


Anticipated and Unanticipated Life Transitions

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SANDRA BAUER, PHD, MSW, LSW
LESLIE GREGORY, MSW, LSW

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Objectives

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- Explore how transitions unfold in the life span development of adults.
- Discuss anticipated and unanticipated life transitions and the nonlinear nature of lifespan development.
- Consider how faith practices can help people navigate life transitions.




(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Why we got interested in this topic?

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- Wrestling with this topic led to starting a group.
- Work with clients in clinical setting struggling with transitions.
- Our own life transitions.



(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Voices of Transition

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- “How do I accompany my father going through cancer treatment?”
- “*The death of my spouse tells me that I am not in control.*”
- “Having a child is like having your heart walk around on the outside of you.”
- “*I want to retire but I can't...yet I'm feeling a call to do something else*”
- “I'm no place, I'm in transition. Where is God in all this?”
- “*I'm trying to find another provider for my almost adult child who has developmental disabilities and it's hard.*”
- “I can't believe I'm thinking of dating again at 45.”

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Overview of Theories

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- Life Cycle Theory (e.g., Erikson)
- Life Course Perspective
- Faith Development

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Process of Transitions

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- Transitions begin with *endings*, “letting go of something” (Bridges, 1991, p. 5).
 - Role;
 - Relationship;
 - View of self, etc.
 - ✦ “Ending can be gradual or abrupt, painful or exhilarating” (Merriman, 2012, p. 6) and these processes may overlap.
- Next is a *neutral zone* or “the land between the old and new reality” where the old is gone, but the new isn't comfortable yet (Bridges, 1991, p. 5).
- Finally is *new beginnings* when there is launching into new ways of being and doing (Merriman, 2012, p. 6).



(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Anticipated Transitions

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- “...periods of change in our lives that seem to alternate with periods of stability” (Merriman, 2012, p. 3).
- “...Opportunities for learning and development” ...as a fundamental part of adult life (Merriman, 2012, p. 3).
- Relate to *life events* (graduation, marriage, career move) and *roles* (student, parent, retiree) (Merriman, 2012).
 - If transitions occur when “expected” it is less likely to cause a crisis, than if the event is “out of sync” with cultural expectations, e.g., career change later in life (Merriman, 2012).

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Unanticipated Transitions

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- “...events that are unexpected and do not have a typical time in adult life when they are most likely to occur.”
 - Health problems;
 - Getting laid off or fired;
 - Being a victim of a crime (Merriman, 2012, p. 5).
- Stressful transitions with potential for stimulating learning and development greater than anticipated events (Merriman, 2012, p. 5).

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Unanticipated Transitions, conc.

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- “Nonevent transitions”
 - Transitions that the client expected, but that didn’t occur or are delayed and altered life.
 - e.g., not getting married, not getting promoted, not becoming a grandparent, etc., (Merriman, 2012, p. 5).
- “ Sleeper transitions”
 - Transitions that occur gradually and go unnoticed for awhile, but produce change (Merriman, 2012, p. 5).
 - e.g., deterioration of a relationship, becoming more independent, etc.

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Sugarman's 7 Stage Model (1986)

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- **When experiencing an unanticipated transition one may move back and forth between these nonlinear stages:**
 1. Immobilized, overwhelmed, unable to respond
 2. Mood swing between elation and despair
 3. Minimization of feelings and anticipating impact of event
 4. Letting go or breaking with the past
 5. Testing alternatives
 6. Searching for meaning
 7. Integration; feeling comfortable with the change

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Learning and Life Transitions

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- **Meaning assigned to life transition is what gives it potential for learning** (Merriman, 2012, p. 8).
 - Race, gender, socioeconomic class, education, and cultural context contribute to the meaning assigned to an event.
- **Learning through reflection.**
 - For learning to be developmental, change in self must take place.
 - For a transition to be transformative event has to be actively engaged even if painful.



(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Examples

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- **Identify strengths and resilience.**
- **Identify past transitions in life and how coped.**
- **What is difficult about transitions?**
 - "It gets worse before it gets better"
 - "I know there are friends who really don't want to hear it"
 - "Actually it's exciting and frightening at the same time"
 - "Hearing the diagnosis"
- **Support given and received.**

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Faith and Transitions

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- Use of narrative with Biblical stories of transition.
 - Jacob wrestling with an angel (Genesis 32:22-31).
 - Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:14-25).
- Where have you seen signs of God?
 - "When I'm with other people who believe."
 - "Through other people I meet with and who I listen to."
 - "A quilt made by a church member and signed."
 - "Sometimes in the anger."
- What does it mean to dwell with God?
 - Transcending self.
 - Meditating on God's word.
 - Praying.



(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Poem (Jan Richardson)

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God of making and unmaking,
 Of tearing down and recreating,
 You are my home
 And habitation
 My refuge and place of dwelling.
 In your hollows I am reformed
 Given welcome and benediction
 Beckoned to rest
 And rise again,
 Made ready and sent forth.

(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

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(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

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(Bauer & Gregory, 2014)

Contact Info

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- Dr. Sandy Bauer, Eastern University, sbauer@eastern.edu
- Prof. Leslie Gregory, Eastern University, lgregory@eastern.edu

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