

Motivation and personality human development essay sample

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Life Span Development and Personality

Harriet Tubman was a remarkable woman that led the black slaves to freedom during the early and middle part of 1880s through the Underground Railroad. She was born Araminta Harriet Ross, census records cannot determine the correct month of her birth. However, reports indicate that her birth is between February to March of 1822. Tubman was born in an African-American slave family. She is a humanitarian, an abolitionist and a Union spy during the time of the Civil War. Tubman made 13 trips to the South in a mission to rescue more than 70 slaves using networks of anti-slavery groups including safe houses also known as the underground railroad. Later in her missions, Tubman came across John Brown in her journeys and helped him recruit men to raid the Harper's Ferry (Humez, 2003, p. 3-8).

Harriet Tubman's life is determined by forces that influenced her development from a mere slave into a remarkable leader that she was. Certain Traits and characteristics are involved in psychological development. She was a symbol of hope for many slaves, despite the lack of education and poor living condition (a typical slave living condition) and physical abnormality, Tubman were still able to establish a personality that made a significant impact to many people's lives. Tubman had a childhood injury that led to her epileptic seizure episodes. However, she courageously fought to end slavery armed with a single-mindedness nature of purpose towards her cause. Her characteristics include strong spiritual and focused mind-set and non-pretentious. Harriet Tubman seldom talks about her efforts, but her action speaks the bigger picture. Her leadership strategy is a mix of

practicality and spirituality. However, Tubman strongly believes in divine guidance even though others see her as a methodical and practical leader when it comes to strategic approach to tasks (Northouse, 2012, p. 19-20).

Several factors have influenced Harriet Tubman's psychological development that helped shaped her characteristics that determines her motivations in life. The affecting factors are heredity and environmental influences. The aspects of physical appearance and human characteristics are largely determined by genetics. However, research also suggests that traits and personality are more subjective to environmental influences rather than heredity. This includes how people feel, thinks or act. In Harriet Tubman's case, her personality and psychological development is much determined by the environmental factors instead of heredity, by definition traits and characteristics can be passed on to generations to generations including, mental, emotional and physical characteristics through heredity. The impact of heredity in human development is interacted by environmental influences. However, physical traits such as eye color, height and skin color are the characteristics that are more associated to heredity, but the mental, emotional and personality is a result of the environmental interaction (Alexandra City Public school, 2006, p. 43). Tubman's inherited characteristics are more on physical features that came from her parents that are both of an African descents. In heredity, physical abnormalities can also be passed on to the next generation, but Tubman's epileptic condition is not a result of heredity, but caused by an early injury. Therefore, the physical abnormality is another result of an environmental influence.

When it comes to environmental influence on Harriet Tubman's psychological development, Lawrence Kohlberg studied the moral development in children and revealed that not all individuals reach certain stages of moral development (Alexandra City Public school, 2006, p. 43). Kohlberg believes that Tubman went through six stages of moral development as a child. First is the totally egocentric development in the early pre-moral stage during infancy. The second stage is the pre-moral stage in toddlers, which demonstrates the fear of punishment of hedonism. As a child born in a slave family, Harriet Tubman is very much exposed to the fear of punishment considering the social status of her family as a slave having no apparent social rights in the society. The third stage is called the early conventional morality, which upholds thought of pleasing others by following the rules. Rules that could be imposed by teachers, parents and in Tubman's case, their masters. Tubman is under the control of both of her parents and ultimately their master. Their slave status gives them no choice, but to follow every rule imposed to them as slaves.

The fourth stage that Tubman have undergone through called the conventional morality, which upholds the general rules of morality and proper behaviors. In this stage individuals possess awareness of the universal rules of morality and able to compare those rules with that of the society. Harriet Tubman knows very well and understands the rules that are laid upon the slaves during her time. The next stage in Tubman's moral development is the post-conventional morality. This is when individuals begin to develop understanding of the abstract moral philosophy and

generally distinguish the difference between right and wrong. In this stage, Tubman already knows the differences between moral codes and laws of the society. In most cases, the normal individual only reach the fifth stage it is very seldom that a person's reach the final stage, which is the individual conscience. Harriet Tubman is among the few individuals in history that is known to reach the sixth stage. This involves making choices directed to the betterment of the society. Most people function on a daily basis just by reaching the fifth stage. However, famous historical figures like Harriet Tubman came to the sixth stage of moral development during the course of her life. This explains the reason for her specific trait of being a leader and an abolitionist. She has the higher thought that rooted on the objective of changing the society and she used to be motivated in becoming the leader that she was.

