

Sam Owen

By Sam Owen

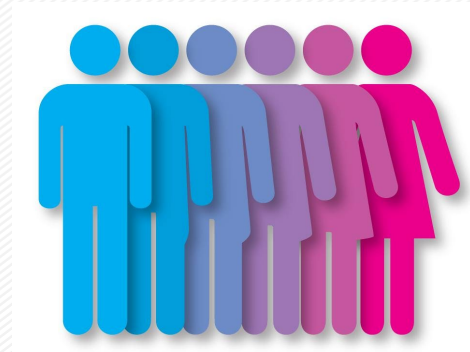
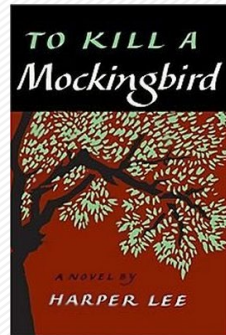
Pregnancy

My mother's pregnancy with me was very much by the books. Extensive care was put into the avoidance of teratogens, including the complete abstention from alcohol. In order to facilitate my in-utero cognitive development, my mother listened to classical music and read books daily. Due to a previous miscarriage, she avoided physical activity, despite working full time, and took the hormone progesterone to prevent a similar happening. Although my mother had no aversions to any kind of food while pregnant, she did crave milk, ice cream, and steak. I was born four days late, and the labor became the subject of legend: thirteen hours, with the last two spent pushing.



Choosing a Name

- My parents liked the sound of “Samuel”, and on my paternal side, the eldest son’s middle name is the father’s first; therefore, my middle name was Jeffrey.
- Other considered names included Cameron and Atticus (from *To Kill a Mockingbird*).
- The latter was thrown out because my mom believed that my nickname could become Cuss.
- In our society, names are typically labeled as either male or female. As children develop, they associate a name, including their own, with a gender. Giving a child a name identified with his or her gender reinforces that child’s gender identity. Conversely, it is possible that a child’s understanding of his or her name is derived from his or her gender identity. For example, a boy named Claire may think of it as a masculine name rather than thinking himself to be feminine.



Nursery

My nursery was bright and full of primary colors in addition to other patterns known to hold a baby's interest. Animals dominated the theme, and although there was nothing truly feminine about the décor, it possibly could have passed as gender neutral. However, it is more common for a zoo-like scene to mark a boy's room than a girl's. With that said, I would argue that my nursery strengthened my identity as a male.



How I imagine it looked:

Physical Development

Size at Birth

- 8 pounds and 1 ounce
- 22 inches long

Me at Birth



Developmental Milestones

	Sam	Average*
First sat up	5 months	6 months
First tooth's arrival	10 months	4 – 7 months
Took first step	13 months	9 – 12 months
Officially toilet trained	20 months	~ 2 years
Loss of first tooth	6 years	~ 6 years

* Taken from www.babycenter.com

Me vs. The Median:

Most of my early physical development was on cue, with the only exception being the emergence of my first tooth, which came several months after the median. As this is dictated by maturation, a biological process exclusively dictated by genetic nature rather than environmental factors, I presumed that this was an inherited trait, so I consulted my mother, who consulted her mother, who reported that the emergence of my mother's first tooth was at around the same time as mine. Physical development is primarily determined similarly, with maturation providing the capacity for children to perform certain activities like standing and walking.



Puberty

Puberty, in essence, is the maturation of the reproductive system and its corresponding secondary developments including growth spurts, a deepening of the voice in males, and the growth of body hair. It marks the point at which a person can (but probably should not) reproduce. Due to differences in genetics and environment, everybody undergoes this change at different points. Genetic factors are rather self explanatory, but some environmental influences that affect the onset or influence of puberty include nutrition, intake of certain hormones, and activities like strength training.



A Tale of Two Pubescents

Jebediah and Zechariah were born in the same Amish community and have been close friends since childhood. Although they are the same age, Jebediah underwent puberty at an unusually early age. He grew tremendously, his voice began to deepen, and a bit of fuzz appeared above his lip. The other boys in the community looked up to Jeb – both literally and figuratively; however, Jebediah began to feel detached and isolated from his classmates. As he developed emotionally and cognitively, it became difficult to associate with the interests of his prepubescent peers.

