

The social
development
autobiography
psychology essay



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In the book titled, *Social and personality development*, David Shaffer conveys that modern researchers view families as a complex social system or network of reciprocal relationships that are constantly evolving (2008, p. 371). Each component of this complex network has direct and indirect effects. In essence, every person and every relationship within a family affects the other people and relationships (Shaffer, 2008, p. 372). I was born and raised in a traditional nuclear family in Lemont, Illinois. We are currently a family of five: my parents, my older brother, my younger sister, and I. My parents, Thomas and Linda Czernobil, were born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. They moved to Burr Ridge, a suburb located south-west of the city, to begin their family. By the time I became 2 years old, my family moved into our home in Lemont. My parents currently live at this same residence. Both of my parents are of Ukrainian and Polish descent. My great-grandparents escaped Eastern Europe to avert Communist persecution. They escaped to freedom by hiking over the Alps into Switzerland, much like the von Trapp family in the *Sound of Music*. They travelled until they reached Chicago and started a new life in a neighborhood in the city called the Ukrainian Village.

When I was born my mother was 30 years old and my father was 34 years old. By this time, my mother had already become a stay-at-home mom to care for my brother and my father was employed at CNH, an agricultural and construction equipment industries firm. He was a mechanical engineer for the company. After the birth of my brother, my parents planned to extend their family. They wanted more children. However, I was a surprise and they were very happy. According to my mother, my brother was disappointed when I was born because he wanted a baby brother. My parents attended

Lamaze class to prepare for my birth. However, they failed the class because they could not watch the birthing process movie. Since I was their second child, my parents did not have any worries about parenting and providing proper care for me. They felt competent and financially ready. Lastly, they did receive a tremendous amount of support from family and friends.

Genetics

Researchers in the field of behavior genetics study how the set of genes one inherits comes to be observable characteristics and behaviors. They believe that there are biological bases for individual difference (Shaffer, 2008).

Behavior geneticists define genotype as the set of genes an individual inherits. One's phenotype is defined as the observable or physical product of genes. In other words, a person's genotype is their genetic blueprint or DNA, while their phenotype is the actual observable physical characteristics (Shaffer, 2008). Keeping this in mind, I believe that my physical characteristics such as eye color, height, gender, hair color, and blood type are solely genetic traits that were determined by the relationship between my genotype and phenotype. Therefore, my physical characteristics were solely influenced by my genes.

On the other hand, I believe that my personality and intelligence characteristics were determined by the interaction between my genes and environment. Behavior geneticists contend that most behavioral attributes are the results of the interaction(s) between hereditary predispositions and environmental influences. In my opinion, my personality and intellect were established by nature but shaped through nurture. In other words, I believe

I was born with a genetic predisposition to behave and think a certain way.
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However, my behavioral and intellectual attributes were cultivated and influenced by my family, peers and life experiences. For example, I believe that I was born with genetic predisposition of a type A personality: competitive, hardworking, achievement-oriented, and ambitious. However, environmental influences were responsible for the expression or observable manifestation of these traits.

Furthermore, I believe the same is true for my intellectual traits. According to Shaffer (2008), the genes individuals inherit influence intellectual performance. He states that these attributes are genetically predetermined. However, they are heavily influenced by an individuals environment. Therefore, my personality and intellect were created by nature but largely determined by my environment.

My caregivers agree that my physical characteristics are purely genetic because everyone in the family shares similar physical attributes even though our environments have changed throughout the years. In other words, the members of our family still resemble each other even though my parents live in Chicago, my sister and I live in Birmingham, and my brother lives in Italy. My caregivers also agree that personality and intellectual attributes are both genetically and environmentally influenced. They also agree that ones personality and intellectual attributes are heavily influenced by environment because of the observable similarities and differences within our own family. My mother, father, sister, brother and I share many personality traits. We are all aggressive, hardworking, and compassionate individuals. However, some of our personality traits differ because of our personal life experiences and different environments. For example, my sister
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and I place a large value on artistic success over financial success because we spent most of our development years in confined artistic environments. On the other hand, our brother did not have a great deal of exposure to artistic environments. He spent many hours with our father learning about business, ethics, and finances. He places a much larger emphasis on financial success because he was exposed to this environment. All three of us are hardworking, career-oriented people. However, my financial personality as well as my sisters differs a great deal from our brothers because we were exposed to different environmental influences.

