

Psychology 101

Science



We all come in different shapes and sizes. We all have strengths and weaknesses. What is right for one person may not be right for another. How we feel, think, behave and react in different situations are shaped from when we are born throughout the rest of our lives. Our environment influences our personality, our experiences from when we first walk to the last day we breathe. There are a number of psychologists who support that individuals environment is the key aspect to influencing personality. Sigmund Freud believed that our childhood experiences are what influence our personality as an adult.

The nurture theory proposes that environment is what influences each individual and determines their personality. B. F. Skinner and John Watson both suggest that personality is a result of interaction between the individual and the environment. The case study of “ Genie, the wild child” comes to show how much we require all of the environmental factors in Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs to live a healthy and standard life. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) believed that the psychosexual stages affect your personality and your experiences as you grow up influence your personality as an adult.

Each of Freud’s five stages determines certain characteristics in our personality as we become adults (see appendix 2 for details on stages). It was developed from patients' recollections, dreams and free associations. He “ asserted that sexual instinct was the most important influence on personality. ” (WiseGEEK, 2011). The oral stage develops a sense of trust and comfort. The next period, the anal stage, increases accomplishment and independence. The differences between males and females are developed

throughout the phallic stage, as the individual wants to possess the opposite sex parent and has the desire to replace the same gender parent.

The latent period is important in the improvement of social and communication skills and self confidence. The individual will develop a strong sexual interest in the opposite sex throughout the last stage, the genital stage. “ Fixation gives each problem at each stage a long-term effect in terms of our personality or character. ”(Boeree, George. 1997) This means that if difficulty occurs in the stages, it can affect your personality, such as independence can transform to becoming dependant on others. Everything you become is determined by your first few years.

The adult is exclusively determined by the child's experiences, because whatever actions occur in adulthood is based on an outline laid down in the earliest years of life. Personality comes from adaptive patterns associated to an individual's specific environment. Nature versus nurture is a debate upon the importance of an individual's inborn qualities against personal experiences in influencing or causing individual's personality and traits. Nurture is the influences on development occurring ' from prenatal, parental, extended family and peer experiences, extending to influences such as media, marketing and socio-economic status. (Answers, 2011). Nature is the genetic predispositions that determine how people behave. It provides us with inborn abilities and traits. A case study that supports the influence of nurture is John B. Watson and his partner, Rayner, experiment on ' Little Albert'. This case study conveys that Little Albert did not display any fear towards the white rat or anything furry, until associating the rat with the loud noise. This event produced Little Albert's fear of furry objects and demonstrates that

experiences play a large role in developing our personality and particularly our traits.

If environment didn't play a part in shaping an individual's personality, then identical twins should, supposedly, be exactly the same. “ Although identical twins are genetically identical and share the same family environment, identical twins raised together do not have identical personalities. These differences must then be explained entirely by non-shared environmental effects. ” (Haimowitz, Avi. 2005) It is evident through the case study of ‘ Little Albert’ and the quote above, that people think and behave in certain ways because they are taught to do so. B. F.

Skinner (1904 -1990) proved that human behavior could be conditioned and individuals condition their behavior accordingly to each role and responsibility they undertake. You may find yourself juggling different roles as a parent, child, husband or wife, sibling, worker, and friend. The way we act and react in different positions and situations has been formed by our environment and how we have been taught to respond through our experiences. The ‘ Skinner box’ is an example of operate conditioning (see appendix 1 for image of the Skinner box). It is an experiment, created by B.

F. Skinner to demonstrate a behavior followed by a reinforcing stimulus, which results in an increased likelihood of that behavior occurring in the future. B. F. Skinner placed a rat in the Skinner box. The rat pressed the response lever, releasing a food pellet into the food dispenser. It was not trying to do anything when it first touched the lever, but once the rat learned how to release the food, it began repeating the process. “ The behavior is followed by a consequence, and the nature of the consequence modifies the

organism's tendency to repeat the behavior in the future. (Boeree, George. 1997). As you learn from your experiences and environment, you condition yourself in response to it. Skinner suggests that psychologists focus on observables, that is, the environment and our behavior in it. " Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select... regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors. "- John Watson.

This well known behaviorist, John Watson, conveys that no matter what the individual's nature is, the environment and experiences in one's life can condition the individual and shape their personality. Genie, a thirteen year old girl, was found on the 4th of November in 1970. She had suffered severe sensory and social deprivation as a result of being locked in her room, completely isolated, for almost her entire life. She was haunted by her traumatic upbringing and trapped by memories of her suffering. Her father, Clark Wiley, turned his back on the world after his mother had been killed by a hit and run driver.

The result of his loss was taken out on his family. Genie was particularly targeted by her father, after he was told she may have a slow development. This case study expresses how important parenting is on a child's personality. The lack of interaction and speech from Genie resulted in having no language or cognitive ability. " The left part of the cerebral cortex in Genie's brain, which is responsible for speech and language, has not

received the stimulation required for normal development” (ExtraOrdinaryChildren, 2008)(See appendix 4 for image).

This lack of development has left her speech centres irreparably damaged. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs show that Genie did not meet any of the levels of need (see appendix 3 for Maslow’s hierarchy of need’s pyramid). According to this theory “ they are the literal requirements for human survival. If these requirements are not met, the human body simply cannot continue to function”. (Wikipedia, 2011) She had the physical development of a 7-year old due to her prolonged malnutrition. Genie had a poor quality diet consisting of milk, oatmeal and sometimes an egg. The house was completely dark, all the blinds were drawn and there were no toys, no clothes, nothing to indicate that a child of any age had lived there”. (ExtraOrdinaryChildren, 2008)These experiences of Genie’s entire life, comes to show how much each individual needs their environment and the result of not having nurture in one’s life. Bibliography A2zpsychology, 2006, Freud's Psychosexual Theory. Viewed March 16, 2011, http://www.a2zpsychology.com/great_psychologists/freud_psychosexual_thoery.htm About, 2011, PersonalityPsychology.

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