

Social influences on behavior

Psychology, Behaviorism



Albert Fish was a 20th century serial killer, child rapist, sadomasochist, and cannibal. This paper is a brief description focused on the forces that impacted his life from the viewpoint of developmental psychology. The author made an effort to distinguish between the influences of hereditary and environment on psychological development. He also explains what family issues and social support systems may have influenced Albert Fish's developmental growth and adjustment.

Two different theories of personality selected by the author was applied to Fish, which includes a discussion of how each theory differs in terms of how it explains Fish's unique patterns and traits. The author also makes a determination regarding which theory he believes best explains Fish's behaviors and achievements. Forces That Impact Life: Developmental Psychology Developmental psychology is defined as “ The branch of psychology concerned with the study of progressive behavioral changes in an individual from birth until death” (Farlex, 2011).

Albert Fish's rough childhood contributed to the person he became, along with other factors that occurred throughout adulthood. He was born to poverty on May 19, 1870. His father passed away on October 15, 1875. His mother could not take care of Fish, therefore, she placed him in a religious orphanage called Saint John's Orphanage. Here he learned to lie, cheat, beg, and steal. He also experienced and seen wrong-doings no boy, or person, should. Albert Fish was whipped bare-bottomed at the orphanage and was forced to witness other boys being whipped.

He said this abuse was the beginning of his ruined mind. During his interview, before his execution, he said he felt his first sex feeling while watching the other boys be whipped, which eventually developed while he was receiving the abuse. When Fish left the orphanage, he felt the need to satisfy these sexual urges with sexual experimentation and prostitution, which included men. His needs and urges became very sadomasochistic. He enjoyed what hurt. He inflicted pain on not only himself, but also on others.

He would not stop until he reached his climax, and progress on with the torcher for days. In his late 20s, Albert Fish married. His wife had the same types of sexual interest as he. While he was married, he continued to lead a double life by fulfilling his sadomasochistic fantasies with boys. He made this way of life easily obtainable by working as a traveling housepainter and being away more than he was home. Fish traveled all over the United States. “ I had children in every state,” Albert Fish stated during his interview (Borowski, 2006).

After 19 years of marriage, Albert Fish’s wife left him for another man. She had sent their six children off to the movies, and they came home to an empty house. He came home to find his six children alone and discover she had taken everything. Fish believed this was his breaking point. His children testified, during his trial, although he never hit them or raised his voice to them, they did witness his self-torcher. They testified to finding blood covered boards with nails sticking out of one end and to seeing him drive needles into himself.

An x-ray was taken of his pelvic region that showed 29 needles lodged within. In 1928, approximately five years after his wife abandoned him and their children, Albert Fish decided to act upon a growing urge. He responded to a newspaper advertisement of a young boy looking for employment. After he responded by telegram, he arrived at the young man's house, bearing lunch. He quickly lost interest in the young man once Fish seen his younger sister, Grace Budd. He convinced her parents to let him take her to his niece's birthday party, which was fictional. She was to never be seen again.

Albert took Grace to an old abandoned house where he tricked her into coming into the house where he was naked, waiting for her. He strangled her, cut her up into little pieces, and devoured her. Fish said that he got the idea of cannibalism from his uncle in 1894, which was never verified. His uncle, Captain John Daus, sailed to China during the time of a famine. Children were sold to be butchered. They were brought out in parts to be cut to one's choosing and sold as veal. The captain told his nephew human meat did taste of veal, and the behind was the sweetest part.

The captain stole two children to bring home with him. He beat their behinds for days, while they were still alive, to make it nice and tender. Albert Fish decided he had to try it. Not only did the environment in which he grew up shape Albert Fish, it is believed that his genetic influences may have had a huge impact as well. " His family had a history of mental illness: his uncle suffered from religious mania, a brother was confined in the state mental hospital, another brother had died of hydrocephalus and his sister had a " mental affliction".

Three other close relatives suffered from severe mental illnesses and his mother was believed to suffer frequent aural and/or visual hallucinations” (Farlex, 2011). Albert Fish seems to fall in the postconventional moral development area of psychological development. Postconventional morality is how “ people reason using abstract, self-defined moral principles that may not match conventional moral beliefs” (Kowalski & Western, 2009). Fish was a very religious man. He claimed that his reasoning for his crimes were of religious purposes. He took the word of the Bible and twisted it to make his doings the work of God.

Several times he said he was visited by Jesus Christ. Jesus would give him messages telling him what to do. Fish identified religion with suffering. In all his doings, he thought he was doing right because no angels came and stopped him as they did in the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Isaac. The word ‘ stripes’ in the Bible he referred to the lashes left by being whipped. He performed castrations and sacrificed virgins. Fish put cannibalism on the same level as communion. Eat the flesh and drink the blood, and they will become one with him, and he with them.

This made Albert Fish feel God-like and powerful. He said he inserted the needles into his pelvic region to purge himself of sin by torcher. Theories of Personality The two different theories of personality selected are the drive model of Freud’s theory of psychodynamics and the cognitive-social theory. “ Freud reasoned that if a symptom is not of physiological origin and the patient is consciously trying to stop it but cannot, then opposing the conscious will must be an unconscious counter-will of equal or greater

magnitude” (Kowalski & Western, 2009), which is the basis for his theories. The drive model was proposed by two basics: sex and aggression. Albert Fish used both together to shape his life. To him they were one and the same. He enjoyed and got off the torcher of himself and others. “ Cognitive-social theories share the behaviorist belief that learning (rather than instinct, conflict, or defense) is the basis of personality and that personality dispositions tend to be relatively specific and shaped by their consequences.

However, they also focus on beliefs, expectations, and information processing” (Kowalski & Western, 2009). This theory shows how environmental demands, and the way one processes the information about themselves and the world can have an effect on one’s interaction of a situation, such as school or in an orphanage, and one’s learned tendencies to behave in a certain way in a certain circumstance, which in turn can reflect one’s knowledge and beliefs. Albert Fish’s environment at the Catholic orphanage demanded him to watch other boys get whipped.

He was also whipped himself. He began to relate this abuse to sexual gratification by torching himself and others. He also connected suffering to religious aspects, such as being purged of sin. In the end believed the religion was his reason for his crimes. The author believes the cognitive-theory best explains Albert Fish’s behaviors and achievements because of his strong belief that what he was doing was an act of God. If Fish was never subjected to the environment at the orphanage, he may not have developed the sexual urge from torcher.

The author also believes many other factors in Fish's life contributed to his deranged achievement, such as the family history of mental illness and the psychotic break, which occurred when his wife abandoned him and his children. Albert Fish's environment and religious upbringing was horrid yet detrimental to his moral psychological development. It is obvious that family issues and support systems along with hereditary influences has greatly impacted his life and influenced his behaviors and achievements. Albert Fish was found guilty of murder in the first degree and sentenced to death by electric chair. He was 65.

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