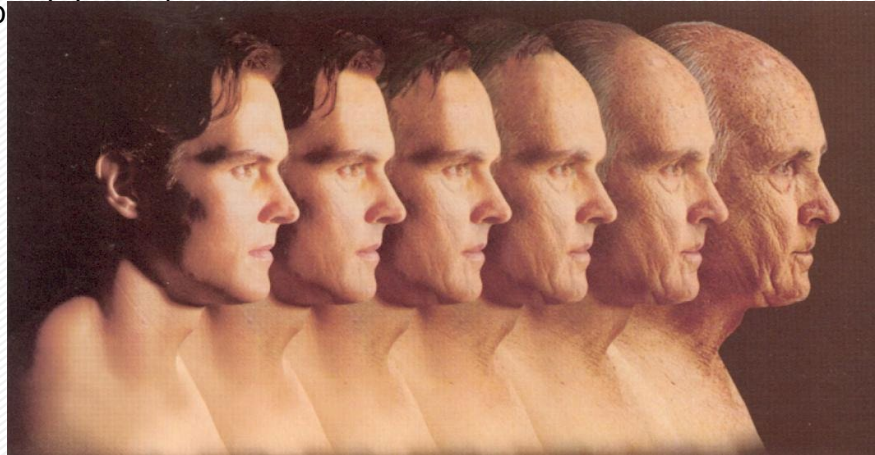
After seeing his friend's growth spurt, Zechariah wanted nothing more than to hit puberty. Knowing his time would come, he waited... and waited. He continued to wait until age 16. Until then, Zechariah was known as the 5'2" kid who still spoke in countertenor. He was afraid to speak up, was chosen last for whatever sports Amish kids play, and ruled the friend zone. Although Zechariah's time eventually came, his memory of adolescence is not a fond one.

Being different is never easy at this age, and although Jebediah and Zachariah had opposite problems, the effects were largely negative, especially for the latter.



On Aging

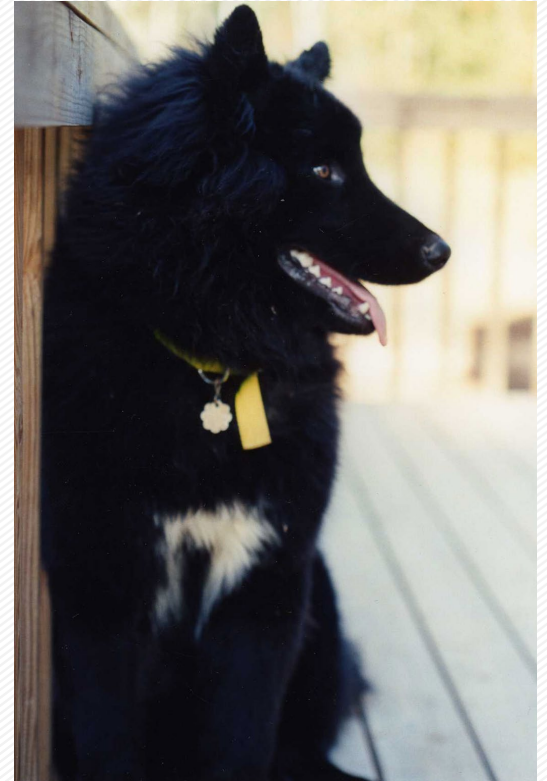
As I see it, I will remain at my physical peak for a few more years, but then I began a slow deterioration that lasts until my eventual expiration. At around age 30, my body will begin to weaken and I will begin to lose some fluid intelligence. At around age 70, I will become increasingly prone to dementia and Alzheimer's disease, which is present in my father's lineage. With that said, aging does not seem like a pleasant process; however, I have come to accept its inevitability. In addition, it is reported that older people do not necessarily lose happiness because of age. I presume that this is because aging is a gradual change, and one accommodates these changes into their life with time. My primary concern is that I have already wasted a great deal of the very limited time I have at my peak of learning ability and physical health. I aspire to make the most of my age-related vigor before



Language Development

First Word

- “Abby” (the family dog’s name)
- Occurred at 7 months
- My choice of first word appears to mirror Skinner’s theory of Operant Learning more closely than Chomsky’s.
 - I associated “Abby” with my dog.
 - I was also probably imitating my parents, who had frequently addressed the dog by her name as a means of gaining her attention, etc.
 - Being pleased and excited by their child’s development, my parents undoubtedly encouraged this association between words and my observations of the environment.



Weird Things I Said

- Red became “top”
 - Stop signs are red, and I associated the color with the sign.
- Truck was “cuck”
 - The “tr” sound was perhaps difficult for me to make as a toddler.
- And motorcycle was referred to as “cockle”
 - I assume that “cockle” was onomatopoeia for the noise the motorcycles make, and because “motorcycle” is a large word for a toddler, I preferred this name.
- I could also make a very convincing pig noise.
 - Making this sound probably just provided me (and my parents) with amusement.
 - This also provided a stupid party trick for my parents to show visitors.

My Development

My parents claim that I proceeded relatively quickly through early language development, surpassing the vast majority of my peers. I learned new words quickly and could recite phrases given to me by my parents at an early age, leading to more human tricks for them to show their friends. Like all children, I also overapplied grammatical rules and made up words, as discussed in the previous slide. I was fortunate to not suffer any impediments to my acquirement of speech.

Me During Late Childhood



Social Development

Attachment

For most of my early childhood, I was closest to my mother. This is largely because my mother quit working upon my birth while my father continued to do so full time; therefore, I spent much more time with my mother and became closer to her. Even now, I still feel more emotionally tied to my mother than my father although I would consider myself to be very close to birth.

Imprinting

- Imprinting in psychology is an animal's acquirement of certain behaviors at critical periods in development through its parents.
- Although the development of a child is time sensitive to a degree, the passing of behavioral characteristics is not an instinct of a human parent. If my parents did wait for an ideal moment to influence my development, it was probably because they were taught to do so in some class or reading.
- Therefore, I would claim that the process of imprinting is not very relevant to my development, as I am pretty sure that I was never a baby duck at any point in my life.



Object Attachment

- As a toddler, I had an infatuation with matchbox cars. I would always sleep with one in each hand.
- Later, I formed attachments with a set of stuffed animals.
 - I had a “posse” of sorts that I would add (and sometimes remove) members from.
 - I would generally sleep with all of them, with an arm laid across the lineup.
 - All of these were given names and characteristics.



Contact Comfort

- Through his experiments, Harry Harlow demonstrated that skin-to-skin contact is imperative to the development of rhesus monkeys. The infant monkeys would form contact with “cloth mothers”, preferring their presence over that of the “wire mothers” who would provide nourishment. Contact comfort refers to this trait in mammals.
- Although I do not see the appeal behind the matchbox cars, the stuffed animals I would sleep with and the attachments I formed with them provide an acute example of Harlow’s principle.



Favorite Toy

- Throughout childhood, I went through a multitude of phases, so it is difficult to pinpoint a favorite toy.
- Until about three years of age, I had a profound interest in cars, and most of the toys I played with reflected this interest.
 - Although both men and women drive cars (outside of Saudi Arabia, of course), car-related toys are generally typed to male children, and car-related roles and occupations are typically associated with men. For example, a mechanic is usually assumed to be male.
- Later, beginning at around 4 ½ years, I developed a huge interest in Legos and a lesser interest in the knock-off brands (“No, mom, it’s *not* the same thing!”)
 - Especially then, Legos were advertised towards male children, and the common themes of kits were those that were commonly associated with boys’ interests.

Me at Early Childhood

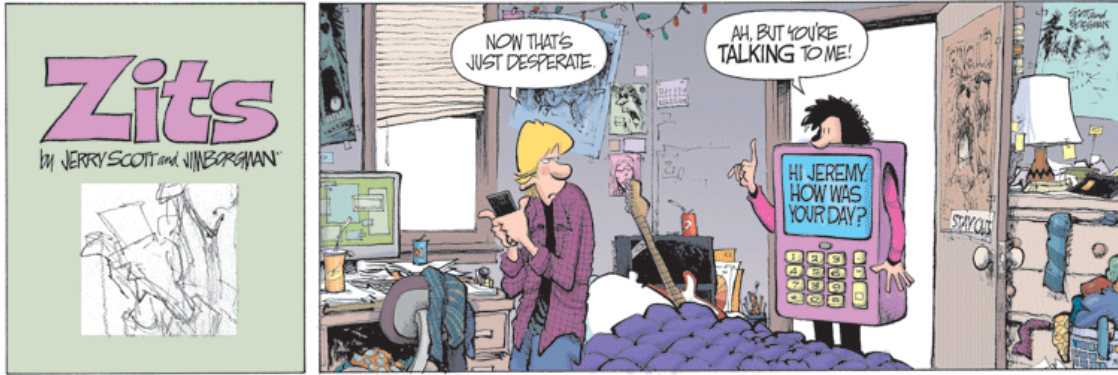


Cognitive Development

Piaget

Although Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development provides decent guidelines for cognitive milestones, I believe that it is too constricting, for everybody develops at different rates due to both nature and nurture, and Piaget's model does not fully accommodate the diversity of factors in life. I am not attempting to boast, but I find that I exceeded many of the standards he set for certain age groups. As my grades and standardized test scores would indicate, I was an exceptionally gifted child, and some topics, such as conservation, came remarkably easy to me when, according to Piaget, I should have been struggling to grasp them. In addition, I began thinking abstractly at a much earlier age than Piaget's Stages would suggest. At around age 9, I began questioning the existence of God (after being raised Protestant) and the derivation of authority when I should have been only able to think in concrete terms. However, I am probably the exception rather than the rule, and I do not doubt the most children accord to Piaget's guideline

Comic



As any parent of an adolescent would report, having meaningful conversation with a teenager is a gauntlet. This is largely because a person entering the Formal Operational Stage of Development perceives that he or she is incomprehensible by everyone else, a tendency referred to as adolescent egocentrism. This comic satirizes this disconcertment between adolescents and their parents.

“My Bad”

It is often difficult for teenagers to acknowledge that they are not invincible and that bad things *can* happen to them. This falsely perceived invincibility is referred to as personal fable, and it is the cause of adolescents' notorious lack of foresight and caution. During my sophomore year, a certain person – who I will refer to as “*That Kid*” – was nominated to homecoming court, as a joke (by somebody else). That year, to cast a ballot in the homecoming elections, all one needed was a student number and an internet connection, and, just prior to this development, a friend of mine had uncovered a roster file, embedded in plain text, containing well over a hundred of student ID's. If *That Kid* was to become the sophomore homecoming king, the resultant hilarity and confusion from the student body would be legendary. In addition, I believed that it would make an appropriate mockery of the archaic popularity contest that is homecoming elections and its associations with cliquishness and social superficiality. Being an adolescent caught up in the moment, I did not think that anything bad would come of me using the roster to give *That Kid* a bit of an advantage in the elections. I failed to consider that once somebody casts a vote, they are unable to change it later, so all the people whom I had helped make a decision realized that they were unable to vote, and eventually, the anomaly was traced back to me. Considering the severity of the offence (over 70 counts of internet fraudulence, a federal crime and international crime), I was fairly fortunate to receive a mere four days of suspension and 30 without network privileges. However, it was enough for me to learn my lesson, and I have not attempted something similarly stupid since.

Me as I am



Moral Development

My Beliefs

For most of my life, I have been a strong advocate of independent thought and the development of individual beliefs and opinions. I associate the emergence of this ideal with my acknowledgement of my atheism. Like most early atheists, I held organized religion in spite for its proliferation of dogma, and although my antipathy has subsided with maturity, I still firmly hold to the opinion that the autocratic nature of proselytic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, is a disservice to free thought. When a child is told from birth to follow a set of established beliefs on threat of eternal damnation, there is little room for independent thought. In my view, sheepish subscription to an archaic theology is a travesty, and the clergy, who perpetuate these constrictions to intellectual growth, are the greatest inhibitor to the progress of societal knowledge. Historically, it has been the religious in the vanguard of the opposition to scientific progress, such as in the cases of Heliocentrism, Evolution, and countless medicinal developments.

I have no aversion to religion nor the religious, but beliefs – metaphysical, ethical, political, etc. – should not be forced onto others. An authority based on dogma and incompatibility with inquiry is not worth following, for without independent thought and questioning, society stagnates.

Kohlberg's Theory

I believe the prior example of my personal belief set to be indicative of Sixth Stage of Kohlberg's model of moral development, which is defined by Universal Ethics Orientation. I assert my advocacy of individualism as a principle to be applied to humanity as a whole, rather than as a way of protecting my own interests or the laws of society. I abide by this belief solely because it is what I believe to be justified; there is no decree, written or implied, that dictates my subscription to it. To the contrary, presenting this opinion has probably already earned me more disdain than acceptance.

	View of Persons	Social Perspective Lvl
6	Sees how human fallibility and frailty are impacted by communication	Mutual respect as a universal principle
5	Recognize that contracts will allow persons to increase welfare of both	Contractual perspective
4	Able to see abstract normative systems	Social systems perspective
3	Recognize good and bad intentions	Social relationships perspective
2	Sees that a) others have goals and preferences, b) either conform to or deviate from norms	Instrumental egoism
1	No VOP: only self & norm are recognized	Blind egoism

Personality Development

Temperament Theory

My parents claim that, as a child, I was fairly easy-going. I was easy to please and would respond stoically to discipline. I did have difficulty sleeping through the night, but that was primarily a result of a lack of scheduling on the part of my parents. Now, I am generally not emotionally reactive although there have been some strong exceptions to this tendency. Rather, I tend to internalize strong emotion, especially in a public setting. However, when experiencing severe anger, I may express it physically and have, on occasion, broken things and put holes in walls, and my parents tell me that, even as a young child, I would throw objects when angry. Despite occasional lapses, I am generally calm and patient.



Adolescence & Adulthood

To say that adolescence is a difficult time would earn the speaker an award for understatement. The dynamics of sexual maturation, shifting social interactions, and rapidly morphing schemas result in a crucible of psychosocial development, and through this tribulation, according to psychologist Erik Erikson, one develops a personal identity (1963). Following the onset of puberty, I underwent an inane amount of ideological shifts: I delved into philosophy, experimented with vegetarianism, and shifted political ideology more times than I care to count, all in search of a true identity. During middle school, I utterly lacked confidence and felt victimized by a culture that failed to understand me; hence, I was scarcely sociable and disallowed myself from enjoying the company of others. As a result, I became anxious towards any kind of social interaction or attention directed towards me.

This internal struggle to find a sense of self culminated to the point of causing a nihilistic crisis that began during my freshman year of high school. I saw little point of putting effort into academics or extracurriculars, and, as is inherent of adolescent egocentrism, I sought no consolation through others. In fact, I became even more misanthropic; I assumed any kindness shown towards me was a deprecating joke or a Tartuffe-esque facade. Fortunately, my condition began to improve at some point during my sophomore year, but the social anxiety and awkwardness remained, and I still had difficulty associating with most people and never formed a solid group of friends.

Cont.

If there was ever a turning point in my life, it was at the beginning of this scholastic year when I decided to stop stressing over what I believed others to think of me. Following this shift in mantra, I began to gain a reasonable level of confidence and began to speak my mind more often. However, I immediately ran into other barriers, especially the cliquishness which dominates who interacts with who in high school. As a social floater, I have never strongly associated with a single group and hold such categorization in disdain. Although not belonging to a group makes socializing much more difficult, it has also allowed me to avoid conformity, allowing me to live life for myself and to find an identity that accommodates my set of beliefs, thus preparing myself for adulthood.

It is a commonality for some people to have magnanimous social lives in high school but fail to make anything of themselves following graduation. This is because at adulthood, relationships gain meaning, and without an identity, there is little success in forming intimacy. Because I have been able to establish an identity, I expect that my interactions with others will significantly improve once the focus shifts from social status to quality of personality. In college, I will be much more likely to find people with whom I can identify, due to the high median intellect of the universities to which I am applying and the heightened willingness of people to reach outside of their social comfort zone.

Conclusion



When considering nature and nurture, it is impossible to select one as the main influence on development, for one cannot exist without the other, and both are paramount in determining aspects of a person. Without a genetic code, there is nothing to nurture, and without an environment, and organism can never form. In development, nature sets conditions and capacities while nurture responds to these operants and determines the extent to which limits are reached. However, some traits depend on one more than the other. For example, height is primarily determined by genetics assuming that a minimum level of nutrition is met, whereas obesity, although some people may have genetic predispositions to fatness, is primarily determined by food and activity. Intelligence, in the traditional sense, is an example of a trait that receives huge influences from both nature and nurture. This can be observed between my siblings and me. We differ in interests and levels of ambition. However, we all share similar appearances, mannerisms, and personalities to a degree. In short, the issue of nature vs. nurture is far too complicated to choose a single side.