

# Genie and nature vs. nurture

Psychology



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## Genie and Nature Vs. Nurture

There have only been a handful of “feral children” stories in the 20th and 21st centuries. Perhaps one of the most famous cases involved a young girl by the name of Genie. According to the article entitled “Wild Child Speechless After Tortured Life,” Genie was a severely abused 14 year old girl discovered by social workers and taken to a hospital where she was observed and treated for many years (James, 2008). Writer Susan Donaldson James states that at the time of her discovery “Genie was the size of an 8-year-old with the language and motor skills of a baby, speaking only a few words...” (James, 2008). Genie’s case has been of particular importance to the medical community, especially in how it impacts the nature vs. nurture debate.

The nature vs. nurture debate has been dividing the scientific community for many decades. According to an article entitled “Nature VS. Nurture,” this argument is boiled down to the question of which element has more of an impact on a human’s overall growth and development. The author of the article, Shady Guirguis, states “nature, referring to heredity, and the nurture, referring to the environment, are two very reasonable explanations to why we are the people we are today” (Guirguis, 2004). In Genie’s case, doctors were trying to figure out if Genie was so underdeveloped because of the abuse she suffered or if it she was always going to be underdeveloped due to birth defects. Over the ensuing years, Genie has experienced progress and regression. According to James, Genie was able to acquire some language during her time in the hospital, but once the funding dried up, Genie experience a lot of bouncing around in foster homes and hospitals, <https://assignbuster.com/genie-and-nature-vs-nurture/>

and she has largely been “ abandoned”(James, 2008).

Ultimately, Genie’s story was a very important case study because it afforded doctors the chance to study the nature vs. nurture debate up close. Even with the extensive care that Genie received for several years after her discovery, she still only acquired minimal language abilities and skills(James, 2008). I think this case proved that there is a specific window of time where a child can be taught language and other important skills and Genie missed that window due to the severe abuse that she suffered. Although Genie may have had some mental issues from birth, they were heavily exacerbated from her abusive environment. Genie’s case suggests that nurture plays a much larger part in development that doctor’s initially may have thought. If she had been removed from her environment within her first few years of life, I think that she might have been able to recover better than she ultimately did. While nature played a definite role in her initial limitations, there is no doubt that the isolation and abuse was the ultimate culprit for her overall developmental issues.

In the end, Genie’s case represents a tragic reality which has served the medical community in aiding the continuing debate over nature vs. nurture. Some people point to Genie’s overall stagnation in skill acquisition as proof of the prevalence of nature in development, but this is not accurate in Genie’s case. According to Guirguis, nature had more to do with genetics and biological aspects, while nurture is more to do with behavior which is impacted by outside stimuli(Guirguis, 2004). In looking at Genie’s overall case, it is clear that she lacked the outside stimuli that she needed to become a healthy member of society and the starvation of that stimulus simply took too much of a toll on her overall well-being.

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## References

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