

Developmental Analysis Paper

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Author Note

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This paper contains sensitive topics such as abuse, neglect, adoption, mental illness, and resilience. Any questions or concerns about this paper can be submitted to Linnea Puckett

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Abstract

Everyone has a different experience regarding individual human development. So many other factors and unique living situations can change or redirect one person's growth. Sometimes, it doesn't even matter if the person has strong resilience. All that life still rocks their development has to throw at us. In the end, the only thing that seems to promote healthy development after experiencing trauma is the loving care of one individual. Even then, sometimes it is just hard for an individual to heal. I want to review my journey in human development, for much of what I experienced as a child is what has made me desire to pursue this career today. In my personal journey, I quickly learned that resilience is all about mindset. I am proud of how far I have discovering human development and healing, and I share my experience with you.

Keywords: Trauma, abuse, resilience, mindset, developmental delay.

Developmental Analysis Paper

Human development is complex and unique to the individual. In my development, I experienced a very rocky start to life. As I have mentioned in previous papers, I was adopted by my parents when I was six years old. Before that, I suffered much hardship that would significantly impact my developmental growth. In this paper, I will discuss my complete development journey, covering the extent of my growth that contributed significantly to my desire to become a counselor. I will cover from birth to now and incorporate empirical studies and my textbook from this course.

Infancy and Toddlerhood

Prenatal Development

My birth mother (I will refer to her as BM in this paper) was stressed before I was born. Having to deal with the toxic situation she had put herself into, on top of dealing with severe mental illness (Paranoid Schizophrenia), she almost chose to abort. Even though she decided to go through with the pregnancy, she could not stop her addiction to illegal drugs and alcohol while pregnant. This ultimately resulted in me being born with a condition known as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and my twin's (I was a twin) death. As stated in our textbook. "The same amount of alcohol that the mother consumes transfers to the fetus. While the adult's liver can break down the alcohol, the fetus's liver is not yet developed enough to do this" (Wong et al., 2021). Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is also considered a traumatic brain injury or TBI. Although I am unsure whether she was a victim of domestic violence, it is entirely probable.

Infancy/ Toddlerhood

Now, Sadly, because of my BM's mental illness and her spiritual beliefs at the time of my birth, I suffered many forms of abuse and neglect throughout my infancy and toddlerhood.

My BM was a Satan Worshipper during the early 1900s. As I was born a living twin, there was an element of belief that I was cursed. Combined with her visions of demonic creatures and paranoid schizophrenia, I fell victim to spiritual, emotional, and sexual abuse. Many of these events' memories were only recently recalled as it was a traumatic experience for me and led to the early development of PTSD. Keller describes the effect on my growth perfectly. "Survivors may also experience social isolation. Particularly considering that spiritual abuse is not yet a widely understood or accepted form of abuse, survivors themselves may lack understanding of the abuse they have experienced in their religious group. Secrecy and silence frequently accompany spiritual abuse as survivors are told not to speak of the injustices they have experienced" (Keller, 2016).

My BM also decided to have two more kids, my younger sisters, after me. They mainly experienced neglect as our BM was often too high or too drunk to care for them properly. In this sense, my cognitive, social, and emotional development matured beyond my capabilities as I became aware of the need to make sure my sisters were cared for before myself. Neglecting my own needs to protect them. As stated in Chapter 5 of our textbook, I became aware of the cause and effect of my behaviors and interactions with BM and began building my own sense of autonomy, understanding what behaviors could change my BM's responses, and developing my self-concept. (Wong et al., 2021).

Preschool and Middle Childhood

Preschool:

From the ages of 4 to 6, I was placed in foster care with my two sisters. While in the system, my sisters and I were separated. My youngest sister, who was still a baby, was adopted immediately, and my younger sister and I stayed together until our last foster home. During this

time, I became withdrawn within myself. When I was later diagnosed with Autism, I began understanding why I became withdrawn. When put in kindergarten, I played alone and barely remembered anything I learned there. I had significant developmental delays in fine and gross motor skills, and my toilet training was severely delayed. (This was due to a tactic behavior I learned to get out of having to deal with sexual abuse). I also had intellectual difficulties grasping concepts and learning difficulties that made learning impossible for me at the time.

On top of that, I had some medical needs that were troubling to my health. Some of this is highlighted in the empirical study by Steenacks et al.: “Children in foster care can have difficulties establishing and maintaining social relationships. A recent meta-analysis shows that age-appropriate social functioning does not improve during foster family placement (Goemans et al. 2015). Compared to other types of out-of-home care, children in family foster care require specific attention for attachment-related difficulties (Leloux-Opmeer et al., 2017)” (Steenbakkens et al., 2017). The only thing that helped me through that time was a single friend, whose name was Summer. She was the only light in my life during this challenging time. Years later, I would run into her again, and even though it was preschool, we remembered each other instantly.

Middle Childhood:

Middle Childhood was where my life trajectory took a drastic positive turn. I was adopted by my mother at 6 years old, and my development began to move once again. After taking the IQ test and finding myself below average, my mother was determined to help me learn the way I could learn. She pushed my limited fixed mindset and allowed me to learn at my own pace. Working with my habits of wanting to find patterns, she helped me learn how to use my “faulty issues” with my brain to study effectively. I also found a new hope in the fact that I had a forever home that was not hurtful or abusive. My mother introduced me to Christ shortly after I

was adopted, and for the first time in a long time, I began to develop spiritually. Due to my mother's persistence, I began to foster resiliency and change my mindset.

