

We are products of  
our past essay

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When trying to explore the above statement it is significant to consider both the nature and nurture debate. This statement suggests that our biology & genes help make us who we are, however, we are shaped by the impact of our past through significant turning points, crisis, early family interactions, dynamics, experiences, expectations, roles, interpretations and comments made about us.

These aspects don't rule us exclusively, yet play an important part, some of them unconsciously. In order to explore this statement further I will be discussing Freud's Psychodynamic approach, Erickson's eight stages and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Further to this I will also make references to personal experiences which will further help to refrain or refute the statement. Sigmund Freud came from a Jewish family, he was the oldest of 8 children born in Moravia in the Czech Republic. He went to a Medical school in Vienna. He studied neurology and some of the things discovered by Freud included that he illustrated that male eels had testes, neurons in fish represented new characteristics of neurons in fish. Allegedly it has been stated that Freud used Cocaine and he discovered that it could be used as anesthetic (Hilgard (2000)).

Eventually Freud opened a private practice in Vienna for treatment of nervous disorders. After Freud married he had 3 girls and 3 boys but left Vienna after the Nazi invasion. Freud considered all religion was an illusion used by civilization to cope with feelings of infantile helplessness. Freud died from cancer of mouth and jaw (from cigar smoking) on Sept. 23, 1939 (Cole, 2001). Freud's main views when considering humans, personality and psychology was that human nature dominated by instinctual, unconscious,

and irrational forces (Cole, 2001). He recognised that human beings are selfish who are sometimes in conflict with themselves both internally and externally; relating to both aggressive and sexual.

He assessed that some humans have no free will; therefore they are incapable of dealing with own psychological problems. Freud believed that some people turn to religion in hope of gaining control over their urges. Freud used self-analysis in order to understand others behavior in terms of himself.

He was very much interested in the interpretation of dreams as he believed that dreams allow people to experience wish fulfillments. He described a term " Psychological Determinism" a belief that nothing about human behavior occurs by accident or chance and personality is " determined". He did not promote biological determinism and emphasized psychological determinism which would fit in with the nature/nurture debate. He explored his own childhood as the origins of his behavior. He held a belief that boys want to " kill" their fathers in order to " marry" their mothers.

It is suggested that this feeling of his may have created guilt when his dad died when he was aged 40 years (Cole, 2001). In order to explore the statement I will now look into what Freuds view was and discuss the personality structure and how it was formed. Freud stated that there are three basic components of personality; the first is the biological side, the second is the psychological side and the third is the societies contribution (Hilgard, 2000). There is the Id, Ego and Superego which are processes of the mind and they organize our mental life and interact with one another.

They are all powered by Libido and are always struggling with each other to dominate personality. The Id origin of personality operates according to the pleasure principle and satisfies its needs through the Primary Process (Hilgard, 2000). The Id is the reservoir of two instincts which is Eros that represents energy for preserving love for self and love of others. The other is Thanatos that works towards destructiveness and death aimed at returning living things to original lifeless state.

It promotes aggressiveness and this is the most important function. The preoccupation with the self and needs “ I want” (Hough, 2003). The Ego is a coherent organization of mental processes that develops out of Id energy. It has access to consciousness, and devoted to contacting reality to satisfy Id's needs (Nelson-Jones, 1993).

The ego adapts to the outside world, bridging reality but not totally conscious. Ego's reaction to threatening instincts is stress/anxiety. So, “ Ego calls upon Defense Mechanisms which is internal, unconscious, and automatic psychological strategies for coping and regaining control over id instincts” (Hilgard, 2000). The defense mechanisms include repression, projection, rationalization, intellectualize. A exaggerated use of defense mechanisms results in Neuroses. The Superego represents society in personality that incorporates norms and standards of culture (Hilgard, 2000). Children adopt society's rules, regulations, and codes of right and wrong. “ The superego introjects processes where personality incorporates norms and standards of its culture through identification with parents or role models of society” (Cole, 2001).

