

Reflection on the Child Psychopathology Class

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During last class of Child Psychopathology, we learned about the relationship between biological factors and human behavior and focused specifically on the theories of development, biological background of human behavior, heritable characteristics and environment. Finally, we studied the role genes play in the development of anti-social behavior. We were able to understand that what is happening in a human body is essential for people's behavior. Hormones and neurotransmitters also influence human behavior (Smith, 2014). Additionally, genetics can be crucial for development of some individual traits as well as different illnesses. However, we also learned that genetics could not influence and predict everything.

The most impressive moment of the class for me was watching the video called *The Genetics' Myth* (2011) that debunks contemporary common misconceptions about genes and explains how genes enable us to survive in, or respond to the environment. The video contains a number of interviews that comprehensively highlight the concept of epigenetics (the science that studies genetics and possible environmental impacts on it) in relation to mental health, addictions and chronic diseases. There was a lot of evidence presented that genetic factors may be determined by environment.

People use to believe 'hereditary' means inevitable and unchangeable, although it is not true. For example, the most frequent cause of death, which is heart disease, has been proved not to be related to genes. Many other diseases like cancer and mental disorders have a genetic background but may not manifest until an individual experiences certain environmental influence. Actually, environment has more essential effect than it is believed. Young children, who experience abuse from an early age, are likely to develop serious psychological problems and mental diseases in adulthood. In other case, breast cancer is inherited, but people with its gene may not inevitably suffer the disease. On the other hand, most people with breast cancer do not have its gene. Addictive behaviors are also not directly connected to genes, instead, they are the result of a certain lifestyle of a person. Dr. Gabor Mate said in the video that nothing itself is

addictive, and nothing is completely genetically programmed (The Genetics Myth, 2011). The individual's susceptibility and their life experience are not the least important.

One great idea introduced in the video suggests how to better treat violent people. Isolating and punishing these people does not bring positive outcomes. Recently, we have been thinking too much about genetics and never about social factors. People do not think about improving social and economic environment when facing a problem of high levels of individual violence. Nevertheless, social factors do contribute to the growth of it (The Genetics Myth, 2011).

Not only the large social environment, but also smaller in-body environment can influence individual development. The Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-1945 is an example that demonstrates the effects of smaller environment (Smith, 2014). During that time little, still unborn, children were starving when they were in the mother's body. To survive, their body adapted to the environment and learned to store every bit of sugar and fat. People believed this ability to be inborn, genetic. However, most of the population born at that time was experiencing high blood pressure and metabolic syndrome for half of a century after the Hunger, because of the environmental conditions they were influenced even before the birth.

In conclusion, in the class I was able to learn about important biological and environmental driving forces of human behavior. The new knowledge has not only improved my understanding of the individual developmental process but has also helped to debunk the popular myth that everything in our body is controlled by genetics.

Reference List

Smith, T. (2014). *Biological Underpinnings to Behavior*. [PowerPoint slides]. Lectures material.

The Genetics Myth. (2011). *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward*. [Online Movie]. Retrieved from

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36HquPzdx4&feature=related>