

I am interested in the biological and psychological journey that we all experience growing up. To learn more I researched the mental and physical transformations that occur during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I also explored how one's past experiences plays into who they become later on in their life. I decided to recall and organize how my adolescence and what pivotal moments in my life helped me transform into the young adult I am today.

I chose to depict these memories through journal entries, photographs, items of clothing, objects, sketches, and other various mediums that could allow the viewer of my piece to visualize the memories I chose to share. When looking at the installation horizontally my memories are chronological. Vertically they are categorized by importance or impact. The string allows the reader to see my own sense of the interconnectedness of everything in my life, and how all of the events have led to one another.

With my installation I intend to communicate how these people, places, and pivotal moments in my life have shaped who I am as a person today. On a deeper level, however, this piece is my own personal journey into my psyche. This is my attempt to confront these memories head on and accept that they happened -- whether or not they were positive or negative. The installation is not only the synopsis of the past 18 years of my life, but also my own personal experiment, exploring the process of healing, forgiving, and growing as an individual.

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This paper discusses the significance of memories and the process of growing older. I will discuss the various stages of growth in one's life and explain the different changes both physically and mentally during one's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. I will explain my connection to this topic, relating the general behaviors and transitions one has during each stage, and apply them to my own personal memories from each of the stages. I will then transition to discussing my personal experiences and how they have negatively and positively affected me and shaped who I am as a person. Finally, I will analyze my growth as an overall individual throughout my years and why I have wanted to move on from both positive and negative memories. I will conclude by sharing my thoughts on nostalgia, the desire to want to move on from the past, and whether or not it is possible to do so.

A few months ago I was on the phone with one of my best friends. We were talking about how sad we were to only have a few months together until we parted ways to go to college. After talking for what seemed like hours, I blurted out "I can't wait to go to college. It'll finally be my time to reinvent myself. I can be whoever I want." She laughed and we shared a few more jokes, life updates, funny stories, and then she hung up.

After our phone call ended I immediately felt uneasy. Why did I say I wanted to reinvent myself? What part of my past did I want to forget so easily and why did I think the right thing to do was to try to forget it even happened?

After careful consideration, I've realized how hard it has been for me to move on from my past, and just how hard it has been for my past to let me move on from it. Because I have lived in the same town my whole life, and for the most part, have been in the same friend group since middle school, I have shared most of the pivotal moments in my life with the same people in the same place. I had my first kiss with the same boy I had my first time with, I used a lighter for the first time at the same neighborhood park I played in as a kid. I have gone out with the same boys I once played with at recess so many years ago. I got arrested in the same place I learned how to ride a bike. Having said this, every memory I have had -- both good and bad -- have been shared with essentially the same people in the same place.

Looking back, I know that these memories have been such big parts of my life. Regardless of whether or not these past events in my life have left me crying or laughing, they have helped shape me into who I am today, so why did I want to forget them?

I realized that up until my senior year of high school, my entire life consisted of looking back into my past and reminiscing on both positive and negative times. In middle school I would look back to my childhood and think, "times were easier when I was eight, I wish I was that age again." Once high school hit, I would look back to seventh and eighth grade and think to myself how many great memories I had with my friends, and how much better things were two or three years ago.

Nostalgia: a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition; pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again. I have become victim to being overly nostalgic. Remembering both the positive and negative memories I have from my early childhood to the present has not only held me back, but made me feel nostalgic in the worst way possible. When I wanted to move on from a boy, I would think about all of the years of our friendship and my feelings would

revert back. When I wanted enjoy time with my parents I would be reminded of their long and loud arguments from my childhood. I realized that I didn't want to forget these memories. They happened, I learned from them, I cherish them, I am who I am because of them. I want to move on. I want to look at the boy I once loved and pass by him at a party and not feel agitated. I want to hug my dad without it feeling wrong. I want to be able to look at my soccer trophies and team pictures and not want to cry or think about what could have been.

Why is it so difficult to let go, forget, and move on from the past? Why are memories the single thing that hold us together, make us who we are today, yet remind us of a past time that may drag us down mentally? This is something that has forever intrigued me, which is why I will explore the transition from childhood to adulthood, and how memories play an important role in shaping who we end up becoming.

