

5. to what extent  
does your country's  
culture encourage  
unhealthy eating  
habits?

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Case Study of Jane Analyzing the Applicability of Piaget's theory of social, cognitive and moral development.

I conducted this study on a female friend who I have given the name Jane for confidentiality and privacy purposes. The resource persons who gave me the information have also been given other names for the same purpose. The aim of the case study was to use the Piaget theory of development to explain the development of Jane, socially, morally and mentally. I also wanted to know if there could be a link between this theory and Jane's character as an adult. I also sought to find out if there are stages in the course of her development that did not fit in with Piaget's theories.

#### Case study

My study depended a lot on information from Jane, her mother and a close friend of hers. . For statistical information, the mother was very helpful as she gave me access to Jane's birth certificate, medical records and vital point cases, episodes and experiences in Jane's development to adulthood. Her former and current teachers also gave crucial information on her work in school.

Other friends also assisted to get information especially those who grew up with. Her long term friend Heidi was also crucial in giving details of how they grew up. This is because i have not known Jane since her childhood. I have only known her since 2001 when she was 14 years old. Her boss, Mr Bradford was also instrumental in giving out information on her possible manner of conduct in employment.

Jane was born on May 17th 1987 in Santa Cruz, California at the Dominican Hospital.

She has been successful in class since she started schooling. She was a normal child born with no physical or mental disabilities. By the age of one she could walk and understand her environment and knew her mother very well. She could also sense when her mum was angry by refusing to be carried. She could only be happy when her mother was. Her reports from early stages in schooling show excellent performance. This is as far back as kindergarten. Her teachers always had glowing comments about her during performance evaluations. She was top of her elementary school class until she completed.

Her adolescent ages between 11 and 17 were very not really challenging as the norm with almost every teenager. She did not have an "experience with boys" as is the case with teenage girls. Her mother says that apart from one day when she sneaked to Heidi's house for a sleep over, she has not had any serious case of indiscipline from her. She believes, this is because of the strong attachment that is there between Heidi and her. This attachment has created trust and confidence and as a result Jane has not been a deviant child. Also, since she is the only parent available for Jane, she has been able to instill discipline and morals without conflict of interest.

Socially, Jane has always been a social person. She is an extrovert and always goes out of her way to meet people. She does her best to help no matter how hard the situation is. Her mum recalls the day when she came home with a schoolmate who she had spotted crying at the school gate. On

inquiry, the girl said that she was scared to go home because her mother would beat her. Jane decided to go home with her and ask for her mother's help. It is an attribute that has sometimes landed her in trouble. Some peers felt that she can be a little bit too concerned about things that should not concern her and labeled her as a nosy person. However most of her friends feel that this shows that she is a caring person.

Jane was brought up by a single parent this being the mother. Her mum and dad separated when she was young. As such she has always been an independent person who depends only on herself to get things done. Her friends believe that her mother has been the biggest influence in this regard. She saw how much she worked hard to bring her up. She believes strongly that a woman can make it without a man's help and for this some male schoolmates have labelled her a feminist. This passion about women is seen when she is articulating women issues in school organized workshops and seminars. She believes that women should not be judged on the basis of their gender but on their ability.

Jane's ability strongly lies in her excellence in academic field as she is always on top of her class. She represents her class in many Maths and Science congresses. She has the potential of becoming a great academician and her teachers say that it will be long before any student in her school matches her academic abilities.

Her other strength lies in the ability to also excel in extra curriculum activities. She is the captain and one of the best players of her school's basketball team. She is also a member of the swimming and tennis teams.

Together with these activities, she is also a good chess player which implies she is very intelligent. Her abilities to balance her class and out of class work shows she is a good time manager.

Over the holidays, she works as a waitress in a hometown hotel. Within just two holidays of working, the manager put her in charge of other waitresses. According to the manager, Mr. Bradford, she is a very hardworking young lady and is very pleasant to the customers. Most of the customers normally request to be attended to by her. This position is usually reserved for her and she takes it up immediately she closes school.

Jane like any other normal human being has weaknesses. Growing up with a single mother has had some effect on her social life. She does not relate well with the opposite sex. Her close friends are all female. She does not have any significant male friends. Her friend Heidi believes that she cannot relate well with them as she has never had a father figure in her life and does not know exactly how to relate to men in general. The only two relationships she has been in with men have ended up breaking up. According to Heidi, the ex-boyfriends complain that she is too domineering in a relationships and always believes she is right during quarrels.

There is also the fear that she could get involved with a man and end up alone like her mother. Heidi candidly remembers their first prom night. She had to practically beg Jane to accept an interested neighborhood boy as her date to the prom. She was not very pleasant to him and he kept clear of her from that day. It is therefore true that Jane has fear of the unknown. She does not like taking big risks and gambling with her life.

Jane is also quick tempered and can get annoyed very fast even by little things such as someone brushing past her. As Amber explains, as children when they were 9 year olds, there is a time Jane could not talk to her for a whole week because she declined to eat dinner in their house. To her Amber was implying that her mother was a bad cook and this to her was a big insult. No explanation from her was convincing enough and it took the intervention of Jane's mother for the two girls to get talking again.

She is a perfectionist and always likes to do her things over the top. This has made her a critic even of small things. As her mother gives examples; For Jane, the salt has to be of the right amount in the food or to her it becomes bad cooked food. The dinner table and chairs have to be in the perfect angle before they can sit down for dinner and flower gardens have to be watered with the right amount of water or to her the maidservant is ineffective in her work.

