

PERSONALITY

Assignment Two

Introduction

The focus of this essay is based on my own developmental and personality issues. I will give a brief account and description of my life history, and examine relevant biological and environmental factors that contributed to my development.

I was born in Auckland, in the 1960s to Christian missionaries who emigrated from Samoa to New Zealand in the 1950s. My mother was the traditional mum who stayed home and looked after the children. She was always there, and spent so much time with us. My father was a very dedicated and hardworking man, who committed a lot of his time with the youth of our church and the community at large. My parents were very loving and supportive. I was brought up to respect myself, and more importantly to respect other people. My relationship with both parents was very close, and they were very involved with my music lessons and sporting activities. My siblings and I were always encouraged to strive for the best, and to take every opportunity by the palms of our hands and run with it.

At the age of nine, my life suddenly changed when my mother (aged 38) died of a heart. Two years later, my father also died of an illness. I was 11 years old and even more devastated. My siblings and I were under 12, and we feared that we would be separated - which we were. My younger sister and I stayed in New Zealand with an aunt and uncle, while my four other siblings went to live with family in Samoa. Although my close relationship with my extended family produced a similar effect that my parents had in my

life, I was still unable to cope with the sudden loss. I was sad and withdrawn for a long time, and the separation from my siblings caused me more grief. My schoolwork suffered as a result, which left me too afraid to ask for help. I made many new friends at my new school, but I steered away from any attention drawn to me. My school teachers reported that although I had strong leadership skills and was always conscientious and hardworking, my shyness and lack of confidence was often a hindrance to my learning. Whilst still in high school, I knew I wanted a career in the media. I was a senior prefect, and I excelled in sports at representative level. My aunt and uncle were very proud, and that was important for me. After my parents died, they continued to encourage my education, music and sports.

Five years after leaving school, I went to work for The New Zealand Herald, starting in the Call Centre, and working my way up the ladder. I had very high expectations of my own work ethics and quite often would stay late into the night to prepare for the next mornings deadlines. After 13 years with the company, and two months before I left to pursue fulltime studies at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), I was awarded the overall winner of the *“2002 New Zealand Herald Advertising Achievement Award”* from six other nominees. The prize was a destination choice of an overseas trip for two, for the value of \$4000. I took my husband with me, whom I married in my late 30s. Today we are happily married.

Close friends and work colleagues described me as a “yes” person who was honest and friendly, and very easy to get along with. My husband says that I am strong and that my calmness, quietness and patience are my assets, while my young nephew and nieces (aged 7-16) think that I am kind and caring.

Question 1

Erikson's psychosocial theory is aligned with the Neo-analytical perspective, and derives from the psychoanalytic perspective of personality. The focus is on several of the theories which reflect the two themes that are most salient in post-Freudian psychodynamic thinking - ego psychology and psychosocial theory (Carver and Scheier, 2004). Erikson's psychosocial theory suggests that personality development occurs throughout life, where the task for the individual is to achieve a sense of identity, with a need to resolve issues at critical stages in life, while environment and experience effects how issues are resolved (Berk, 2001).

In the Basic Trust versus Mistrust I learnt to trust as an infant and received warm responsive care from my parents. I gained confidence that my world was good (Berk, 2001). I was not mistreated nor without physical hugs, so I did not learn to mistrust (Berk, 2001). At the autonomy versus shame and doubt stage (1-3), my parent's would have fostered autonomy by allowing reasonable free choice and by not using force or making me feel shamed (Berk, 2001). At this stage of initiative versus guilt (3-6 years) I learnt a sense of ambition and responsibility when my parents supported my wanting to play the piano, so they put me through weekly lessons. At the industry versus inferiority diffusion stage (6-11 years), my parents died. This stage was marred by difficulties in school, where I became withdrawn, my school grades dropped despite trying hard, and my confidence was replaced with low self-esteem and anxiety. On the other hand, I did learn to develop the capacity to work with others as I was use to sharing with my siblings and working side by side with my cousins. The identity versus role confusion stage (12-

20), gave me a sense of who I was mainly because of the cultural influences that shaped me, but I was also still deciding what I wanted to do with my life and career choices by the time I left school. Although I had many good friends, the intimate versus isolation (young adulthood), was probably a difficult stage for me in terms of establishing intimate ties with others, especially with the opposite sex.

The Five Factor trait theory of personality is associated with the Dispositional perspective. The trait and type approach begins with the assumption that personality consists of stable inner qualities, which are reflected in behaviour (Carver & Scheier, 2004). The Five-Factor trait theory is one of several trait theories including Eysenck's Approach and Cattell's Approach. McCrae and Costa (1999, as cited in Pervin and John, 2001) view the Big Five as basic tendencies to feel and act a particular way, and having a biological basis that is not under the direct influence of the environment.

There are some variations of my personality that contrast across the five themes. Although "Extraversion" is characterized by boldness, forcefulness, and self-confidence, I tend to more of an introvert with traits of quietness, and submissiveness, especially when people ask me to do things - I never say no. The "Agreeableness" factor is a strong feature in my personality. I possess warmth, kindness, politeness (McCrae and Costa, 1999) towards people, and enjoy doing things with my nephew and nieces, and spending time with friends. The "Conscientiousness" factor was clearly evident through my school progress. I worked very hard in school despite the difficulties, and likewise continued into my career life. The "Openness" in my character was displayed through the success of my advertising career with the NZ Herald, and gaining more knowledge of the

newspaper industry. In contrast to the characteristics of “Neuroticism”, calmness and poise, were a regular feature.

Question 5

Culture is what holds a community together, giving a common framework of meaning. It includes how people communicate with each other, how we make decisions, and how we structure our families and who (and what) we think is important (Bolstead & Hamblett (2001). It consists of socially transmitted beliefs and practices that influence our behaviour and personality (Pervin and John, 2001). It constitutes the collective memory of the people and the collective heritage which will be handed down to generations still to come (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2001).

I regard myself as a first generation New Zealander of Samoan background. I grew up surrounded by extended families, church and the traditional culture, which were the key influences that shaped and determined my identity. Although I spoke mainly English at home with my parents, my guardians taught me the foundations of the Samoan language (which is the heart of the culture), and the knowledge of the culture and customs, as they felt it was necessary to keep the culture strong and alive. To any Samoan elder, the highest pride of identity is the ability to speak your own language. My guardians believed that identity is linked to achievement and that if you know who you are, you cannot lose. Unfortunately, since the death of both parents and guardians, so too did the la

Personality is thoroughly cultural, especially because culture influences the meanings that we accept about ourselves and our world, e.g. culture teaches us whether ambition is moral virtue or evidence of sinful pride (Pervin and John, 2001).

My parents and guardian were raised in a monocultural society, such as Samoa, where there is only one set of knowledge and way of doing things, while I grew up in a society where there is the mainstream culture and then the Pacific culture, which is a minority culture. In New Zealand, everything is based on learning, while in the Pacific, knowledge is based on association, knowing your family, village and roots. I grew up being proud of who I am, and my Pacific heritage for example, and yet when I go back to Samoa I am treated as a *Palagi* (European).

Cross-cultural comparisons help to reveal the impact of culture, but they underestimate the centrality of culture by looking for an underlying similarity based on the assumption that culture shapes the expression of personality without changing its core Shweder (1990, as cited in Pervin and John, 2001). In contrast, cultural psychology, assumes that culture helps to create personality, not simply to shape it.

Conclusion:

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