The superego operates according to Morality Principle and is conscience. It helps to control the Id impulses by directing energy toward inhibiting id's expression of sexual and aggressive instincts. The Superego can result in feelings of pride and self-respect through the influence of the Ego Ideal (Hough, 2003). Another aspect of Freud's theory is the four psychosexual stages associated with erogenous zones (Hilgard, 2000). Freud stated that everyone's basic personality is established by age 5. Individuals could become fixated upon a stage; feeling satisfaction or frustrated and fixated people are likely to show regression. Every decision you display results from influences present in the unconscious (Hilgard, 2000).

The four stages include the oral (narcissistic) stage from birth to 1 year (Hilgard, 2000). At this the main focus is upon satisfying needs of mouth and digestive tract e. g thumb sucking. The Oral Receptive personality type derived from childhood pleasures of receiving food and digesting it. These individuals usually form relationships dependent upon others, they can sometimes be gullible (Cole, 2001).

They are usually interested in getting information, knowledge and material goods. If there has been issues at this stage these individuals will present oral aggression derived from childhood pleasures of mouth, food, eating, but with more chewing, biting, and use of teeth. These individuals can be sarcastic, argumentative and seek to hold firmly to others.

When I was reading about this stage I was able to distinguish certain characteristics such as sarcasm to myself and I can be aggressive at times aswell as searching for information and knowledge frequently (Hough, 2003).

When I thought about it further I was able to remember when I was very young and I use to enjoy having a soother but my parents would not allow me as and this continued when I was older. I think maybe this is why I now show some of these personality attributes that Freud developed. The second stage is the Anal Stage from two to three years. Freud stated that sexual gratification occurs with relieving tension of full bowel and stimulating the anus (Hilgard, 2000). When toilet training and issue of interpersonal interaction and conflict between parent and child. There can be two varying types that Freud suggested which included Anal Retentive which is a delay of final satisfactions to last possible moment. These individuals always always “save” for the future whether relating to money or need, orderliness, stingy and stubborn.

The other is Anal Expulsive inclination to disregard accepted rules of cleanliness, orderliness, and appropriate behavior. These individuals react against others attempts to restrict them by doing what they want whenever and wherever. They are usually messy, aggressive destructiveness, temper tantrums, emotional outbursts and cruelty (Nelson-Jones, 1993). The Phallic Stage is from four to five years and satisfaction received through masturbation (Hilgard, 2000). This stage was central to Freud's theory because it is the last infantile stage, it provides context where two important complexes develop and critical issues of anxiety and envy become relevant. The basis of psychological and social identification for children, it results in psychological and sex-role differences and determines development of superego.

At this stage there are differences between boys and girls where boys have possessive love for mothers and see fathers as rivals (Hough, 2003). Freud described this as the Oedipus complex feelings. The Electra complex is what girls experience and this is love of dad and hate of mum for girls.

Boys experience Castration Anxiety fear that they might lose "boy parts" their vital organ of pleasure. Girls display penis-envy the wish to obtain one of their own and they might blame mothers. The final step of Oedipal complex is the formation of superego (Hough, 2003). Fixated males may devote life to sexual promiscuity in quest for sexual gratification that they never got as a child or he might get attracted to men. This may be evident of homosexuality and it would be interesting for me to see research into why some men are gay. Fixated females have more difficult time of identification with mothers as they have an ambivalence for mothers and blame for not giving or taking away her "boy part".

Girls Electra complex also turns to dad in hope of getting "missing part" from him. Freud also believes that a female's superego develops less completely than males (Nelson-Jones, 1993). When I was reading this part it was very interesting and I reflected on myself and I was able to consider my attitude towards boys when growing up and how they had it easy.