Prenatal Development

Shaffer (2008) defines human development as occurrences or changes in an individual that happen between conception and death. In other words, human development is an ongoing process that begins as soon as a sperm penetrates an ovum. The prenatal period typically lasts for forty weeks or roughly nine months and refers to the time in a pregnancy between conception and birth. There are many changes that occur to both the mother and child during this time and it is very important that the mother provide appropriate care and a healthy environment for her baby to develop properly. During this time, mothers should visit with her doctor regularly, get enough sleep, take prenatal vitamins, eat health foods, and exercise. They should avoid exposure to toxic substances, drugs, alcohol and harmful environments.

A teratogen is an agent, such as a drug or disease that can cause a birth defect. My mother had no exposure to any teratogens during my prenatal development. Since I was the second child, my mother knew what
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environments to avoid so that I was not exposed to anything dangerous. My mother does not smoke and rarely drinks alcohol. During the pregnancy she did not drink any alcoholic beverages or allow herself to be in environments where smoking was permitted.

During the entire pregnancy and after I was born, my mother exercised at Ballys. She took several fitness classes, including jazzercise. My mother received a great deal of emotional support from her friends and family during the pregnancy. She revealed that my father and grandmother in particular were very supportive and helpful, which helped keep her level of stress low. The pregnancy was nine months and fifteen days long. During the pregnancy, my mother felt great emotionally. She was so excited to have another child and she hoped it would be a girl. Physically, however, my mother did not always feel great during the pregnancy. She experienced throbbing headaches, nausea, back pain, and morning sickness.

Delivery, Early Health, and Milestones

My mother went into labor on January 10th, 1987. I was born at Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Illinois during a blizzard. My mother had some concerns since I was approximately two weeks late. My expected due date was December 27th. Nevertheless, the delivery went very smoothly. My mother did not receive any delivery drugs because there was not enough time for them to be administered. I weighed seven pounds and was nineteen inches long. My mother said that I was chubby, with no hair and big brown eyes. She remarked that I had a great smile. According to my mother, I received a perfect Apgar score of ten. I was breastfed for two weeks. My family did not experience any adjustment issues after I was born.

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On average I slept for two to four hours. As my body weight increased, I began sleeping for four to six hours.

Psychologist, Jean Piaget theorized that children move through a series of four stages of cognitive development. The four stages include the sensorimotor stage, the preoperational stage, the concrete-operational stage, and the formal-operational stage. During the sensorimotor stage, infants begin to coordinate motor responses and sensory input. This stage typically lasts from birth to approximately 2 years of age. In the preoperational stage, children begin to think symbolically. This stage begins at approximately 2 years of age and lasts up to age 7. In the concrete-operational stage that begins at approximately age 7 and lasts until 11 years old, children begin to think abstractly and logically. In the final stage, the formal-operational stage, children begin to think rationally and systematically. This stage begins at approximately age 11 or 12 and lasts into adulthood. During each of these stages, they are developmental milestones that children encounter (Shaffer, 2008).

According to Piaget, an infant's coordination habits, such as grasping and sucking begin to occur around 1 to 4 months of age. Between 4 to 8 months of age, infants recognize that they are separate beings from external objects and begin to retrieve attractive objects that may be hidden or concealed. By ages 8 to 12 months, infants begin to exhibit problem solving skills. Between 12 to 18 months of age, children acquire the ability to solve problems mentally (Shaffer, 2008).

