Development of the christian personality: theories

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Christian Personality Development: From the Womb to the Tomb

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Abstract

Research done using various peer-reviewed journal articles, a theory of personality based on Christianity is proposed. Research has shown that all development, including personality, is influenced even prior to conception based on how the future mother takes care of herself prior to implantation. It is necessary for expectant mothers to keep their stress, anxiety and depression at a minimum not just for their own health but the future mental health of their unborn child. It is the parent(s) duty to nurture all facets of the child all the way through adolescence, as prescribed by the Bible. Physical health is equally as important to personality development as mental healthcare. People have times in life when they have an apparent shift in their personality and this is all a part of development. Many have speculated

about why one person grew up to one way while another became another. Empirical studies of moral personality development will be continuous to show how using an integrative structure for examining personality can readily unite Christianity and psychology.

Keywords: development, infant, mother, Bible, parents

Christian Personality Development: From the Womb to the Tomb

Personality develops over an entire lifespan and when done according to God's plan life is much more enjoyable. Canonical correlation analysis showed that " more religious individuals are healthier in general, which might be supported at least circumstantially by the results reported here. It makes good sense that if people have both a spiritual and a natural essence that these dimensions would be interactive" (Simpson, Newman & Fuqua, 2007). Integrating psychology with biblical studies, much like done at Liberty University, will provide guidance of God's people according to His Word in developing healthy personalities.

Foundations of Personality

According to Feist, Feist, and Roberts (2013), there are differing definitions of personality and each is dependent upon the theorist's part of the world, religious experiences, and many from their time as psychotherapists (pp. 3-4). In general, personality can be defined as " a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person's behavior (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008)" (Feist, Feist & Roberts, 2013, p. 4). In a few ways we are all the same. We all have the same personal inclinations and share a basic nature of being. We all have

physical bodies and personalities and we all have thoughts and feelings. Personality is made up of various traits and each arrangement is unalike for every individual. It comes from within the person and usually remains unchanged throughout life.

Nature versus Nurture

Nature and nurture are both important but not interchangeable. Biology plays a huge role in personality development. Nature is the first influence on personality development as it begins in a person's DNA. Nurture takes place after birth and is impacted by a person's environment.

Hans J. Eysenck noted three findings as evidence that personality is 75% hereditary and 25% a result of environmental influences (Feist, Feist & Roberts, 2013, p. 411). Eysenck noted that research done by Robert R. McCrae and Juri Allik regarding " the five-factor model of personality across cultures" done in 2002 showed nearly identical personality traits among persons in difference parts of the world such as Uganda, Russia, and Japan (Feist, Feist & Roberts, 2013, p. 411).

Another piece of evidence from Eysenck's own 1990 study that showed a " higher concordance between identical twins than between same-gender fraternal twins reared together" which suggests that heredity plays a dominant role in determining personality differences (Feist, Feist & Roberts, 2013, p. 411). Personality develops from birth on. There are certain aspects of human behavior that come from human nature. Humans have natural instincts to find nutritional sustenance, seek out love and affection, and ask for help with the things they cannot do for themselves.

From birth until the beginning of school age, which varies from child to child but is usually around age four or five, caretakers may notice certain behavioral traits which may mimic a personality type but essentially no permanent type has yet been established. Starting around age five until around age eleven people begin to develop the dominant personality traits begin to form and it becomes apparent as to how the child learns, such as if they are auditory or visual learners and if they work well in groups on solitary. From around age twelve or thirteen, when they are entering adolescence, traits that support the dominant feature begin to appear: how they make decisions, what they value in life, and their perception of things.

Starting around age twenty, adults start to learn how their personality traits fit in with the rest of the world. This becomes very apparent when peers become coworkers rather than fellow students. For some people, sometime between the ages of 35 and 50, people may hit what is called a " mid-life crisis" because they begin to see facets of their life that they did not develop and feel a strong desire to satisfy these. After around age 50, the personality is more disciplined that those of younger stages and this is usually due to life experiences.

The Unconscious. Carl Jung stated " There are certain events of which we have not consciously taken note; they have remained, so to speak, below the threshold of conscious. They have happened, but they have been absorbed subliminally" (Mlodinow, 2012, p. 5). Influences that we are not consciously cognizant of influence our actions. Dream content has been shown to be a reflection of people's view on religion. Disagreeing with the normal thought

that Christianity and science " inevitably conflict with each other, dreaming offers an area of potential religion–science convergence" (Bulkeley, 2009).

View of Self. " Different aspects of the self emerge in different periods of the lifespan" (Klimstra, 2012). However, once new aspects of the self emerge, existing aspects do not finish growing. Therefore, it is important to consider several aspects of the self. Neuroscientists have performed studies using human brain mapping and have concluded that " People who endorse individualistic cultural values showed greater MPFC [medial prefrontal cortex] activation to general self-descriptions, whereas people who endorse collectivistic cultural values showed greater MPFC activation to contextual self-descriptions" (Chiao, Harada, Komeda, Li, Mano, Saito, Parrish, Sadato, & Iidaka 2009).

Personality types . The personality can be assessed using the Myers-Brigs Personality Type Indicator (based on the theories of Carl Jung). According to this instrument, there sixteen personality types made up of four criteria. (E)xtraversion versus (I)ntraverson give a clue of if the person is focused on the outside world or only their inner circles. How they process information by either by way of the five senses (S)ensing or if they look for patterns ntuition. People make decisions by either (T)hinking or by (F)eeling. Finally, the test also measures how people prefer to live in the outside world, structured which is called (J)udging or more flexible, (P)erceiving. An example of personality type would be INFJ who is described as

Seek meaning and connection in ideas, relationships, and material possessions. Want to understand what motivates people and are insightful

about others. Conscientious and committed to their firm values. Develop a clear vision about how best to serve the common good. Organized and decisive in implementing their vision (Briggs-Myers, 2013).

