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## PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

### Read to Discover

1. What are the four main factors that affect the development of personality?
2. How does isolation in childhood affect development?

### Define

personality, heredity, instinct, sociobiology, aptitude, feral children

### Identify

John B. Watson, the Iq, Kingsley Davis, Rene Spitz

What comes to mind when you hear the term *personality*? You probably think of someone's social skills or social appeal. People often use the term to describe someone's specific characteristics or as an explanation for achievements or failures. For example, a woman's skill as a salesperson may be attributed to her assertive personality.

A man's popularity may be credited to his humorous personality. Or a person's lack of friends may be blamed on a selfish personality. When sociologists and psychologists use the term, however, they are referring to more than an individual's most striking characteristics. To social scientists, **personality** is the sum total of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values that are characteristic of an individual.

Our personality traits determine how we adjust to our environment and how we react in specific situations. No two individuals have exactly the same personalities. Each individual has his or her own way of interacting with other people and with his or her social environment. Each individual also has his or her own temperament, or emotional nature.

People's personalities continue to develop throughout their lifetimes. Specific traits change at different rates and to different degrees. Some personality traits seem to remain basically constant throughout a person's life, while other traits undergo dramatic changes. Personality development is more obvious during childhood, when people are experiencing rapid physical, emotional, and intellectual growth. Once people reach adulthood, personality traits change at a slower rate. Thus, most adults appear to maintain stable personalities over time. However, personality development varies from individual to individual.

## Nature Versus Nurture

For many years, social scientists have heatedly debated what determines personality and social behavior. Some argue that it is **heredity**—the transmission of genetic characteristics from parents to children. Others suggest that the social environment—contact with other people—determines personality. This debate is usually referred to in terms of nature versus nurture, or inherited genetic characteristics versus environment and social learning.

The nature viewpoint that held sway throughout the 1800s states that much of human behavior is instinctual in origin. An **instinct** is an unchanging, biologically inherited behavior pattern. Instinct is most often applied to animal behavior. For example, birds possess the instinct to build certain types of nests and to migrate at particular times of the year. Supporters of the nature argument extended this notion of the biological basis of behavior to humans. They claimed that instinctual drives were responsible for practically everything—laughing, motherhood, warfare, religion, capitalism, and even the creation of society itself. At the height of the debate in the early 1900s, social scientists claimed to have identified more than 10,000 human instincts.

From the nurture point of view a person's behavior and personality are the result of his or her social environment and learning. The work of Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov helped this viewpoint gain acceptance. Pavlov found that supposedly instinctual behavior could be taught. To find the relationship between the nervous system and digestion, Pavlov conducted experiments with dogs. He knew that dogs would salivate when they were fed because saliva aids digestion of the food. Pavlov rang a bell every time he fed the dogs. Eventually, he rang the bell but did not feed them. Even so, the dogs still salivated. They had learned to salivate at the sound of the bell. American psychologist John B. Watson suggested that what applies to dogs can also be applied to humans. He claimed that he could take a dozen healthy infants and train them to become anything he wanted—doctors, lawyers, artists, beggars, or thieves.

The emergence of sociobiology in the 1970s re-emphasized the nature viewpoint. **Sociobiology** is the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior. Sociobiologists argue that such varied cultural characteristics and behavioral traits as religion, cooperation, competition, slavery, territoriality, and envy are rooted in the genetic makeup of humans. In general sociobiologists argue that most of human social life is determined by biological factors.

However, few social scientists accept the sociobiologists' argument. Instead, most social scientists assume that personality and social behavior result from a blending of hereditary and social environmental influences. They believe that environmental factors have the greatest influence. Heredity, birth order, parents, and the cultural environment are among the principal factors that social scientists see influencing personality and behavior.

**Heredity** Everyone has certain characteristics that are present at birth. These hereditary characteristics include body build, hair type, eye color, and skin

pigmentation. Hereditary characteristics also include certain aptitudes. An **aptitude** is a capacity to learn a particular skill or acquire a particular body of knowledge. For example, a natural talent for music or art would be considered an aptitude. Most social scientists do not limit aptitudes to inherited capabilities. Instead, they believe that some aptitudes can be learned as well as inherited. Some social scientists also believe that inherited aptitudes often develop only because of environmental factors. Specifically, parents' responses tend to encourage or discourage the development of aptitudes. For example, if a child shows verbal aptitude, parents often respond by praising his or her ability.



**INTERPRETING VISUALS** Even though identical twins share the same genetic makeup, environmental factors contribute a great deal to their personalities and social behavior. *What do these twins have in common? What differences can you identify in these sets of twins?*