

# Genie wiley essay sample



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BUSTER**

Genie was discovered on 4th November 1970 in Los Angeles. \* The thirteen year old girl had been confined to a small room and spent most of her life often tied to a potty chair. \* The girl was given the name Genie to protect her identity and privacy. “ The case name is Genie. This is not the person’s real name, but when we think about what a genie is, a genie is a creature that comes out of a bottle or whatever, but emerges into human society past childhood. We assume that it really isn’t a creature that had a human childhood,” explained Susan Curtiss in a documentary called *Secrets of the Wild Child* (1997). \* Both parents were charged with abuse, but Genie’s father committed suicide the day before he was due to appear in court, leaving behind a note stating that “ the world will never understand.” \* Before she was discovered, she spent most of her days tied naked to her potty chair only able to move her hands and feet. When she made noise, her father would beat her. Her father, mother, and brother rarely spoke to her. The rare times her father did interact with her, it was to bark or growl. \* Both the general public and also the scientific community were interested in her case.

Psycholinguist and author Harlan Lee explained that “ our morality doesn’t allow us to conduct deprivation experiments with human beings, these unfortunate people are all we have to go on.” \* With so much interest in her case, the question became what should be done with her. A team of psychologists and language experts began the process of rehabilitating Genie. \* The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) provided funding for scientific research on Genie’s case. \* When she arrived at UCLA, she weighed only 59 pounds (26. 8kg) and she moved with a strange “ bunny walk.” She

often spat and was unable to straighten her arms and legs. She was silent, incontinent, and unable to chew, she seemed to only recognize her own name and the word " sorry." \* After testing her cognitive and emotional abilities, psychologist James Kent described her as " the most profoundly damaged child I've ever seen... Genie's life is a wasteland." \* Her silence and inability to use language made it difficult to assess her mental abilities, but on tests she scored at about the level of a one-year-old.

\* She quickly progressed in certain areas like going to the toilet and dressing herself, and over the next few months, she began to experience more developmental progress, but remained poor in areas such as language. \* Another psychologist Susan Curtiss suggested that Genie had a strong ability to communicate nonverbally. \* Part of the reason why Genie's case fascinated psychologists and linguists was that it presented a unique opportunity to study a hugely contested debate about language development. Nativists believe that the capacity for language is innate, while empiricists suggest that it is environmental variables that play a key role. Do genetics or the environment play a greater role in the development of language? \* Nativist Noam Chomsky suggested that knowing a language could not be fully explained by learning alone, he claimed that children are born with a ' language acquisition device' (LAD), an innate ability to understand the principles of language.

Once exposed to language, the LAD allows children to learn the language at a remarkable pace. \* Linguist Eric Lenneberg suggests that like many other human behaviours, the ability to learn a language is subject to what are known as critical periods. A critical period is a limited span of time during

which a person is capable of acquiring certain skills. According to Lenneberg, the critical period for language acquisition lasts until around age 12. After this the organisation of the brain becomes set and no longer able to learn and utilise language in a fully functional manner. \* Genie's case presented researchers with a unique opportunity. If given an enriched learning environment, could she overcome her deprived childhood and learn language even though she had missed the critical period? If she could, it would suggest that the critical period hypothesis of language development was wrong. If she could not, it would indicate that Lenneberg's theory was correct.

\* Despite scoring at the level of a one-year-old upon her initial assessment, Genie quickly began adding new words to her vocabulary. She started by learning single words and eventually began putting two words together much the way young children do. Curtiss began to feel that Genie would be fully capable of acquiring language. \* After a year of treatment, she even started putting three words together occasionally. In children going through normal language development, this stage is followed by what is known as a language explosion. Children rapidly acquire new words and begin putting them together in novel ways. Unfortunately, this never happened for Genie. Her language abilities remained stuck at this stage and she appeared unable to apply grammatical rules and use language in a meaningful way. \* Although she did learn to talk, her inability to use grammar (which Chomsky suggests is what separates human language from animal communication) offers evidence for the critical period hypothesis. \* However there were other factors to consider in Genie's case.

Not only did she miss the critical period for learning language, she was also horrifically abused. She was malnourished and deprived of cognitive stimulation for most of her childhood. Researchers were also never able to fully determine if Genie suffered from pre-existing cognitive deficits. As an infant, a paediatrician had identified her as having some type of learning difficulty. So researchers were left to wonder whether Genie had suffered from cognitive deficits caused by her years of abuse or if she had been born with a learning difficulty. \* Psychiatrist Jay Shurley helped assess Genie after she was first discovered, and he noted that since situations like hers were so rare, she quickly became the centre of a battle between the researchers involved in her case. Arguments over the research and the course of her treatment soon arose. \* Genie occasionally spent the night at the home of Jean Butler, one of her teachers. After an outbreak of measles, Genie was quarantined at her teacher's home.

Butler soon became protective and began restricting access to Genie. Other members of the team felt that Butler's goal was to become famous from the case, at one point claiming that Butler had called herself the next Anne Sullivan, the teacher famous for helping Helen Keller learn to communicate. \* Eventually, Genie was removed from Butler's care and went to live in the home of psychologist David Rigler, where she remained for the next four years. Despite some difficulties, she appeared to do well. She enjoyed listening to classical music and loved to draw, often finding it easier to communicate by drawing. \* NIMH withdrew funding in 1974, due to the lack of scientific findings. Linguist Susan Curtiss had found that while Genie could use words, she could not produce grammar. She could not arrange these

words in a meaningful way, supporting the idea of a critical period in language development. Rigler's research was disorganised and unreliable. Without funds to continue the research and care for Genie, she was removed from Rigler's care.

\* In 1975, Genie returned to live with her birth mother. When her mother found the task too difficult, Genie was moved to a series of foster homes, where she was often subjected to further abuse and neglect. \* Genie's birth mother then sued the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and the research team, charging them with excessive testing. While the lawsuit was eventually settled, it raised important questions about the treatment and care of Genie. Did the research interfere with the girl's therapeutic treatment? \* Genie's situation continued to worsen. After spending a significant amount of time in foster homes, she returned to Children's Hospital. Unfortunately, the progress that had occurred during her first stay had been severely compromised by the subsequent treatment she received in foster care. Genie was afraid to open her mouth and had regressed back into silence.

\* In the documentary *Secrets of the Wild Child*, Harlan Lee stated " Look, there's an ethical dilemma in this kind of research. If you want to do rigorous science, then Genie's interests are going to come second some of the time. If you only care about helping Genie, then you wouldn't do a lot of the scientific research. So, what are you going to do? To make matters worse, the two roles, scientist and therapist, were combined in one person, in her case. So, I think future generations are going to study Genie's case ... not only for what it can teach us about human development, but also for what it

can teach us about the rewards and the risks of conducting ' the forbidden experiment.'"

Sources:

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2Blh9KydjA>

\* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jclyXQ20Z1o&feature=youtu.be>

(Link to Secrets of the Wild Child documentary) \* [http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Genie\\_\(feral\\_child\)](http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Genie_(feral_child))