Career Autobiography, Part 1

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My career development has been a lifelong process shaped by my family, education, personal interests, work experiences, and evolving values. A career encompasses more than a single occupation; it includes the various life roles, experiences, and decisions that contribute to an individual's personal and professional development (Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey, 2021). Looking back on my own journey, I can identify how my family background, educational experiences, and changing interests have influenced my career choices and ultimately led me to pursue a career in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

I grew up in a middle-class family as the youngest of two children. My parents both grew up in upstate New York but came from very different socioeconomic backgrounds. My mother was raised in a wealthy family as the oldest of two children, while my father grew up in a low-income household as the youngest of nine siblings. Despite these differences, both of my parents valued hard work and perseverance, which became important values throughout my childhood.

My mother earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and worked as a private school teacher until I was a sophomore in high school. She later transitioned into entrepreneurship by starting her own wedding planning business. My father graduated from high school and completed some college coursework before building a successful career in sales. He has consistently been the primary financial provider for our family while also owning two businesses. Watching both of my parents succeed in different career paths demonstrated that there is more than one route to professional fulfillment and that career development often involves transitions throughout life.

For as long as I can remember, I dreamed of becoming a veterinarian. I loved animals and imagined spending my life caring for them. Throughout high school, I intentionally selected courses such as Sports Medicine, Medical Terminology, and Biomedical Sciences to prepare for veterinary school. At the time, I believed this was the career I would pursue for the rest of my life.

My family's cultural background also influenced my early career development. I was raised in a White, Christian, heterosexual family where traditional gender roles were common. My father served as the primary breadwinner while my mother balanced her career with raising our family before eventually starting her own business. Politically, my parents and brother identify as Republican, while my own experiences and education have led me to identify as politically independent. Studying psychology and Women's and Gender Studies broadened my perspectives and challenged many of my previous assumptions about culture, diversity, and social issues. These experiences reinforced the importance of understanding individuals from different backgrounds, which has become one of my motivations for entering the counseling profession.

Socioeconomic status also influenced my understanding of work. Although I grew up in a financially stable household, hearing about my father's upbringing helped me appreciate the opportunities I have had through education and career exploration. His experiences emphasized the importance of financial security, while my mother's career transition demonstrated that career paths are rarely linear and that people can successfully reinvent themselves throughout adulthood.

My educational experiences played the largest role in shaping my career development. I graduated from high school in 2019 with a strong interest in science and medicine. I then attended the University of South Carolina, intending to complete the prerequisites necessary for veterinary school. However, during college I realized that my interests were changing. While taking Organic Chemistry, I recognized that I was no longer passionate about becoming a veterinarian. Although changing career paths felt overwhelming after spending so many years working toward that goal, I also viewed it as an opportunity to pursue something that aligned more closely with my strengths and interests.

I quickly switched my major to Psychology because I had always been fascinated by human behavior and the brain. Initially, I was especially interested in abnormal psychology and forensic psychology, particularly understanding the minds of serial killers. As I progressed through my coursework, however, my interests shifted away from forensic psychology toward helping individuals improve their quality of life. I also completed a minor in Women's and Gender Studies, which strengthened my appreciation for multicultural perspectives, advocacy, and the influence of systemic factors on mental health.

After graduating from the University of South Carolina in 2023 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, I decided to continue my education by enrolling in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling master's program at Wake Forest University. My graduate education has further solidified my desire to work directly with clients while integrating psychological knowledge with compassionate, evidence-based care.

My work experiences have also contributed significantly to my career development. Beginning as a freshman in high school, I worked as a nanny for seven years, caring for three young girls. This position taught me responsibility, patience, communication, and relationship-building. Even today, I maintain a close relationship with the family, which reflects the meaningful connections developed through that experience.

While completing graduate school, I worked as a bank teller for approximately one year. Although the position differed from my long-term career goals, it strengthened my customer service skills, professionalism, and ability to communicate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Currently, I work as an office coordinator at an Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Center. This role has allowed me to become familiar with healthcare systems, interdisciplinary collaboration, and patient care. Working within a medical setting has reinforced my interest in integrating mental health services into healthcare environments, where counselors can collaborate with physicians and other healthcare professionals to improve patient outcomes.

Several internal factors have shaped my career development. Curiosity has always been one of my strongest personal characteristics. Whether I was interested in veterinary medicine, forensic psychology, or counseling, my motivation has consistently centered on understanding people and improving lives. My empathy, desire to help others, and fascination with human behavior naturally align with the counseling profession. Another important internal factor has been my willingness to reevaluate my goals. Although changing career paths during college was difficult, it ultimately allowed me to pursue work that better matches my values and interests. Rather than viewing career decisions as permanent, I now understand career development as a lifelong process involving growth, adaptation, and continuous learning.

External influences have also played a significant role. My family's support, educational opportunities, mentors, professors, and work experiences all contributed to my career development. Exposure to healthcare settings has inspired my interest in integrated behavioral health. Currently, I am particularly interested in working with patients seeking plastic surgery by screening for Body Dysmorphic Disorder before surgery and providing ongoing therapeutic support afterward. I am also interested in working with patients recovering from head and neck trauma within hospital settings by providing preoperative and postoperative counseling to help them adjust emotionally throughout their recovery.

Reflecting on my personal career development demonstrates how careers evolve over time through the interaction of personal interests, family influences, education, and life experiences. What began as a childhood dream of becoming a veterinarian ultimately developed into a passion for psychology and counseling. Each educational experience, career transition, and job has contributed valuable knowledge and skills that have prepared me for my future profession. As I continue my graduate education, I recognize that career development is an ongoing process rather than a final destination. I look forward to continuing to grow professionally while helping clients navigate their own personal and career development journeys.

References

Niles, S. G., & Harris-Bowlsbey, J. H. (2021). Career development interventions (6th ed.). Pearson/Merrill. ISBN: 978-0135842638