There were no developmental or major health concerns. However, I did have bouts of eczema as an infant. My developmental milestones were generally on time if not slightly early. My mother said I began smiling immediately after birth. I was generally a happy baby. She said that when I was 3 months old I was able to hold my head up, I began paying attention to faces and I began smiling at other people. Shaffer (2008) revealed that babies typically beginning smiling at other people around 3 months of age. I also began making cooing and gurgling noises at this time. By 4 months of age, I began to babble and copy sounds. I could hold my head up unsupported and could push up to my elbows when lying on my stomach. By 7 months of age, I could sit unsupported and bring things to my mouth. I began crawling and saying my first words such as mamma when I was 9 ½ months old. I began walking and talking around 12 months of age.

Caregiving

According to Shaffer (2008), high-quality child care programs can optimize a child's cognitive, language and social outcomes because they provide an outlet where a child can be intellectually stimulated and participate in new experiences. As a matter of fact, research has shown that high-quality care facilities can actually enhance a child's social, intellectual, and emotional development. However, it is important to note that these child care facilities must be high-quality centers. The quality of the day-care facility is a critical factor in determining how well a child will learn to communicate, behave, and think.

My mother and father provided daily care for me during the first 5 years of my life. My mother was a stay-at-home mom and my father cared for me
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during the evening hours after he arrived home from work. When I became 16 months old, I began attending Montessori preschool 2 mornings a week. As I grew older, my parents increased the time at the preschool. My parents sent me to Montessori preschool because they liked the Montessori method and philosophy. The Montessori philosophy is built upon a belief that children develop through a series of different stages and that children should work towards meeting their own learning individual needs rather than learning something based on age. According to my mother, I also received care from my grandparents.

My parents were happy with the care I received during this time in my life and they would do it all again the exact same way. They felt I received high-quality care from the Montessori school and that the care I received had many beneficial effects on my social and intellectual development. When I have children in the future, I will likely raise my children the same way my parents raised me. I would like for my husband and I to be the primary caregivers for our children with help from our parents. However, I am unsure I would register my children for a Montessori preschool program because I fear these programs focus too much self-directed learning. In these programs, children pick their work for the day and learn at their own pace. I believe that children should learn at their own speed. However, I also believe that there is a correct order and process to learning certain activities. Therefore, I will send my children to a preschool program. However, it will most likely not be a Montessori program.

Attachment

According to Shaffer (2008), secure attachments between caregivers and infants build gradually from social interactions during the first year of life. Schaffer and Emerson found that infants pass through 3 phases to form affectional ties with caregivers and other people. By third phase, babies establish their first genuine attachments. Mary Ainsworth, a psychologist known for her work in early emotional attachment, emphasizes that these first attachments act as a secure base. This secure base provided emotional support for infants and allows them to venture out and explore new environments (Shaffer, 2008, p. 138).

There are 4 influential theories of attachment: psychoanalytic theory, learning theory, cognitive-developmental theory, and ethological theory. Each theory provides different insight as to how and why infants form attachments. According to the psychoanalytic theory and Freud, infants form attachments with their mother because they provide food. Erik Erikson also expressed that feeding practices influence the strength of attachment. However, he felt that a mother's overall responsiveness is more important than the actual feeding practices. Learning theorists also believe that infants become attached to people who feed them and gratify their needs because it increases the likelihood of a caregiver's affection and ability to provide many comforts. Cognitive-development theorists think that the ability to form attachments depends on an infant's cognitive development. Lastly, the ethological theory states that human beings are born with innate behaviors specifically designed to create attachments (Shaffer, 2008, p. 139-140).

Around the age of 6-8 months, I was most securely attached to my mother.

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My mother revealed that I did not develop any other attachments during this time period. This attachment developed because my mother was actively involved and interacted with me often. She spent time laughing and playing with me and learned how to meet my physical and emotional needs.