However, I am unsure if this is penis envy as Freud described or whether it was influenced by my culture and the way I saw the males in the family being treated more special. Freud stated that girls are generally more dependent on defense mechanism of repression. They have a weaker superego development and women function at a lower morality level than men (Lieber,

1990). The Latency period is between ages of 6 to 12 years at this stage there is a notable for absence of dominant erogenous zone (Hilgard, 2000). Children lay aside attraction to parents and become sexually disinterested. The Libidinous instincts transformed through sublimation and then fixed in anal stage might be interested in clay substituting earlier desires to play with faeces (Cole, 2001).

Genital Stage is the final stage and is from puberty onwards (Hilgard, 2000). This is usually a phase of mature sexual love; directing feelings of lust and affection towards others. When discussing the statement a significant theory to also consider is that of Erik Erikson who was heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud, explored three aspects of identity: the ego identity (self), personal identity (the personal idiosyncrasies that distinguish a person from another, social/cultural identity (the collection of social roles a person might play) (Hilgard, 2000).

Erikson's psychosocial theory of development considers the impact of external factors, parents and society on personality development from childhood to adulthood. According to Erikson's theory, every person must pass through a series of eight interrelated stages over the entire life cycle (Nelson-Jones, 1993). The eight stages are Infant (Hope) - Basic Trust vs. Mistrust, Toddler (Will) - Autonomy vs. Shame, Preschooler (Purpose) - Initiative vs. Guilt, School-Age Child (Competence) - Industry vs. Inferiority, Adolescent (Fidelity) - Identity vs. Identity Diffusion, Young Adult (Love) - Intimacy vs.



Isolation, Middle-aged Adult (Care) – Generativity vs. Self-absorption, Older Adult (Wisdom) – Integrity vs. Despair. These eight stages, spanning from birth to death, are split in general age ranges (Cole, 2001). The first stage is infancy which is from birth to eighteen months old. Erikson believed that during the first or second year of life, the major emphasis is on the mother and father's nurturing ability and care for a child, especially in terms of visual contact and touch (Cole, 2001).

The child will develop optimism, trust, confidence, and security if properly cared for and handled. If a child does not experience trust, he or she may develop insecurity, worthlessness, and general mistrust to the world. I have met many individuals like this through the job role that I have undertaken particularly with adults who were taken into care at a young age. The second stage occurs at early childhood years from eighteen months to three years (Cole, 2001). At this point, the child has an opportunity to build self-esteem and autonomy as he or she learns new skills and right from wrong.

The well-cared for child is sure of himself, carrying himself or herself with pride rather than shame. During this time of the “terrible twos”, defiance, temper tantrums, and stubbornness can also appear. Children tend to be vulnerable during this stage, sometimes feeling shame and low self-esteem during an inability to learn certain skills (Nelson-Jones, 1993). This reminded me of my niece as I have noticed this behaviour and characteristics in her.

The Preschoolers between three to five years and during this period we experience a desire to copy the adults around us and take initiative in

creating play situations (Hilgard, 2000). We make up stories with Barbie's and Ken's, toy phones and miniature cars, playing out roles in a trial universe, experimenting with the blueprint for what we believe it means to be an adult. We also begin to use that wonderful word for exploring the world —" WHY? ". I have been told by my mum that I would do a lot of this when I was younger and now I experience my neices and nephews doing the same.

While Erikson was influenced by Freud, he downplays biological sexuality in favor of the psychosocial features of conflict between child and parents (Cole, 2001). Nevertheless, he said that at this stage we usually become involved in the classic " Oedipal struggle" and resolve this struggle through " social role identification. If we're frustrated over natural desires and goals, we may easily experience guilt (Lieber, 1990). The most significant relationship is with the basic family. The fourth stage is school age child that is six to twelve years (Cole, 2001). During this stage, we are capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge, thus developing a sense of industry. This is also a very social stage of development and if we experience unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among our peers, we can have serious problems in terms of competence and self-esteem. As the world expands a bit, our most significant relationship is with the school and neighborhood.