My mom used resources such as Physical and Speech Therapy, gripping pencils, and math manipulatives to help with my fine and gross motor skills. She was always patient and encouraged me to keep going when I got frustrated. She looked for places where I was gifted and implemented my gifted skills into my learning tasks, such as including piano, when she found that I was musically inclined. I came to her as a blank slate, and she had me reading and writing by 10 years old. By age twelve, I was reading beyond my peers' level, writing mini books, and my comprehension had improved significantly. The only problem with this dealership is that it was hard for my mom to prove I required services, As expressed by Beckmann; "As it is assumed that giftedness can mask G/LD students' disabilities and vice versa (Ruban and Reis, 2005), they are often not recognized and 'considered "not good enough" for gifted programs and "too good" to qualify for accommodations' (Silverman, 2013, p. 14)" (Beckmann & Minnaert, 2018).

Although my journey through cognitive development and education was rocky at best, my faith in Christ was the ultimate rock I held onto for dear life. As I struggled with understanding my worth and value, my mother continued to pour the life of Christ for me. I often say that if it weren't for my mom introducing Christ when she did, I probably would have lost my life to suicide because of how severe my depression and anxiety had a hold on me. My mom encouraged our spiritual growth by incorporating bible reading into our daily routine, allowing us to attend children's Sunday school and Awana, and also by praying with us every day. My faith would become a living hope for me throughout the rest of my years up to today.

Early & Late Adolescence

Early Adolescence

During my teen years, I was riddled with social anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues that affected my emotional and social development. I also had confusing things happening to my health due to my changing body to womanhood. This was also when I got retested in IQ, scored below average and average in most subjects, and got the official diagnosis of Autism. Even though I had somewhat normal reactions to being a teen, feeling rebellious, and often felt my mother was too harsh or irrational (Wong et al., 2021), I still held morally solid principles of obedience to my parents and often only participated in little actions of rebellion. Sometimes, my siblings would label me as a goody two shoes.

Because of this and my severe anxiety, it was really hard for me to be social. It was a combination of my depression and self-esteem issues that also contributed to my social anxiety. As Heeren points out, “Although the presence of depressive symptoms in SAD (Social anxiety disorder) is well documented, uncertainty remains regarding how core symptoms of SAD—i.e., fear and avoidance of social situations—are associated with depressive symptoms, and vice versa. Of clinical importance, distinct types of social fear may vary in terms of their debilitating nature. As a result, one cannot rule out the possibility that fear and avoidance vis-à-vis a given social situation may relate to different symptoms of depression. For instance, fear of talking to unfamiliar people may promote avoidance of going to a party, which, in turn, may influence depressive symptoms such as pessimism and self-dislike, worsening the fear of talking to unfamiliar people” (Heeren et al., 2018). It was almost debilitating for me, and it took years of soul-searching and spiritual growth to build confidence in my ability to be social slowly.

Late Adolescence

Late adolescence has been chiefly about self-discovery and understanding self-worth. I needed to develop more independence, explore college life, meet people, and lay down my final foundation of values. The most impactful change was in my brain. Wong et al. state: "Significant brain structure changes continue after age 18...As an individual continues to experience opportunities to mature and grow, his or her brain will also continue to adapt" (Wong et al., 2021).

For me, it was a significant change. I took the IQ test one last time when I was 18. And I was average in everything. Not only that, when I was six, doctors told my mom that according to my results, there was a probability that I would never reach high school level skills in Education, but that was quickly proven false by not only my graduation from high school, but my successful academic career in college, graduating with honors with my bachelor's degree at 24 years old, and even now as I pursue my Masters. With my mother's earlier training, I built study habits that worked well with my particular disability, and my adaptation skills grew immensely.

I still had slight problems with social skills, but my social anxiety had subsided, and I began to struggle with the intricate parts of relationships. Although I was aware of my attraction to men during this period, I did not pursue relationships as my goal was to finish school successfully and heal from my past trauma. During this period, I also started processing everything that happened to me as a child with a therapist to be more successful in future relationships.

Conclusion

Currently, I am at the end of a quarter-life crisis, just having left late adolescence and finding my self-identity. Some behaviors I enact I am sure positively affect my aging process would probably be participating in exercise and therapy to better my mental and physical health.

However, I know that my aging process will bring on some painful health issues because of my current health conditions. I deal with a condition known as Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, which has led to the early development of Arthritis, digestive issues, and Thyroid issues. These health issues will lead to some more challenging times in my aging. Other than these health issues, some behaviors can negatively affect my aging process, such as unhealthy eating habits and sitting/standing for long periods at work/home. Some things I can do to eliminate these problems are practicing more breaks at work, more walks at home, and buying healthier food options.

For further studies, I think there is a need for more empirical studies on trauma, resilience, and foster care. Most of my research stated that there was little to no research on how children can gain resilience through spirituality or the effect of foster care on the mindset of children. This is troubling for me since this type of research could be the key to a child successfully overcoming adversity. Also, research on disability resilience could bring hope to a struggling student or teacher.

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