### Analysis

Piaget proposed four stages of development in order to chart the course for mental growth. The first stage is sensorimotor development between ages 0 and 2 (infancy). In the beginning of this stage, there is little cognitive activity that takes place and limited distinction can be made between the self and the environment. However, by the end of the first year, meaningful interactions with one's surroundings begin. Physical mobility enables the child to start developing intellectually (Beilin and Pufall, 1992).

Jane at the age of 1 liked to shake her crib because she found the movements interesting. She could also tell when hanging toys on her crib

were taken off and cry out very loudly. She could identify her clothes. She could also utter few incomprehensible words just like any normal child at this age.

During the preoperational thought between ages 2 and 7 (toddler and early childhood). the ability of the child in languages increases and concepts become more clear. At two and a half years, Jane could communicate well enough. She was also self-centered which is characteristic of children at this stage. She could not allow anyone else near her mother as she wanted to be the only one staying close to her. She wanted to be served first at the dinner table. She was also discriminative of objects. For instance, she only wanted to be bought for big dolls and toys with bright colors.

Her good performance in kindergarten shows consistence with Piaget's theory of development. Jane could have been doing well because of the nature of children at this stage. Her memory and imagination was sharp. This can be deduced from the crayon drawings she made. She was able to imagine and make a good drawing of Heidi and herfamilyat the park. Children at this stage believe all they are told and taught by their teachers and parents. As such they take in all the information and can be able to do well in class. Also at this age, children are curious and eager to know new thing and question everything that appears new to them. Jane wanted to know the name of every new thing her mother brought home when she was at this stage.

In the stage of concrete operations between ages 7 to 11 (elementary and early adolescence) children grasp the concept of conservation. There are

seven types of conservation at this stage; number, liquid, length, weight, mass, volume, volume and area. The child is able to consider viewpoints of others and classify objects and order them in a series along a dimension such as size. Without interest, children cannot make meaningful efforts to modify their sense of reasoning (Beilin and Pufall, 1992). Jane could differentiate between sizes of objects at this stage. She could tell big objects from small ones.

The formal operational stage (adolescence and adulthood) is the final stage. Abstract thinking is now possible. When a problem is approached, the individual draws a hypothesis and develops several potential solutions. The child can now reason like an adult and is able to give valid opinion on issues (Beilin and Pufall, 1992).

Jane contradicted Piaget's theory at this stage. She was mature before adolescence and there many cases where she reasoned like an adult. There are many of Jane's peers who have reached this stage and cannot be able to reason like adults yet. Jane was a class leader and fellow students could report small cases to her and she would offer a solution. Alternatively, she would direct the same to her classteacher if the problem proved to be big, for example cases of a fight. Her friend Heidi and former class teacher confirmed that there was no cause to worry when Jane was left in charge as she was responsible enough.

Piaget proposed that the level of moral reasoning a child shows changes in a qualitative way over time. Moral reasoning changes as the child grows due to decrease in egocentrism and exposure to divergent views. Their reasoning



matures and is shaped by the society. Piaget suggested two main types of moral thinking; heteronomous and autonomous morality (Beilin and Pufall, 1992).

Premoral judgment is found in children below 5 years of age. Rules are not understood at this stage and so judgment cannot be made about the people who break them. Heteronomous morality is shown mostly by 5 to 9 year old children who regard morality as obeying other people's rules and laws. They follow rules given by others out of obedience and not their personal conviction. The child is expected to respect the adult and the adult uses this authority to instruct and socialize the child. They believe that automatic punishment follows if the rules are broken (Beilin and Pufall, 1992).

Jane was very obedient. When she was young, she could caution fellow playmates against abusing people. When asked why it was wrong to abuse people, she would say that it was wrong because her mother said so and because she would be pinched if she did so. This strict following of rules could also be observed when Jane was playing with her friends. She would strictly follow the rules of the game.

Autonomous morality is shown by children who regard morality as following their own set of rules and laws. In judging actions of other people, they pay attention to whether the actor's intentions were good or bad than the consequences of his or her act (Beilin and Pufall, 1992).

Jane showed independent morality in this stage. Her younger sister could spill food on her but she was able to understand the sister was young and

was not doing it intentionally. Also, when a fellow student stepped on her foot in school she did not get angry if it was not intentional.

According to Piaget, the child's intellectual adaption is an adaptation to the physical and social environment. Peer interactions are crucial to the child's construction of social and moral feelings, values and social and intellectual competence (Beilin and Pufall, 1992). Jane has always interacted well with her female peers and this has made her sensitive to their feelings.

Jane was encouraged by her mother to think for herself and reflect on moral issues in her life. As a result, she was able to rework commands given to her through reinterpretation, differentiation and elaboration in the course of her experiences in life. This is why she is an independent person and this is line with Piaget's theory of social development.

### Conclusion

There are many factors that affect the development of a child. The social, mental and moral aspects are critical. Jane's development from childhood to adulthood largely follows Piaget's theories of social, cognitive and moral development. The only place that she does not fit in is when it comes to maturity as she matured even before reaching the formal operations stage. Being a normal child, her childhood was normal. From Jane's inability to relate socially with men, the effect of parental circumstances on a child's development is inherent.

Piaget's social theory poses a challenge to us to reflect on how to educate children's will and how to foster their construction of feelings of the moral

necessity to respect persons. As in the case of Jane, according children the right to think for themselves when it comes to moral and social judgments helps to raise children who are morally and socially independent and are able act independently.

#### Reference

Beilin, H., & Pufall, P. (Eds). (1992). Piaget's Theory. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.