Ainsworth's Strange Situation revealed that there are four ways a child can illustrate his or her attachment to their mother or caretaker: secure attachment, resistant attachment, avoidant attachment, disorganized/disoriented attachment (Shaffer, 2008, p 144). Ainsworth describes a securely attached child as one who exhibits stress when separated from their caregiver, but warmly greets this caregiver when he or she returns. Securely attached children are comfortable with exploring new things and environments and are often outgoing with strangers if the caregiver is present. Based on what I have learned I would characterize the quality of my attachment with my mother as secure. My mom stated that I always greeted her warmly and with a smile on my face. I also always sought to be near her or by her side. I showed signs of distress if we were separated and she was still in sight. I was always happy to see her when she returned. She said that I was often friendly with strangers and explored my surroundings with her nearby.

My mother revealed that I displayed a secure attachment with my father, but it developed as I became a few months older. She stated that I did not display any secondary attachments during the first year or two of my life. My mother illustrated that I would reach for my dad as soon as he arrived home from work and that I would always greet him with a smile. Even though I would primarily seek comfort from my mother when distressed. At times, I

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would seek comfort from my dad in these situations. My mother said I was a slightly more playful with my father. According to Shaffer (2008), researchers in Italy, Japan, India, Australia, Israel, and the United States found that mothers and fathers tend to play different roles in a baby's life. They found that fathers are often the preferred playmate and mothers more often provide emotional support (p. 153).

Temperament

My mother describes me as a happy and content baby. She said that I rarely cried except when I needed a new diaper or was hungry. She mentioned that I was very curious and always observing my surroundings. I liked meeting new people and my mother remarked that people really enjoyed my company as well. I showed regular eating habits and smiled often. According to Shaffer (2008), Thomas and Chess believe that the majority of infants can be placed into 3 temperamental categories: easy temperament, difficult temperament, and slow-to-warm up temperament. They describe infants in the easy temperament category as children who are even-tempered, open, adaptable, and predictable (p. 129).

Based on how Thomas and Chess define each category and how my mother described my temperament, I believe the easy temperament category best describes my temperament. Thomas and Chess found that one's early temperament characteristics sometimes can and sometimes cannot carry over into adulthood. Thomas and Chess felt that the relationship between a child's temperamental style and the child-rearing practices used determines the stability of early temperament characteristics. They call this notion the

goodness of fit. A goodness of fit occurs when a child's temperament is compatible with their environment (Shaffer, 2008, p. 129).

I believe that my early temperament has remained stable into adulthood because my early temperament style correlates with my current basic personality characteristics. I feel that I currently exhibit many positive personality traits. I am typically in a positive mood. I prefer to follow a regular routine and am open to experiencing new things. I am optimistic, observant, and happy. My early temperament style has remained stable because my parents recognized and were sensitive to my temperament style. They created an environment compatible with my temperament style.

Siblings and Birth Order

I grew up with two siblings: an older brother and a younger sister. My older brother and I are 2 years apart, while my younger sister and I are 6 years apart. Both of my siblings played positive roles in my development. There are many advantages and disadvantages of growing up with siblings. Anyone who has siblings has had their fair share of sibling rivalries and disputes. However, I believe that the advantages of growing up with siblings far outweigh the disadvantages.

To begin, my siblings provided companionship and friendship. I always had a playmate and I enjoyed their company. I was rarely lonely. Moreover, they provided emotional support when needed and they always made me laugh. They helped me develop the sense of humor I have today. While growing up, my older brother offered guidance on how to achieve new skills and tasks.

My younger sister and I shared many similar interests growing up. We both studied ballet seriously at a young age and the healthy competition between us is responsible for our success in the art form. We are both currently dancing professionally with the Alabama Ballet. Moreover, we developed a bond and support system that is like no other because we share love for the art form and have many common goals. Furthermore, having a younger sister allowed me to improve my interpersonal skills even further because just like my brother I became a model and teacher. I believe that I became a more sensitive, humble individual when my sister was born.