Why is it important to understand the stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? In order to understand how memories and past experiences play into one's life, first we must understand, on both a psychological and physiological level, the changes that are occurring in the human body and more specifically, the mind, during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Common childhood experiences consist of times of innocence, freedom from responsibility, and vulnerability. As a society, we tend to believe that the common child, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, economic standing, and family size, more often than not, experiences feelings of innocence and purity. Having said this, the experiences from early childhood onward set the tone for how one grows up, what environment they grow up in, and how their personality and emotional state transforms. Throughout history, various philosophers, social psychologists, and scientists have had different beliefs regarding child development. Because of this development in child growth, it is known that both the environment children grow up in, and the genetics they are born with help determine who they will be in the future. From a physical and mental developmental standpoint, a lot of the growth that occurs happens because of genetics. *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology* states that "physical development is largely programmed by a genetically determined timetable called maturation, which proceeds in predictable stages." In contrast, the social and personality development that makes an individual unique changes based on the environment. The "nature and nurture" study compares and contrasts the importance of genetics and the environment, and how both play extremely important roles in shaping one's behaviors, traits, and overall identity.

After the childhood stage, people become adolescents, which is the transitional period between childhood and maturity which occurs roughly between the ages of 10 and 20. This period is a time that consists of society's tradition of celebrating rebellion, extreme defiance, sexual exploration, physical change and emotional shifts. Adolescence is also a time in which one is trying to be their own person, which requires them to be less dependant on their parents in every way possible. Major themes of adolescence tend to range from sexual experimentation to exploration with political ideologies, alcohol and drug experimentation and even study habits, etc. Teenagers are able to think more abstractly than they were as children, so they explore topics that require in depth thought such as philosophy, religion, morality, and honesty. The last significant characteristic of a teenager that is different than a child is the desire to be an individual. As *The Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health: Infancy through Adolescence* states, that "being

independent, however, means more than merely feeling independent. It also means being able to make decisions and to select a sensible course of action. This is an especially important capability in contemporary society, where many adolescents are forced to become independent decision makers at an early age. In general, researchers find that decision-making abilities improve over the course of the adolescent years, with gains continuing well into the later years of high school.” This is important to understand, as it is the first real time in the average teenager’s life that being alone is not a terrible or scary thing, and that it is natural to break away from the dependency from childhood and move toward the autonomous responsibilities of adulthood.

When discussing the transition from childhood to adolescence, it is important to note that there is no clear line between the stages. As *The Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health: Infancy through Adolescence* states, “experts think of the passage from childhood into and through adolescence as composed of a set of transitions that unfold gradually and that touch upon many aspects of the individual's behavior, development, and relationships. These transitions are biological, cognitive, social, and emotional.” Having said this, it is important to consider the different parts of an individual’s life that are in transition. Biological changes occur, like the changes that happen in sex organs and chemical balances, sexual urges, mood swings. On a cognitive level, adolescents think in a more complex way than they do as children. Examples of their cognitive growth vary from their ability to think more abstractly, to their ability to understand their self-conscious voice better, and to their increased capabilities and desires to question the “truths” in life and become more skeptical. On a social standpoint, teenagers are victim to many social forces such as the pressure to conform to social norms, interest groups, gender norms, language usage, etc. Finally, the emotional changes that all teens face consist of chemical changes that occur in their bodies during adolescence, the increased feelings of independence from parents and family, and the emotional baggage tied to peer pressure.

The common changes associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood prompt teens to develop problems with eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, or obesity, drug or alcohol use, depression or suicidal ideation, violent behavior, anxiety, stress, or sleep disorders, and unsafe sexual activities. Although these issues are found in society as a whole, teenagers are commonly associated with many of these illnesses and disorders due to the fluctuation of their mental, physical, and emotional states. Overall, the common adolescent is said to be oriented to fun, sports, popular music, and peers; receptive to change; and ready to experiment with alternative identities and sometimes, mood-altering substances.

Although scientists, psychologists, therapists, and society as a whole are able to understand teenagers better, it wasn’t always known that there were four different areas of change in an adolescent. In fact, the world did not always have a middle stage of growth between childhood and adulthood. As it is referenced in Matt Wolf’s documentary *Teenage*, “adolescents” did not really exist until the 20th century, when children were no longer legally allowed to work in factories and were able to live freely. Before the term ‘teenager’ was coined, one commonly and automatically made the jump from a child to an adult. Imagine in today’s world, where after your childhood, which ends roughly when you are 10 or 11, you are automatically considered an adult? Thanks

to social scientists during the Great Depression like Glen Elder Jr., developmental psychology was born and so was the idea of the teenager.

The studies conducted by Freud, Watson, Skinner, Piaget, and Bronfenbrenner, are some of the most important scientific and psychological studies today as they opened doors for their predecessors years down the line and introduced social scientists to an entire uncharted territory: the mind of the young adult.