Progression of Personality

Although more research is needed, there has been a link found between depressive as well as anxiety disorders in the mother prior to conception and the onset of depressive disorders and more severe anxiety disorders (Martini, et al., 2013). Progression is expected to flow in a basic manner, beginning in infancy, and personality development progresses based on modeling of caregiver's examples. By the time the person reaches school age, people begin to progress to the next stage of internalizing all they absorbed in early childhood.

Progression to maturity is exhibited by awareness of not only the self but of others and how the two work together. Life has progresses to a deeper meaning. Once a person reaches the last stage of personality progression, development slows down and people become more passive. Dementia is something people fear because it represents personality changes, even at a mild stage, and this change is intimidating, especially to the elderly experiencing it.

Motivation

People are striving to accomplish self efficacy as a result of their behavior. They decide what they should strive for based upon what will allow for them to satisfy their basic needs for love and acceptance and this can often be caused by how they are taught to internalize as well as environmental

factors such as a desire to move out of an impoverished neighborhood. A person is motivated by desiring a sense of security and a lack of pain. " Motivation at work is not always conditioned by external environment. However, it is more governed by internal world–one's own orientation" (Sengupta, 2011).

Classroom activity has been shown to have an impact on motivation as well. Students are motivated either by making the best grades possible or doing enough just to not fail. Self-motivation is probably the strongest form of motivation and this is seen in school aged children. People are motivated by control and whether they realize it or not by challenges. Curiosity is a huge motivator as well.

Maturation. Maturity happens primarily in adolescence when a child develops a sense of self separate from their parental unit. There are differences between genders as to when this happens and overall girls mature earlier than boys (Klimstra, Hale, III, Raajimakers, Branje & Meeus, 2009). Brain mapping had proven useful in this as well. " Early prefrontal cortex damage has been associated with developmental deficits in social adaptation, moral behavior, and empathy that alter the maturation of social cognition and social emotions" (Eslinger, Robinson-Long, Realmuto, Moll, deOlivera-Souza, Tovar-Moll, Wang, & Yang, 2009).

Situations that were ambiguously moral activated considerably more prefrontal lobe activity than did routine moral situations, suggesting the biological nature of personality maturation. The frontal polar stimulation does not change with age and the findings further endorse a substantial role

for the medial prefrontal cortex in maturation of the moral decision making process. Personality develops greater maturity as the person ages but self-distinction decreases with age.

Biblical Integration

Many psychological viewpoints say that man cannot change his personality makeup because it is inbred through evolution. Christians know that personality can change because when they become saved they become a new being. The Holy Spirit is able to defy science and creates a Christian personality that exudes holiness, peace, and happiness. Christians have an advantage in personality development because when they see something not progressing to their liking, they can go to the scriptures to learn to deal with their sinfulness.

While the Biblical canon does not go precisely into how each family unit is handled, it does give basic rules that empower one to discover what God expects of his followers. One such rule is prescribed in Luke 2: 51, " And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart" (King James Version). The guideline in this section shows that folks are given the power to coordinate, guide, and instruct and their kids by God. If Jesus allowed himself to be guided and heeded the words of his earthly mother and father, then children today need to allow theirs to do the same because this is to be as He was, and that is what people should strive for.

There is the issue of original sin where the sin of Adam and Even is passed on to even the current generation as their offspring. Before the person

accepts Jesus Christ as their savior, it is much easier to fall into this sinful nature. Once salvation is received, there is no excuse because the person was to have changed. This affects personality because it creates the trait of hypocrisy. While people are still flesh and blood and cannot be perfect, the Bible gives a clear example of a model for personality development: Jesus Christ.

It is crucial that parents involve their children in activities that glorify God. Youth have the right to need sensible direction from their parent(s) and that unit is called upon to nurture their kids. That is, to have their backs, to raise them correctly, in the " chastening and admonition of the Lord" as stated in Ephesians 6: 4 (American Standard Version). That is to mean that parents are be imitators of God in the reprimanding or guidance given to children. It is rebuking or disciplining based upon affection and care that forms the personality once the child is out of the womb. Before then, a parent must keep the word close to them to bless the family unit even before it is conceptualized.

Conclusion

Personality development starts with the mother. Her mental state before and during her pregnancy and create certain personality traits within her child. Once the child is born, it is the parents God given right and duty to nurture that child in a way that is fitting to God's path. The home situation, the parental interaction as well as the relationship the child has with the family's church plays a role in the nurture portion of personality while the traits one picks up during personality development and self-actualization becomes their nature. When a child reaches school age they begin to separate

themselves with their parents in that they develop their own identity. It is important that they still have a strong relationship with God because He is the only one that can keep an eye on them all day, every day.

When a person reaches the age to move out of their family home and embark on life's adventures, they are still developing. They are learning just how strong their legs are for them to stand on. It is important for parents not to pick them up every time the fall so that they learn to rely on Jesus. Even until death, the human personality is still evolving. People become more set in their ways as they get older and often grow to dislike the youth and the world around them. The only time the personality stops growing is when the person becomes a nonbeing, be it through disability, coma, or death. Only with such a sturdy footing can buoy the load of the weight of personality development. Without the Bible as a foundation, the edifice would simply breakdown. Through it all, it is imperative there is a strong foundation based on God's principles.

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