There are some disadvantages of growing up with siblings. At times, my siblings and I would get into arguments and we did not get along. There were instances of power struggles and we would often compete for our parents attention. At times, we all felt left out. My brother would feel especially left out when my sister and I discussed ballet. There were also instances of jealousy and unhealthy sibling rivalry. We all felt pressure to be the best and could not help but feel the pressure of being compared to one another.

According to Shaffer (2008), siblings play vital roles in one another's lives. They provide care for one another and provide a great deal of emotional support. Through communication and interactions, they often teach each other important interpersonal skills, social skills, an understanding of other people's perspectives and emotions, and a capacity for compromise and negotiation. Simply, siblings foster the growth of many social-cognitive skills (p. 390-392). I believe my birth order heavily influenced and shaped my development. In many ways, being the middle child was very difficult.

However, it also had many perks because I was both an older and younger
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sister. I believe it taught me to become a great negotiator and mediator. It allowed me to gain a great understanding of others perspectives and in turn become an effective team player. However, one negative impression of my birth order on my development is my need to keep people happy at my own expense.

Niches

Psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner felt that a child's environment plays a vital role in their social, emotional, and cognitive development. He developed an ecological system model to illustrate how one's environment influences a child's development. He believed that 5 environmental factors impact a child's growth and development. These 5 factors include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner believes that a child's microsystem has a significant impact on their cognitive, physical and socialization skills because in this system children are affected directly. Children influence their surroundings and in return are influenced by interactions with others, activities, lessons, and much more (Shaffer, 2008).

During my early childhood, I was exposed to numerous environments and activities. I was immersed in several lessons, clubs, and religious activities. My parents exposed me to several different types of environments and activities because they felt, much like Bronfenbrenner, that these activities would have a positive impact on my social, emotional, and cognitive development. I was primarily exposed to artistic activities because my parents felt they were beneficial and I expressed interest in these activities.

At the age of 3, I was registered for ballet and piano lessons. By the age of
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11, I began taking flute lessons as well. My mother signed me up for ballet lessons because she absolutely loves the arts and she always wanted to take ballet lessons when she was little. Furthermore, I was very clumsy and my mother believed ballet would provide me with some grace. My mother signed me up for piano lessons because of the intellectual benefits associated with exposure to musical training. In addition, my mother and father both played instruments during their childhood. My mother played the organ and my father played the trumpet.

My parents also exposed me to religious activities during my early childhood.

My family regularly attended church every Saturday where I attended mass and Ukrainian school. Moreover, we would attend church functions regularly. My parents felt it was important to instill faith and religion in my upbringing at a young age. Furthermore, they felt it was very important that I learn about Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian traditions.

Lastly, I was exposed to sport lessons and activities. When I was 5 years old, my mother registered me for gymnastics and tennis lessons. I only took gymnastic lessons for a year. However, I took tennis lessons every summer at the local park district up until the age of 9. My parents signed me up for these lessons because they felt it was important to expose me to several different activities so that I could become a well-rounded individual.

By the age of 12, I began choosing my own environments and activities. My choices were very similar to what my parents chose for me during my early childhood. However, I did eliminate every activity I was exposed to except ballet because I did not have the proper time to devote to several activities
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at one time. Throughout my childhood, I became very passionate about ballet. It was my dream to become a professional ballet dancer and I was willing to sacrifice all my spare time to make my dreams of becoming a ballet dancer come true.

Parenting Style

According to Shaffer (2008), Erik Erikson and others believe there are 2 dimensions of parenting that are especially important throughout childhood and adolescence. These 2 dimensions are parental acceptance/responsiveness and parental demandingness/control. The acceptance/responsiveness describes that amount of support and affection a parent displays. The demandingness/control dimension refers to the amount of supervision or regulation a parent places on their child. Parents often differ along these broad childrearing dimensions. Maccoby and Martin found that these major two parenting dimensions yield 4 parenting styles when crossed: accepting/controlling or authoritative, accepting and uncontrolling or permissive, aloof /controlling or authoritarian, and aloof/uncontrolling or uninvolved. Psychologists, Diana Baumrind conducted research on these 4 parenting styles. After administering a study on more than 100 preschool-age children she found that the majority of parents displayed 1 of the 3 parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive. None of the parents in the study could be classified as uninvolved (Shaffer, 2008, p. 376-377).

Throughout childhood and adolescence, I believe my parents generally used 2 different parenting styles. I feel my parents personalities, parental

backgrounds, and upbringings contribute to their different parenting styles.
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My mother offered a more democratic approach to parenting. For example, she was more willing to allow me to attend a performing arts high school out of state because she knew it was something I really wanted to pursue. She was warm and nurturing. For instance, she told me she loved me frequently and often. She established rules and guidelines that we were expected to follow. She was assertive but reasonable. For example, if I behaved poorly or did something wrong she would discuss my wrongdoings with me instead of immediately punishing me and sending me to my room. When I was 5 years old, I told my mother I finished my dinner when in actuality I threw the dinner away. When she saw the dinner in the garbage can, she had me sit at the dinner table and discuss the consequences of lying. She was assertive with her words, but not domineering or harsh. My mother was a good listener and often inquired about my needs and desires. She knew of my desires to pursue a professional ballet career and made sure I had all the resources to achieve my dream. Therefore, her parenting style was authoritative.

My father on the hand was more restrictive than my mother. He placed a large emphasis on academic success. Anything below an A was unacceptable. My father established strict rules and we were punished if we failed to follow these rules. For instance, if we behaved poorly or did something wrong we were immediately sent to our rooms and we were grounded until further notice. Furthermore, my father expected us to obey the rules without explanation. When my father was asked to explain the reasoning behind something whether we were arguing or discussing something he would simply respond with because I said so, or because I am your father. For example, when I would ask him if we could get a dog he

would say no. When I would I ask him why he would respond with because I said so. At that point the discussion would be over. Therefore, his parenting style was authoritarian.

As I became an adult, I believe their parenting styles became more cohesive. My father transitioned to a more authoritative parenting style while my mother maintained an authoritative parenting style. I believe my fathers parenting style changed because he began to recognize and accept my independence and maturity. I feel that my father felt that I needed strict parenting and guidance as a child. He was legally responsible for my behavior and he worked to instill respectable values in me while I was young. He felt that the values he instilled in me while I was young would prepare me for adulthood. As I became an adult, he began to respect my opinions because he felt that I had the proper upbringing to make the right decisions. He felt that I was prepared to make mature decisions and take responsibility for my own choices.

Parental Relationship

No two families are alike and every family has its own unique dynamic. Therefore, there is no family dynamic that can be deemed as standard or normal. I believe it is normal for parents to disagree and argue at times. Misunderstandings and arguments are common in every relationship and quite frankly inevitable. My parents will be married 31 years in May. My parents have always had a loving relationship. However, they have experienced many relationship ups and downs.

During my early childhood and elementary years, my parents rarely fought. If they did fight, they took their arguments into a different room away from us. However, when I entered middle school my parents relationship experienced some turmoil. This turmoil lasted for several years. Only after I graduated high school did my parents relationship begin to recover. During this time, my family encountered some financial difficulties. There was a great deal of stress surrounding my family and my parents relationship. They argued constantly and frequently. Their arguments were heated and loud and often in front of us. At times they would encourage us to take sides and not speak for days. My parents relationship has recovered. If they do argue now, these arguments tend to be trivial and short-lived. They admit now that financial difficulties were the main culprit for the marital discord.

Nevertheless, this was a very troubling time in our lives.

This rough period in my parents marriage had many negative effects on my development. To begin, I was often very frightened when my parents argued. I began to worry constantly and often feared they would file for divorce. I would become very upset and sad and I often felt unsettled, anxious and uneasy. At times, I felt that I was walking on egg shells around my parents and was very unsure when they next argument would transpire.

My parents troubled relationship did have a few positive effects on my development. These positive effects include a closer relationship w