Apart from heredity and environmental factors affecting the psychological growth of Harriet Tubman, social and support group system also contributed to her developmental growth. The main and obvious issue that influenced Tubman to take action is the issue of slavery in the country during her time. Before leading the underground railroad, she and her family was a field hand slave in Maryland. At that time, slaves were treated harshly along with several forms of abuse such as labor abuse, wage and brutal physical abuse. The 19th century United States has no anti-slavery laws that would protect the slaves from such abuses. However, several underground movements are putting up escape plans to move up to the north. The American society during that period widely accepts slavery, slaves were deprived of the social

rights to quality living condition, education, access to government services and support.

It was mentioned earlier in Tubman's moral development that she reached the sixth stage where conscience is providing her with higher understanding and initiative to change the society. Therefore, at the height of slavery Tubman realized on the grounds of morality that slaves should not be treated as such. And that they deserve to be treated as equal. Because of the lack of support from the society and government, she took the effort to escape from slavery leaving her family and husband behind to pursue her mission. Despite having a huge bounty in for her capture, she never hesitates to return several times to the South to free other slaves including her family. The understanding of the universal moral code and realization of the truth about the slave's living condition gave Tubman the courage to take actions to change the course of society. Her constant refrain " Mah people mus' go free" demonstrate a strong determination that is uncommon in most black militants during her time (Foner and Garraty, 1991).

There were no definite and stronger support system that influenced Tubman other than the support she is getting from other abolitionists movements. Because of the lack of social support, she opted to craft her own underground railroad. Several personal experiences have contributed to Tubman's adjustments and growth. Her childhood was full of sufferings as she was being rented to other white families to perform domestic duties. However, she continuously displeases her employees until she was eventually sent home. One particular violent incident had changed Tubman's

perspectives and ideology. Her brothers and sisters were either sold or rented to plantations and at an early age of five she was forced to do hard work as a slave. At one time she was caught in the middle of an altercation between an escaping slave and the overseer. The overseer threw a two pound lead weight to the escaping man, but it hit Tubman instead in the head. The injury caused her a permanent physical damage, which triggered an epileptic seizure. She suffered severe head injury that also caused narcoleptic episodes, meaning she would unintentionally fall asleep several times a day.

During her early efforts to free other slaves, she received assistance from the Vigilance Committee's office. Other than that she also came in contact with abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips, Thomas Wentworth, Thomas Garrett, Frank Sanborn, John Brown and William Wells Brown (Wainwright, 1995). The amount of support she received from the key individuals made her develop confidence and courage to pursue her mission and together with her life experiences as a slave, Tubman created her own way of fighting through the slave system and helping her people to obtain freedom. Looking at all the accomplishments that Tubman achieved in her missions, it is evident that her psychological growth and adjustment came from two theories of personality namely behavioral theory and humanist theory.

In behavioral theory, personality can be traced from the interaction between the environment and the individuals. This means that personality is determined by the factors present within the individual's environment and personal growth is largely affected by interaction between the individual and

the environment she is in. In Harriet Tubman's personality development, environmental factors are one of the main contributors. Considering the type of environment and personal experiences she had from childhood up to the time of the underground railroad, it generally had an impact to her on the psychological point of development. The other theory of personality applied to Tubman is the humanist theory. This theory focuses on the significance of free will and individual experiences. The concept of self-actualization plays an important role in discovering innate personal growth that motivates behavior. It is in line with the individual's personal experiences and will to survive. Humanist and behavioral theory differs in explaining the trait patterns of an individual. Like for example. In Humanist theory, the traits are governed by the individual's life experiences and own free will, while the behavioral theory is more focused on environmental influences.

Between the two theories, humanist theoretical approach best explains Harriet Tubman's behaviors and achievements. The fact that she defied the slavery system by freeing herself, despite the law prohibiting slaves from escaping their employers along with the other slaves. Therefore, it can be safe to conclude that Tubman demonstrated a sense of free will in terms of following her own ideologies instead of following the norms of the society. Tubman was very successful in her missions because she strongly believes that people should be free and that everyone has the right to live according to their own free will. Like the context of humanist theory, people with such personality believes that we all have free will and it should not be contained by bondage or slavery. This also means that people has the will to behave in

relation to any given situation. Humanists does not look into a person's outside behavior, but to the person's own feelings and sense of onesself. That personality is a collection of spiritual concerns, values and decisions that the person has inside (Scienceofpsychology, 2004, p. 26).

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