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The question that I am investigating for my essay is 'Are Psychopaths a Product of Nurture or Nature.' I think that this is a really interesting topic to research because there is a large amount of case studies that I can investigate and apply them to the nature-nurture debate. As well as there being a few aspects of this topic that apply directly to one side of the argument there are few that cross over and apply to both. Therefore this has resulted in me having to look deeper and finding out more information and deciding if nurture or nature has the largest impact on psychopathic behaviour. A psychopath is someone who is suffering from chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behaviour. This is sometimes confused with the term sociopath, in the 1900's patients who were mentally ill but appeared normal on the outside were considered to be psychopaths but in the 1930's the name was changed to sociopath, the change was made to highlight the damage that they cause to people and society.

However recently a lot of researchers have returned to the term psychopath to refer to more serious disorders. Psychopathy is a very difficult disorder to notice as not all psychopaths have characteristics that are visible and some people have many psychopathic traits and not even realise. This makes spotting psychopaths very difficult and may be another reason as to why they are so dangerous. There is a list of criteria that is used to state the characteristics of a psychopath, the most commonly used list is called "Psychopathy Checklist Revised (PCL-R)", this was created by Robert Hare and his colleagues. There are many other criteria that can be used to distinguish between a psychopath and not. Psychopaths have certain characteristics that make them different to a normal civilian, for example

they lack empathy, guilt and consciousness. As well as this, they show a large lack of emotion, they are described as “emotionally shallow” (PCL).

These characteristics are caused by two things; nature and nurture. The nature and nurture debate has been an ongoing debate between psychologists for years. Which one of these have the larger influence on how we behave and our characteristics? Nature is the genetic inheritance that is handed down from our parents that influences how we behave and makes us different from others.

These are things such as twin studies, or the variant of the MAOA gene. Nurture is the way that we are brought up and the environmental factors that influence our development. These are things such as abuse that may have been experienced at a young age, or the environment that someone may have been brought up in (friends and families habits). Nature is the genetic inheritance from your parents that shape us into the people that we are today. There are lots of different elements of nature that can add together and can cause someone to have psychopathic characteristics.

Many psychologists believe that there is a single gene that is linked to the risk of violence or aggressive behaviour that people display. This gene is the MAOA-L gene which has mutated from the MAOA gene (warrior gene). This stands for monoamine oxidase A, this gene is responsible for controlling the production of a protein that breaks down brain signalling chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin. Both of these chemicals have a strong influence upon mood. The rare genetic disorder that causes the mutation of this gene leads to MAOA deficiency and causes an excess of monoamine transmitters,

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which leads to a large amount of impulsive behaviour. This can include sleeping disorders, extreme mood swings and the tendency to become violent.

A study was conducted to see the effects of having the MAOA-L gene, by using MRI scanning it identified that these people are more likely to have a smaller limbic system. This is a system in the brain that contains the hippocampus, amygdala, anterior thalamic nuclei and the limbic cortex. This system is involved in emotion, behaviour and long term memory, therefore by having a smaller limbic system the person is less likely to be able to be able to show their emotions and may cause impulsive behaviour. The study also showed that MAOA-L caused hyperresponsiveness to the amygdala during certain activities. This part of the brain is responsible for emotional processing and people with the MAOA-L gene are less able to have strong emotional impulses. Another study was conducted at King's College in London in 2002 which followed a large group of male children from their birth until their adulthood.

The objective was to understand why some children who are mistreated at a young age grow up to have antisocial behaviour and others do not. The MAOA gene was found to stabilise the effects for mistreatment, however some of the male children had the mutated version of this gene (MAOA-L). The children that did not have the variant gene and had high levels of MAOA were less likely to develop antisocial problems, and the children that did have the variant gene were more likely to have antisocial problems.

This may explain as to why children that are mistreated at a young age do not always go on to mistreat others because they are able to stabilise their emotions and their impulsive behaviour, whereas other children are unable to do this because they do not have the genetic capability to be able to prevent themselves from outlying behaviour. Another factor that can influence someone to have psychopathic characteristics is their brain patterns. A neuroscientist at the UC Irvine School of Medicine called James Fallon believe that psychopaths show a distinctive pattern of brain activity. He scanned dozens of people brains who were believed to be psychopaths using a PET scanner (positron emission tomography), this is a machine used to measure brain activity using a small amount of radioactive substance. He used a control group to compare the scans of the psychopaths brains. The images show that the control groups brains contained much more activity in the lower frontal lobe compared to the psychopaths. The lower frontal lobe is where the emotional part of our brain is said to be as well as our personality features. It is involved in problem solving, memory, impulse control and social and sexual behaviour.

If this part of the brain is less active in psychopaths then they will not be able to control their behaviour as easily as the average person would and it could also explain as to why they can have antisocial behaviour. The scans also showed a reduced amount of activity in the area close to the centre which is used to regulate our emotions, this area is the orbital cortex. This may also be another reason as to why psychopaths do not experience feelings of guilt or empathy. Another study which supports the idea that psychopaths have different brain patterns to normal people was held at

King's College in London and was led by Nigel Blackwood. The brains of 44 men convicted of murder, rape or other violent assaults were scanned and then the control group of 22 law-abiding citizens had their brains scanned. 17 of the violent offenders had antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy, the researchers found that these people had less structural grey matter than the other two groups in the front sections of their brain, these are the same parts of the brain as James Fallon's findings.

