

How genetics and the environment influence one's self-identity

[Science](#), [Genetics](#)



As I was creating my genogram, I was analyzing and reflecting on my lifestyle, and what contributed to the way I do things and see myself. I was considering the effect of genetics, referred to as nature, and environment, referred to as nurture, on my self-identity. At first, I was not sure whether genetics or environment shaped my perspectives and actions, or whether my identity is a combination of nature and nurture. By nurture, we focus on the effects of our environment, and how our physical and social experiences influence who we are and our experiences. By nature, we talk about the hereditary information we receive from our parents, and its influence on who we are. Many types of research have argued that intense negative experiences in the first few years of life cannot be fully overcome later in life, even when many positive experiences were presented, thus showing the importance of long-lasting positive experiences during our early years.

As a teenager, I would always identify myself as a good student, very good child, I act and look like my father, and as such, I always considered myself a part of someone else. I never heard myself saying, I am smart or I am independent. I believe that both genetics and the environment influence one's self-identity.

Self-identity refers to the global understanding a person has of themselves. Self-Identity is composed of relatively permanent self-assessments, such as personality traits, physical attributes and social and professional skills. I believe one's self-assessment function as a motivator for future behavior and shapes individual's ideas of what they want to be, and also what they are afraid of becoming. Self-assessment gives hopes and fear and helps to us to

set goals, in my opinion. As a child my interaction with adults was in a more authoritative and obedient manner, so growing up in such environment resulted in me complying with my parents and other authority figures more, even when I was reluctant to do so, and even when I wanted to question their authority. Obedience was demanded in my society, and this influenced how I behaved socially; I was more sensitive and compliant to authority figures. The cultural influence of my society was more apparent to me later in my life, as I matured into adulthood. I was very curious about the world and I love interacting with people, however, I was not allowed to explore my curiosity and hence, I would sit quietly in social gatherings, and be afraid to ask questions. As a result of my lack of social skills, I suffered tremendously in my classroom. I rarely passed my quizzes, and was considered dumb in my class, at home, and in my community.

Overall, my social, cognitive and language skills were below average. My culture believed that girls should sit at home, and become homemakers. They must appear polite and quiet, otherwise, they will be laughed at and be single out from society with the consequence of being labeled “ bad marriage material”. I was recently told that I am predisposed to diabetes. I was pretty disturbed by this diagnosis, as I lived a relatively healthy lifestyle my entire life. I always struggled to understand why, but as I was doing this genogram, I had conversations with many family members and discovered that many of my family members are diabetic. Similarly, I found out that many of my family members have an alcohol drinking issue, so my children

and I may be predisposed to alcoholism and diabetes, should we choose to indulge mindlessly.

Currently, I do not practice what I was forced to do growing up. I have evaluated myself and who I am in a more realistic manner and realized that my previous enforced practices are not self-fulfilling, and do not contribute to any positive development; socially, emotionally or cognitively. I grew up believing that socialization with others influences you negatively, and encourages bad behavior. I now realize that socialization is pivotal to our social and emotional development and is required for us to feel content and happy with our selves. I also realized that questioning authority and asking questions enhances your confidence and self-esteem and lead to increased creativity and intellect. I have abandoned all of my previous practices, and have looked upon the Canadian culture as a positive factor in the development of my self-identity.

My environment growing up did not provide any opportunity for positive growth and development, in my opinion. I believe my personality has changed over time. I was more of an introvert growing up. I was very quiet and reserved. Growing up in Guyana, children were not allowed to voice their opinions or share their thoughts with adults, and as such, I may have been forced into an introvert personality type. However, after my father died, I immigrated to Canada. I was a young adult at that time, and I noticed my personality started to change. I noticed more about myself and what makes me content emotionally, and was doing more of what I wanted to do. I am now demonstrating traits, such as kindness, thoughtfulness, organization

and most importantly ambition, suggesting that I am more conscientiousness, and intelligent. I believe that nurture and not nature caused this change in my personality. Although, a very well-known study, The Minnesota Study of Twins that were reared apart, demonstrated that the personalities of identical twins were very similar whether they were raised in the same household or raised apart, suggesting personality are is influenced by genetics. In my situation, I may have been born with a conscientious personality, but perhaps because it was not socially acceptable in my culture I could not express it. As a child, I would stay out of trouble and this is a trait demonstrated by people with conscientious personality, suggesting that I may have always been conscientious, but just repressed it based on environment. Thus providing a supportive environment may allow an individual to express their innate traits.

Overall, my beliefs and values have changed. Beliefs are assumptions we hold to be true based on past experiences, resulting from cultural and environmental situations. I am certain that my beliefs have changed after I immigrated to Canada. Just to give a few examples, I no longer believe that diseases are as a result of bad luck or a curse from God. I have improved my knowledge of why people become sick, and no longer live in fear, but live an informed life, both medically and socially. Also, I no longer believe that divorce is a sin that is punishable by God. I understand that divorces arise when two married people can no longer make their relationships work. Changes in my beliefs arise from me being conscientious and curious and me having the freedom to explore and understand my options. Values are not

based on information from the past and they are not dependent on past experiences.

As my life conditions change, and as I matured psychologically, my values changed. As an adult with a family, I focus on what is important to us and what we need to feel a sense of fulfillment and well-being. Before coming to Canada, I did not know about equality and privacy. These are words I had never heard before, yet in Canada equality is one of their most cherished values. Canadians believe that all human beings were created equally and are equals regardless of their intelligence, physical condition or economic status. They believe that all people have an equal opportunity to succeed in life. Equality is an important social goal in Canada. There is no class or social ranking system in Canada, a system that gave people in my Guyanese society a sense of security and authority. Here in Canada, each individual is seen as unique and special, and individualist in their thoughts and actions, and entitled to their privacy as an individual. The word “privacy” does not even exist in my country. If it did, it is likely to have a strongly negative connotation, suggesting loneliness or isolation from people. Thus my change in value is due to my exposure to the Canadian culture and my ability to recognize who I am. Factors that influence how attitudes and bias are formed are complicated, in my opinion. Many factors such as, structural factors, how your friends look relative to you, and who you interact with regularly could shape biases and beliefs. Biases could be due to demographic in your community, and also due to historical segregation and “institutional racism”. Biases are not formed overnight as neighborhoods, schools, and cities are

not formed overnight. Also, historical government policies left many communities segregated, thus creating an opportunity for us to form bias and attitudes. I strongly believe bias is reinforced in adulthood through high racial residential segregation and segregated social space and setting. I believe we are not helpless to combat bias, however we must recognize where it exist in our lives, and seeking exposure to people beyond our regular circle. Bias is maintained by lack of contact with others beyond your regular group. Bias is a cycle that's hard to break without conscious interaction with people beyond your circle. Bias against people of a different race, religion or sexuality influence their judgment and cheats people out of a fair and entitled life.

In conclusion, this reflection of me and how my culture influenced the development of my self-identity, and the way I developed socially, emotionally and cognitively has been very liberating. To actually reflect on how culture and genetics influenced my development provided information both medically and socially that I had not previously thought about, and has enhanced my knowledge of who I am today and factors that influenced me developmentally. This reflective essay has also shed light on how I choose to raise my children, and has also made me realize why I over compensated in certain areas of child rearing.