

Nature vs Nurture Part II

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The nature versus nurture debate has gone back and forth over many years. The nature side of the debate believes that genetics is responsible for a person's behaviors and personality. The nurture side of the debate believes that environment shapes a person through their different life experiences. It is the opinion of this writer that despite an individual's genetic coding, a child's parents, peers and culture play a bigger role than genes in their development. Human nurture is subjected to many issues that can influence people differently even those from the same genetic background. Nurture, in the long run overshadows nature because the influence on an individual's development from environmental factors is greater than genetic influence (Myers, 2013, p. 147). Nurture is relevant to our understanding of mental illness and psychiatric nursing practice. This paper will show how environmental factors shape one's personality, behaviors, and increase their risk for developing a mental illness.

Nurture development starts in the prenatal environment of the womb, and continues after birth where specific environmental influences such as family, peers and culture play a huge role in personal development (Myers, 2013, p. 145). Parents are considered most influential towards education, responsibility, discipline, orderliness, charitableness and interactions with authority figures (Myers, 2013, p. 147). Our childhood experiences, whether positive or negative, can shape our personality and future outcomes as adults. Children who experience poverty, neglect, trauma, inadequate education or the loss of a parent can suffer psychological and emotional consequences later in life leading to mental illness (Fryers, 2013). Parents matter according to Myers (2013, p. 147).

Parenting influence on children is shown the clearest at extremes, abused children become abusers, and neglected children become neglectful. Parents lay the foundation of how their children should act and think ("NBC," 2013). If a parent explained violence as wrong, and television as fictional, a child who sees violence on TV and violence in real life should be able to sort out the difference and know it is wrong. If however a child has not been taught these differences, and they experienced violence in real life, the lines between fictional and reality become blurred ("NBC," 2013).

Peers are considered most influential towards learning cooperation, popularity, style invention and interactions with other peers of the same age (Myers, 2013, p. 147). Peers also influence an individual's development, preschoolers who dislike certain foods will eat that food if the other children around them are eating it, and teenagers that have friends who smoke typically will start smoking (Myers, 2013, p. 147). Children seek out peers who have similar attitudes or interests. This is an important social factor called, the selection effect, that contributes to development and peer bullying (Myers, 2013, p. 147). Cyber-bullying and bullying behavior of peers is associated with low self-esteem, parental divorce, delinquency and depressive or other symptoms (Fryers, 2013). Two to three times more bullying and violence towards peers, were by children who come from homes of violence, maltreatment and family dysfunction (Fryers, 2013).

Culture is influential towards a child's values, ideas, religious beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviors and social appraisal (Belfer, 2013). Human culture supports reproduction and survival by enabling economic and social systems to give us an edge (Myers, 2013, p. 149). Culture shares beliefs and customs that enable us to communicate, play, eat, exchange money and drive without crashing due to agreed-upon rules (Myers, 2013, p. 149). There are many variations among child-rearing in cultures that contribute to a child's behavior. Upper class British parents

handed off caregiving to nannies and sent older children to boarding schools where they became leaders of British society with their peers (Myers, 2013, p. 153). Westerners push their babies in strollers and place them in playpens but spend many hours on language and face to face interaction. In African Gusii societies, the mother carried the baby on her back all day giving lots of body contact but little language or face to face interaction. Westerners may worry about negative effects on the child's language development and African Gussii may worry about lack of body contact (Myers, 2013, p. 153). This shows there is large diversity among cultures and environmental factors in the way children are raised, none proving better than another.

Environmental experiences contribute to the risk factors of developing mental illness. A person's experience undergoes affective and cognitive processing; this influences their self and mental concepts (Rutter, 2005). Some factors that contribute to the 'cause' of mental illness are childhood experiences, personality characteristics, significant life events, relationship quality, genes, social and economic situations, life-style choices and aging (Fryers, 2013, p. 20). Factors that are proven risks for mental illness related to environmental experiences are major trauma, poverty, alcohol consumption, poor education and life-events and loss (Fryers, 2013, p. 20). Chronic antisocial behaviors that stem from ineffective parenting, academic failure and peer rejection, build upon each other and cause limitations later in life such as a depressed mood or involvement in delinquency and drug use (Hicks et al., in press). Clear evidence shows that serious childhood hardships such as abuse cause an increased risk of recurrent psychiatric disorders (Fryers, 2013, p. 20). Suicidal behaviors in young adults occur from a combination of environmental risk factors such as abuse, social disadvantage and parental discord whereas panic disorder behaviors stem from a childhood history of phobias and separation anxiety (Fryers, 2013, p. 21). The chance of developing adolescent psychiatric disorders is 100 times greater in

children exposed to environmental disadvantages (such as family dysfunction) than it is for privileged children (Fryers, 2013, p. 21).

As psychiatric nurses we need to be aware of the different environmental factors that contribute to our patient's personality and behaviors. The patient's family, social and cultural upbringings should be explored and assessed to see what impact they may have on the person's current situation. Mood, past experiences and cultural beliefs can all contribute to a patient's personality and behavior. People tend to gravitate towards pleasant, positively reinforced environments and flee or avoid coercive, punishing environments ("factadmin," 2007). As psychiatric nurses acknowledging these principles can help us to create a pleasant, positive, reinforcing environment where our patient can feel safe and understood, by modifying our patient's environment we can modify their behavior.

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