This supports the idea that psychopaths have different brain activity compared to the average person. Finally, another study that was carried out to investigate the brains of prisoners who were diagnosed with psychopathy compared to those who were not diagnosed with psychopathy was carried out in a medium-security prison in Wisconsin. The brains of 20 prisoners with a diagnosis of psychopathy were compared with the brains of 20 prisoners who committed similar crimes but were not diagnosed. There were two different types of brain scans that were collected DTI (diffusion tensor images) and fMRI (functional magnetic resonance image). Dr. Kent Kiehl had a mobile MRI scanner which he brought to the prison and used to scan the prisoner's brains. Michael Koenig and Julian Motzkin (his graduate student) analysed the brain scans.

The results of the investigation showed that the psychopaths had little connections between the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (responsible for empathy and guilt) and the amygdala. The DTI showed that there was reduced structural integrity in the white matters of fibres connecting the two parts of the brain, and the fMRI showed less coordinated activity between the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and the amygdala. This study shows the <https://assignbuster.com/the-makes-spotting-psychopaths-very-difficult-and/>

structural and functional differences between the brains of psychopaths and average people, the two parts of the brain which are responsible for regulating emotion and social behaviour are not working as they should be which is a reason as to why psychopaths have certain emotional and behavioural characteristics. Another factor that nativists believe contributes to the production of psychopaths is the if they are a twin. Twin studies have become very developed and there is a lot of research into the developments of twins and their genetics.

There are two different types of twins; the first is identical, these share 100% of the same genes and fraternal twins who share 50% of their genes. A study was conducted in 1988 by Plomin who researched into the IQ of identical and non-identical twins, he found that the concordance rate was approximately 0.68 (68% was influenced by genetics). However when the identical twins lived apart the concordance rate increased to 0.74 (74% similar even though they lived in different environments).

This shows that genetic influence appears to be stronger than environmental factors, and also further strengthens the idea that people are born with the characteristics of a psychopath instead of being influenced by their environment around them. If they were to be influenced by their surroundings then the concordance rate should have been lower when the identical twins lived apart from each other because they both would have had different upbringings and different circumstances in their lives. Another study was conducted on twins to research the development of prosocial behaviour. Data was collected from 682 families with children between the age of 5-16, and was in the form of parent and teacher reports. The data was <https://assignbuster.com/the-makes-spotting-psychopaths-very-difficult-and/>

used to examine both genetic and environmental factors on their behaviour. The results showed that there was a decline in the environmental factors and an increase in the genetic influences as the children got older. This was a trend in parent data and reached statistical significance in teacher data. Both the parent and teacher data was examined together and it showed that there was a large amount of bias from the parents reports, the parents reports showed increasingly higher scores than the teachers.

However there was an overlap in the phenotype rated by both the parents and the teachers. This study also demonstrates that nature is the key determinant of someone's behaviour because as the children got older they were less influenced by their environments. Jeffrey Dahmer was known as the "Milwaukee Cannibal" because he was very fond of ingesting human flesh. He is an example of psychopath who was influenced by his genetics. He was born in 1960 and suffered from borderline personality disorder. Dahmer did not have any problems with his home life during his upbringing and his parents were very loving and supportive of him, as well as this he did not have any problems with his health other than what he brought upon himself with his social behaviour. When he was younger he had a real fascination with animals and he claims this was from when his father removed a den of rodents underneath his house when he was 10.

Even though he had this fascination with animals he never proceeded to kill any of them, instead he would strip the skin from roadkill as well as other various dead animals he would find. Three weeks after graduating Dahmer committed his first murder, the victim was an 18 year old who he struck round the head with a dumbbell, masturbated over his body and then

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proceeded to cut the remains into pieces. The flesh was burned in acid and smashed the bones with a sledgehammer before he buried them under his home. Dahmer felt an overwhelming loneliness due to being unable to develop relationships. Therefore he was unable to feel any guilt or emotion towards the people that he was murdering.

He enjoyed the feeling of power, control and sexual fulfilment, this led to him beginning to murder a person weekly. In 1991 the police were able to understand exactly what happened, he would strangle his victims and then dismembered them so he could keep a part of them with him forever. He had two heads in the fridge, two torsos in the freezer, seven bodies with the skin completely stripped from them and pieces of genitals. Dahmer was very scared to be alone and this is one of the main reasons as to why he would keep lots of the body parts in his house. This case study shows that even though Dahmer had a loving and caring upbringing he still became a psychopath and committed serious crimes. Nature is the environmental factors and personal experiences that influence someone's behaviour. Environmentalists believe that humans are born with a blank slate and they are gradually filled with experience.

