I conducted this interview with Jeanne in my family room at my home with her husband present. I had my questions formulated beforehand, and asked them in chronological order. The focus of my questions was on transitions; however, I also included questions to help get to know her and her life story better. After the interview was completed, I transcribed the recording and analyzed it for themes and relation to our class content. I then transferred this information into a poster presentation.

Theory

Erikson has 8 stages in his Theory of Identity Development, which are discussed by Quadagno in the Aging and the Life Course textbook. Erikson states that you must successfully complete a stage before moving onto the next. Generativity vs. Stagnation is the stage for middle adulthood, ages 26 to 50. This stage states that mature adults must find a way to guide the younger generation. Integrity vs. Despair is old age, from 70s/80s to end of life. This stage states that older adults must feel a sense of satisfaction with the life that they have lived. (Quadagno, 2011)

Successful aging is defined by physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. Quadagno states that successful aging includes "[f]reedom from disease and disability, an intact mental capacity, and an active engagement with life" (Quadagno, 2011, pg. 3). One Theory of Aging is the Activity Theory, which states that successful aging is active aging (Quadagno, 2011). In order to successfully age, one must maintain a social circle and stay physically active.

Themes

Social Network:

Social networks, including family and friends, was a common theme throughout this interview. She shared that her relationship with her family has drastically changed over the years. When she was young, she was very close with her family. She moved from New Jersey to Virginia after retirement because she wanted to be close to her family, but this led to negative changes in her relationship. She stated during the interview, "the close-knit family I had, the relationships I had with my brother and sister, over the course of my lifetime have changed significantly, not necessarily by my choice, but it is what it is. And I have found that my friends here in Virginia are far more my family than anything that is biological." Because of her restrained relationship with her family, she has turned to her friends as her main social support. Throughout the interview, it was apparent how important her friendships are to her. She talked about her friends from New Jersey, their accomplishments, how much she misses them, how often she visits them, and things that they have done and plan to do together.

Mutual Impact:

Her career was a big topic during this interview. She worked as an elementary school teacher, a juvenile delinquent teacher and counselor in the public school system and Department of Corrections facility, and a high school counselor for students with disabilities. She impacted her students in many different ways, including simply educating and counseling them, encouraging juvenile delinquents to stay in school and attend vocational school, helping special education students and their parents, taking her juvenile delinquent students to the Scared Straight Program, and much more. She stated, "when I finished my career I had 301 students with disabilities that I was personally responsible for" and "I have been a parent to probably, over the course of 38 years, well over a thousand kids." It seemed that she is very proud of her career and glad that she was able to impact the many people that she did.

It was clear throughout the interview that her students had impacted her as well. Through all of the things that she did to educate and counsel her students, she was also learning. She stated, "The things that I loved most about teaching was the personal interaction with my students." One of her favorite memories was a magic circle that she did with her students every Friday where the students were allowed to talk one by one about anything that they wanted to. She told me that she recently visited one of her students and said "I think that was one of my greatest accomplishments to be able to do that after all these years, and still maintain contact with a number of my other students as well."



Conclusion

In conclusion, life course transitions in relation to Erikson's theory, social networks, theories of aging, and successful aging all have an impact on the aging process. I believe Jeanne has successfully transitioned through Erikson's stages. She has successfully guided the younger generation in her career as an educator and counselor, and she continues to do this in her personal life. Throughout the interview, her comments reflecting on her life thus far showed a sense of satisfaction and meaning. She has aged successfully because she has met the criteria and has an overall wellbeing. She proves the Activity Theory of Aging to be correct because for her, successful aging is equivalent to active aging.

References

Quadagno, J. (2011). *Aging and the Life Course: An Introduction to Social Gerontology* (5th ed.). New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies.