

**Mary Cate D.**

Atlanta, Georgia

*Change with Age*

Mixed media sculpture

My installation is about changing as you grow older, primarily in adolescence. I used a butterfly, something I have always loved, because it is a physical representation of change. My admiration for butterflies also made it seem like the appropriate option. I know I have changed extremely over two years, and I am nothing like how I imagined myself to be. Quarantine was one of the main reasons, but also I matured and changed as I got older.

I designed a physical representation of the lifespan of a butterfly on a runway. At the end of the runway, a fully emerged butterfly would be about to take off. I ended up using foam to create my pieces and started by carving everything into the shape I wanted and started sanding it. Next, I went in and started painting. Then I cut out and painted my runway. Last I assembled the pieces and glued them.

As I continued to work, I decided I wanted to challenge myself to put more detailing and coloring on the butterfly wings to give the rest more color than just the original idea of a completely black and white theme. My work represents the question “how do people change with age?” I wanted it to show how much people can change and grow in what seems like a shorter amount of time.

# How the Mind is Altered with Age



Mary Cate D.

The Oxbow School

OS46

*Writer's Note: This paper explores the different changes the mind goes through, primarily throughout adolescence. Many factors that go into this society's perception of age, the change from childhood to adolescence, and psychological theories surrounding children's psyche.*

In 2014, a survey was taken by the drug company Pfizer of 2,088 Americans. 87% of participants held at least one fear related to aging.<sup>1</sup> I began my research seeking to answer questions such as: Does age affect people's psychology? Does change on the inside affect the outside? Why are people scared to get older? Many fear aging, or, simply, fear the change that comes with it. Oftentimes, extreme changes in people's psyche has to do with a trauma that the person has gone through. Childhood also has an extreme impact on one's psyche. The most drastic change people experience is usually from childhood to adolescence. It is debated whether one's adolescence is considered part of childhood. Biologically, it is not, yet in most societies people will still be considered children when they reach age 12 or 13. It is being observed that many children are maturing sooner though. Many believe children are being pressured to grow up too fast. This is believed to be from a "toxic combination of marketing, media and peer pressure ...the pace of modern life is so fast that it is even snatching away the precious years of childhood".<sup>2</sup> Children also have been observed having the desire to grow up more quickly. A poem titled "Childhood," by Maura Stanton, describes this perfectly. When she was young, she would look around at her family, and then "return dizzily to [her] perfect floorplan, where [she] never spoke or listened to anyone." In the end, she wanted to know how to "ever get back to the real house,"

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<sup>1</sup> Selig, Meg. "Do You Have 'FOGO?' Taming the Fear of Getting Old." *Psychology Today*, 2022 Sussex Publishers, 21 June 2021, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/202106/do-you-have-fogo-taming-the-fear-getting-old](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/202106/do-you-have-fogo-taming-the-fear-getting-old). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Coughlan, Sean. "Modern Childhood 'Ends at Age of 12.'" *BBC News*, BBC News Education Correspondent, 6 Mar. 2013, [www.bbc.com/news/education-21670962](http://www.bbc.com/news/education-21670962). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

and wished she had not tried to grow so fast.<sup>3</sup> To truly understand the psychological change that comes with age, one must look at society's perception of age, the change from childhood to adolescence, and psychological theories surrounding children's psyche.

It is important to truly understand gerascophobia, or the fear of aging. From the Pfizer statistic, 23% said they were scared of the physical decline that comes with aging, 15% said they worry about memory loss, 12% fear running out of money, and 12% are concerned about chronic illness. Surprisingly only 10% said they fear dying. People do not fear the end of their lives, rather the drastic changes age will take on the body and mind. It has also been found that the least happiest age in mid-life globally is 50. At age 51, happiness rates start to increase.<sup>4</sup> It is important to take into account society's viewpoint and treatment towards age and elders. Different societies treat age and the elderly in different ways. In modern, Western societies, elder people live separately from their children and friends from earlier years, yet in traditional societies, elders live among their children, relatives, and friends, usually in one household. Nomadic societies, meaning hunter-gatherer societies, tended to get rid of their elders by killing or abandoning them. In these societies, the young have to carry their children and possessions. This also includes societies that live in areas where there are periodic food shortages, such as the arctic or desert. Sedentary traditional societies, such as the Tibetan nomads in China and the Romani people, care for elders.<sup>5</sup>

The change from childhood to adolescence has a major impact on a person's psyche. In modern societies, childhood is set to end at 12 or 13.<sup>6</sup> Biologically, childhood ends at adolescence,

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<sup>3</sup> Stanton, Maura. "Childhood." *Poetry Foundation*, Aug. 1982, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=35245](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=35245). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Selig, Meg. "Do You Have 'FOGO?' Taming the Fear of Getting Old." *Psychology Today*, 2022 Sussex Publishers, 21 June 2021

<sup>5</sup> "How Societies Can Grow Old Better." *Ted Talks*, uploaded by Jared Diamond, TED2013, Mar. 2013, [www.ted.com/talks/jared\\_diamond\\_how\\_societies\\_can\\_grow\\_old\\_better](http://www.ted.com/talks/jared_diamond_how_societies_can_grow_old_better). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Coughlan, Sean. "Modern Childhood 'Ends at Age of 12.'" *BBC News*, BBC News Education Correspondent, 6 Mar. 2013

many people will consider their childhood as the part of their lives early on when they felt naive and young. Some consider childhood to be farther past adolescence. For example, in the U.S, someone is considered a child until 18, when they are a legal adult, yet there are still certain restrictions until you are 21. In modern society, children are seen as innocent and fragile, yet during the Industrial Revolution, children were assigned jobs as soon as they could walk. The Fair Labor Standards Act was not passed in the U.S. until 1938, when it began regulating the exploitation of children 16 and under in working conditions. An important factor in the psychological changes appearing throughout adolescence are the three stages of childhood. There is a debate about when early childhood begins since many cannot remember anything before the age of 3. People argue that toddler years should not count, but others argue that childhood starts the first day of infancy. It is known that early childhood ends around age 8. At this age, children are continuously learning and growing. While their parents lead them, they begin to interact with other children and experiment with the world around them. Middle childhood starts around the age of 9 and ends around 12 or 13. Children at this age mature and find friends, discover their abilities, and even take on certain responsibilities on their own. These are considered preteen years. The next stage is adolescence. Adolescence is, biologically, where childhood ends, but many societies still consider them children. Despite the fact that their bodies are still developing and evolving, kids are frequently regarded as too reckless to live freely or do some adult activities. They begin to learn more about their sexuality and feelings for others at this period as their independence grows. A child's surroundings majorly affect their intellectual growth. A child's academic and general life performance will almost certainly improve if his or her family is supportive. A child who grew up in an unloving home with negligent parents may grow up to be careless about academics or station

in life. Overprotective parents who control everything their children do may lead to their adult children becoming too reliant on others, though this is not the case for everyone.<sup>7</sup>

There are many theories to explain why the change during adolescent years are so extreme. One of two major theories is Freud's Theory of Psychosexual Development. Freud was one of the first to discover how impactful talk therapy was for patients suffering from mental disorders. He also believed that our mental states are influenced by two different forces: Cathexis and Anticathexis. Cathexis is defined as a mental investment in a person, a concept, or an object. For example, if you're hungry, you can conjure up a mental image of a meal you've been wanting. The counter to cathexis is anticathexis. Anticathexis is repressing socially unacceptable feelings. One typical kind of anticathexis is repressing wants and desires, although this requires a large amount of energy. Another key point in Freud's theory is that human behavior is motivated by life instincts and death instincts. The basic drive for survival, reproduction, and pleasure is known as Eros, or life instincts. It includes basic human needs such as food, shelter, love, and sex. Thanatos, or death instinct, is the unconscious human urge to die. He felt that self-destructive behavior was one form of the death desire. He did feel, however, that life instincts balanced these death instincts.<sup>8</sup>

The other widely recognized theory is Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development. Piaget believed that children actively participate in learning, such as conducting experiments, making observations, and learning about the world. Kids constantly take in new knowledge, expand on current knowledge, and change once held concepts to fit new information as they interact with the world around them. Before the introduction of this theory, children were treated, medically, as smaller adults. From his observations, he concluded that children were not less intelligent, rather

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<sup>7</sup> Komay, Mason. "How and When Does Childhood End?" *Better Help*, 31 Mar. 2022, [www.betterhelp.com/advice/childhood/how-and-when-does-childhood-end/](http://www.betterhelp.com/advice/childhood/how-and-when-does-childhood-end/). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

<sup>8</sup> "An Overview of Sigmund Freud's Theories." *Verywell Mind*, 14 Feb. 2022, [www.verywellmind.com/freudian-theory-2795845](http://www.verywellmind.com/freudian-theory-2795845). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

they thought differently. Albert Einstein called Piaget's discovery "so simple only a genius could have thought of it." In Piaget's theory there are 4 stages of childhood. The first is the Sensorimotor Stage. This stage begins at birth and ends at age 2. Infants discover the world through movements and sensations. Basic behaviors like sucking, gripping, seeing, and hearing help infants learn about the world. Even when objects can't be seen, infants learn that they exist. Infants learn that they are distinct from the people and objects in their environment. They understand that their actions have the potential to affect the world around them. Next is the Preoperational Stage. This begins at age 2 and ends at age 7. "Children begin to think symbolically and learn to depict items with words and drawings. At this age, children are egocentric and have difficulty seeing things from other people's perspectives. While they are improving their language and cognitive skills, they still have a tendency to think in very concrete terms." Then there is the Concrete Operational Stage. This is ages 7 to 11. Now children begin learning to think logically about real experiences. "They start to grasp the notion of conservation, such as the fact that the amount of pebbles in a short, broad cup is the same amount in the tall, slender glass. While their thinking is still very concrete, it has become more logical and organized. They begin using logic and reasoning from different information to a general purpose." The final stage is the Formal Operational Stage. This is ages 12 and up. "At this age, the teenager or young adult learns to reason about hypothetical situations and think abstractly. Teenagers begin to consider moral, philosophical, ethical, social, and political concerns that need the use of theoretical and abstract logic." Around this age is when fear of aging starts to appear. They also begin to use deductive logic, which is the process of reasoning from a general concept to detailed information. Many teenagers are scared of the responsibilities that come with age and the idea of truly becoming an adult. <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cherry, Kendra. "The 4 Stages of Cognitive Development." *Verywell Mind*, 31 Mar. 2022, [www.verywellmind.com/piagets-stages-of-cognitive-development-2795457](http://www.verywellmind.com/piagets-stages-of-cognitive-development-2795457). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

Society's perception of age, the change from childhood to adolescence, and psychological theories surrounding children's psychological development are all extremely important in the changes occurring in the mind. Many people fear aging and the physical and mental repercussions that come with age. The treatment elderly people receive is mainly due to the societal views of aging. The changes that occur during adolescence is possibly the most impactful change one can go through. The different stages in childhood and adolescence can greatly affect the views and actions of children. Freud's Theory of Psychosexual Development and Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development are the two most important theories when considering to children's psychological development. Both talk about how important each different stage of development is. Pfizer's research study showed that 87% of people feared aging. People tend to fear the change that comes with age and perceive it as a decline. Oftentimes, people are consumed with the negative idea of aging when it is a gift denied to many. Michael Faraday, at the first Royal Institution lecture, said "Let us consider, for a little while, how wonderfully we stand on the world. Here it is that we are born, and breed, and lived, and yet we view these things with an almost entire absence of wonder."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Growing up in the Universe." *Ted Talks*, uploaded by Richard Dawkins, Royal Institution, Dec. 1991, [www.ted.com/talks/richard\\_dawkins\\_growing\\_up\\_in\\_the\\_universe](http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_dawkins_growing_up_in_the_universe). Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.



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