After one undergoes the multi-layered transition that occurs from childhood to adolescence, the next and final transition occurs from adolescence to adulthood. Adulthood is commonly associated with different age markers. When you turn 18, you are officially a legal adult, meaning you can get a tattoo, vote, and serve in the military without any form of parental consent. Another marking age, is when someone turns twenty-one, which is the legal minimum age to buy and or consume alcohol. Although these two ages are known to be big years in one's life, they aren't necessarily the ages that people are considered to be an adult. For example, in Western culture, most consider adults to be individuals who have reached a certain level of accomplishment such as graduating from college, getting married and having children, securing a job, etc. Although the ages that mark adulthood vary between societies, cultures, religions, and regions of the world, it is, for most, the final stage in one's life that includes a lot of dramatic changes like moving out of your childhood home, getting a job, and starting a family of your own.

During the transition to adulthood, there are not as many dramatic changes occurring on a cognitive, social, biological, and emotional standpoint in comparison to transitioning into a teenager. Having said this, however, it is important to note that the changes occurring are still very significant, as they are the final years in one's life as a young adult that truly set the tone for how the rest of their life will go. For example, *Encyclopedia of Sociology* states that, "The transition to adulthood is a highly formative period for the crystallization of psychological orientations relating to work, leisure, and politics."

The *Encyclopedia of Sociology* suggests that, "neither the timing nor the process of becoming adult are universalistic or biologically determined." In other words, there is no real age or way of determining who is an adult and who isn't. Becoming an adult, however, is determined by society. As one moves away from adolescence and nearing towards being an adult, they are expected to "relinquish such dependent, playful, experimental, carefree, and even reckless stances of adolescence and youth, so that they can address the 'serious business' of life. Those who become financially and emotionally independent, productive, hardworking, and responsible are considered 'adult'." Although in most societies and cultures there is a cut off age in which one is automatically no longer considered an adolescent, adulthood is not necessarily just a stage one automatically reaches after their teenage years. In today's society, being an 'adult' is no longer being eighteen or twenty-one. Reaching adulthood is reaching a specific level of maturity that surpasses one who is still considered a teenager in the adolescent phase.

Considering all of the different changes occurring in one's life as a child, adolescent, and adult, one must question how someone's past affects their future. In other words, it is impossible to deny that someone is who they are today because of their past experiences. Our memories, both good and bad, relate to our growth during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

So why is this important? Who cares if our pasts affect our futures? I, too, thought of these questions. I came to the conclusion that it isn't a matter of completely forgetting who we are and where we come from as I previously thought. Instead, the ultimate goal is being able to come to terms with previous events and people who have heavily affected us, confronting those aspects of our past, and having the strength to accept them and continue living and growing. Although I do find myself looking backward more often than looking forward or living in the present, I also found that there is a very thin line between reminiscing in a "healthy" way, and getting so caught up in the past that you can't seem to let go of a previous time or feeling.

As an incoming college freshman, I feel as though I am truly becoming an adult. In only four short months, I will be on my own, completely independent from my parents, and on the opposite side of the country. Because I am approaching this sudden and dramatic shift in my life, I have done a great deal of self-reflection on my past. How have my past memories shaped me into who I am today? Why have I now been able to reminisce rather than dwell on my past? The answers to these questions are multi-faceted, due to the gradual but significant shift in my thinking in the past year. As a young adult, I have realized how crucial memories play into one's life. For example, the car crash I almost got in as a young girl prompted me to try to comprehend death, which led to my greater understanding of how precious life is, and just how easily it can be taken from you. Winning a regional championship as an adolescent showed me the importance of a team dynamic, and that the feeling of achieving something you have been working so hard for as a group is something irreplaceable. My first heartbreak showed me the influence one has over another, and just how easily a person can test and break you. My experiences are unique to myself, yet I believe that the overall messages I have extracted from those key moments in my life are universal life lessons everyone eventually learns somehow.

Past memories don't exist to haunt you. I believe that the human mind is able to comprehend past memories in order for us to grow, not to be held back by mistakes and or the highs and lows in ones life. We must conquer our pasts in order to look forward to what lies ahead in our lives. The most important aspect of growing up is to understand where you have come from and who you have been throughout your life. To me, ultimate goal is to be able to recognize your past, accept it for what it is, and grow from your experiences, because in the end our lives are not defined by who we once were, but who we are now in this moment.

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