Parents are no longer the complete authorities they once were, although they are still important. The fifth stage is adolescent which is from twelve to eighteen years. Up until this fifth stage, development depends on what is done to a person (Cole, 2001). An adolescent must struggle to discover and

find his or her own identity, while negotiating and struggling with social interactions and “fitting in”, and developing a sense of morality and right from wrong. Those unsuccessful with this stage tend to experience role confusion and upheaval. Adolescents begin to develop a strong affiliation and devotion to ideals, causes, and friends (Hilghard, 2000).

I feel that I have experienced this stage particularly when I was at University. The sixth stage is as a young adult from eighteen to thirty-five. At the young adult stage, people tend to seek companionship and love (Nelson-Jones, 1993). Some also begin to “settle down” and start families, although seems to have been pushed back farther in recent years. Young adults seek deep intimacy and satisfying relationships, but if unsuccessful, isolation may occur (Cole, 2001). Significant relationships at this stage are with marital partners and friends. I would agree with this stage as evident at my current stage in life. The seventh stage is middle-aged adult from thirty-five to fifty-five or sixty-five.

At this stage career and work are the most important things at this stage, along with family (Cole, 2001). For this stage, working to establish stability and Erikson’s idea of generativity – attempting to produce something that makes a difference to society. Inactivity and meaninglessness are common fears during this stage. Major life shifts can occur during this stage. For example, children leave the household, careers can change, and so on.

This was evident with my father who changed jobs and when my sister left for university and some of my sisters getting married. Some may struggle with finding purpose. Significant relationships are those within the family,

workplace, local church and other communities. The eighth stage is as a late adult between fifty-five and sixty-five to Death. Erikson believed that much of life is preparing for the middle adulthood stage and the last stage involves much reflection (Cole, 2001). As older adults, some can look back with a feeling of integrity — that is, contentment and fulfillment, having led a meaningful life and valuable contribution to society. Others may have a sense of despair during this stage, reflecting upon their experiences and failures. They may fear death as they struggle to find a purpose to their lives.

The other theory we can consider when exploring the statement is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow presented the idea that human actions are directed toward goal attainment (Maslow, 1998). Any given behaviour could satisfy several functions at the same time; for instance, going to a pub could satisfy one's needs for self-esteem and for social interaction. This theory is often has often been represented in a hierarchal pyramid with five levels. The four levels (lower-order needs) are considered physiological needs, while the top level is considered growth needs. The lower level needs need to be satisfied before higher-order needs can influence behavior (Maslow, 1998).

The levels are as follows Self-actualization (morality, creativity, problem solving), Esteem (confidence, self-esteem, achievement, respect), Belongingness (love, friendship, intimacy, family), Safety (security of environment, employment, resources, health, property) and Physiological (air, food, water, sex, sleep, other factors towards homeostasis) (Maslow, 1998). The first four levels are considered deficiency or deprivation needs (“

D-needs”) in that their lack of satisfaction causes a deficiency that motivates people to meet these needs (Lieber, 1990). Physiological needs, the lowest level on the hierarchy, include necessities such as air, food, and water. These tend to be satisfied for most people, but they become predominant when unmet. During emergencies, safety needs such as health and security rise to the forefront. Once these two levels are met, belongingness needs, such as obtaining love and intimate relationships or close friendships, become important. The next level, esteem needs, include the need for recognition from others, confidence, achievement, and self-esteem (Maslow, 1998).

The highest level is self-actualization, or the self-fulfillment (Maslow, 1998). Behavior in this case is not driven or motivated by deficiencies but rather one’s desire for personal growth and the need to become all the things that a person is capable of becoming (Lieber, 1990). I felt that I was able to relate to this as this is how I have felt and wanted to progress.

Following this exploration it has been illustrated that we are a product of our past by what we have inherited however there is also a strong influence on us through the environment and the role models around us which is linked to social learning. This has been evidenced by the theories that have been explored.