Psychological characteristics and behavioural differences that are created through infancy are a product of learning and new experiences. There are lots of different factors that can contribute to how an individual behaves based on their environment, for example their upbringing is likely to have a key influence on the way that they think people should be treated. A study was conducted in 1920 by John B. Watson to see if it was possible to condition a child to fear and object that they previously never feared. A boy <https://assignbuster.com/the-makes-spotting-psychopaths-very-difficult-and/>

called Albert was used and before the experiment Albert showed no signs of any fear response to any stimuli. When the experiment started Albert was shown a white rat and every time he tried to touch it a steel bar was hit (creating a very loud noise). This was repeated seven times and after that the rat was shown to him alone with no noise, Albert would still begin to start crying and would try to crawl away. Albert began to fear other similar objects such as a rabbit and a fur coat.

One month later, he continued to show fear reactions to all similar objects. This experiment shows that environment can be manipulated to cause someone to have a behavioral change. This also emphasises the influence that a person's environment can have on them because before the experiment Albert did not fear the white rat but once the experiment was over he had grown a phobia of the white rat and other objects that were similar. Therefore, this further portrays that if young children are continually seeing the people around them carry out certain actions (murdering or abusing people) then they are likely to think that this is normality and that everyone should be treating other people like this. This is because their environment has manipulated them to believe this as they have seen the same actions occurring over a number of times, and in the future it is likely to cause them to carry out the same actions as they don't know any difference.

Another part of a child's upbringing is having stable relationships with people that they can trust and rely on. When an infant forms an attachment it responds to the love and attention that it receives from its mother or father. If the child does not receive the love and attention that it desires then it is

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likely to experience feelings of neglect. A psychologist named John Bowlby developed a theory of attachment, he believed that mental health and behavioural problems could be caused by early childhood. His theory said that children were pre-programmed to form attachments with other people because this is a necessity for them to survive. He showed that babies are born with the tendency to display certain innate behaviours which help ensure that they have contact with their primary attachment figure.

The babies performed a number of actions such as crying, smiling or sticking their tongues out. Bowlby suggested a hypothesis that infants and their mother have evolved a biological need to stay together. He believed that their primary attachment figure acted as a secure base for them to explore the world and provided them with care and responsiveness as well as providing them with a a prototype for all future social relationships because if they do not have a secure first relationship then it can have severe consequences to them in later life. This shows that is children do not have secure relationships with their mother or a primary attachment figure when they are younger, they are unlikely to know how to form a secure relationship when they are older and this is also likely to have a large effect on their love life. Forming relationships with friends and family is a key part of someone's life so if they do not have this then it is also another reason for them to gain psychopathic characteristics such as not feeling any emotion towards other people.

A further study was conducted by psychologist Lorenz who tested the attachment upon young ducklings. He had a large amount of eggs and separated them in half before they had hatched. The first half of the ducks
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were kept with their mother and the other half were kept with Lorenz. The ducks that were hatched with Lorenz began to follow him around and even when they were put back with the other group of ducklings and their real mother they still chose to follow Lorenz. This shows that the ducks had formed a relationship with Lorenz and that they follow the first moving object that they see during a critical period (12-17 hours after hatching). This shows that forming an attachment is innate and programmed genetically.

This also shows that the ducklings needed to form an attachment because they did not know how to survive and how to get themselves food. This is another example of how important relationships are for children because they need to be able to rely on others as they are not self sufficient to be able to look after themselves. Other factors that can contribute to a child's upbringing is if they receive abuse from their family or friends. Every year approximately 3.

3 million to 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence in their home. Studies have shown that approximately 900, 000 children are maltreated by their parents and/or their guardian. A large number of children have witnessed domestic abuse but have not experienced it personally. There have been a large number of studies that suggest that children who have been exposed to or witnessed domestic abuse at home are more likely to experience psychological effects when they are older.

This portrays that children who experience and see this type of behaviour when they are younger have psychological effects when they are older due to the mistreatment of them when they were children and not because they

have psychological problems as a child. A study was completed that examined the effects of child abuse and exposure to domestic violence on adolescent internal and external behaviours. The data and research came from the Lehigh longitudinal study, 457 youth addressing outcomes of family violence and resilience in individuals and families. The results show that child abuse, domestic violence and/or both increase a child's risk for internalizing and externalising outcomes in adolescence. This shows that children who are domestically abused are unable to portray their emotions externally to others which is another characteristic of a psychopath, as well as having high levels of anxiety and depression. Teenagers who have been abused as children are much more likely to experience depression than children who are not mistreated as a child, they are also expected to have behavioural problems such as impulsive violence.

As well as this, researchers have also investigated into the dual exposure effect, which they call the "double whammy", this is where children are exposed to both child abuse and domestic violence. These children are much more likely to experience far worse effects in their later years compared to the children who are only exposed to one form of violence. A psychologist called Hughes found that children who were direct victims of both child abuse and domestic violence had higher externalising and internalising score than did those who only witnessed domestic violence. Being exposed to domestic violence in childhood has been linked to characteristics such as having low self-esteem, social withdrawal, depression and anxiety.