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MY PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT: MEMORY, LIFE SPAN

DEVELOPMENT,

OPERANT CONDITIONING, INTELLIGENCE, AND STRESS

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**Abstract:**

The science of Psychology is a labyrinth full of ideas and explanations as to how the human mind works. Throughout history, several philosophers and psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and Michael Balint have put forth theories and explanations as to why humans behave the way they do and how the mind works. Some philosophers have claimed that humans are naturally predisposed to be greedy and act without regard for others, while others have recognized the potential of free will in humanity. Personally, I am cognizant as to how my own mind functions and the different faculties of intelligence I have, as evidenced by my daily routine in my day-to-day life. And unlike many of my other courses, I can apply lessons from my psychology course and use it to explain occurrences in my everyday life. For example, there is a phenomenon in psychology called classical conditioning, which I can personally apply to myself. I remember eating at a restaurant and catching sight of a Starbucks sign. Later, however, I became terribly ill for some unspecified reason and spent much of the evening throwing up with a headache and lying in bed. Nowadays, when I see a Starbucks, it takes me back to that evening when I felt terribly ill. The classical conditioning comes in where I am reminded of that evening many years ago.

This is not the only concept I have learned, as I have also learned about Memory, Life Span development, Operant Conditioning, Intelligence, and Stress. This paper will dive into each topic and how they have shaped my life.

## Memory

One of the key topics that has stuck with me is memory. The course taught me several types of memory, such as short-term memory, long term memory, and the subconscious. Then, I completed an assignment related to repressed memories and the reasoning as to why most people do not make memories prior to their third birthday. As I pointed out in an earlier assignment, the reason as to why human memories do not begin to form until our third birthday is due to the hippocampus not being fully developed. According to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, “They're made by neurons (nerve cells) and stored in a brain region called the hippocampus. They form when repeated neural stimulation strengthens synapses—the connections between nerve cells.” (einsteinmed.edu)

I also explored diverse ways to improve my own memory, such as getting enough sleep and exercise. I attempt to exercise and move around from time to time so I can refresh my own mind and approach my work from a distinct perspective. When I sit for prolonged periods of time, I often run into roadblocks when I attempt to hash out long projects or papers, such as this one. In addition to moving around and getting exercise, I also attempt to eat healthily to ensure that my brain is being supplied by top-quality nutrients. Should a person live a sedentary lifestyle and only eat junk food, they will begin to have problems with their memory due to blood flow being reduced to their brain and a slower protein intake from their diet.

Finally, the interest in the subjects I study will also play a role in memory retention. I have personal experience with this, as I expressed a great interest in English and History throughout my earlier years. During those classes, I would pay attention the most and would memorize the most from the assignments and practices we were given. It was how I incorporated many

vocabulary words into my vernacular without having to practice as much, unlike many of my peers.

## **Life Span Development**

Another topic that piqued my interest was the concept of life span development. In this case, the course touched on the development of a child's brain and how they perceive and experience the world throughout their young lives. In my case, and for billions of other people, I was born without the ability to remember anything, since the hippocampus had not developed to such a stage yet. However, as I grew, I began to remember bits and pieces of my life until I could start formulating more coherent memories, both for short and long-term use. As the Swiss psychologist Piaget explains, there are four stages in which a child develops and learns to perceive the world. Regarding some of my own work that has been researched from simply psychology.org, A child goes through four stages of development. The stages are listed in this order:

The first stage is the sensorimotor stage, which deals with the infant learning how to coordinate their body and focusing on physical sensations. The second stage is the preoperational stage, which deals with children understanding the world through language and mental imagery. The third stage is the concrete operational stage. Through this stage, the child realizes that people see the world differently from them, use operations, and become more apt at including people in group tasks and projects. The last stage is known as the concrete operational stage which occurs once a child reaches adolescence. The stage allows them to

understand concepts like politics, ethics, and science fiction. I have personally progressed through these stages as I matured both mentally and physically.

I remember having to learn how to coordinate my body and my mother having us do exercises relating to us gaining our balance and mobility. I then remember going to school and learning how to find some basic objects and read basic words. I also held the most sanitized version of the world at this point, believing that it was only full of the best without any evils whatsoever. Then, I went into elementary school and began to learn of the downsides of the world and more complex operations. I also had to learn how to work with people on group projects, and there were plenty of times where I had scrapes with other people my age. Finally, I am currently at the last stage of development, in which I am journeying into the world of politics, ethics, and more complex topics such as psychology, which is the topic I am currently authoring my paper on.

## **Operant Conditioning**

Operant conditioning is defined as achieving a desired behavior through the association or prospect of a reward. This is primarily used for dogs and children when a trainer or teacher wants to get their subjects to behave. As explained by JER Staddon, "Operant behavior is behavior "controlled" by its consequences." (doi.org) While Operant conditioning has many upsides, it can also have downsides, especially if a person only behaves due to the prospect of a reward and does not behave in light of that reward being taken away. I have had subjective experiences with operant conditioning, especially in school. When I was in a school called Union Preparatory Academy, we were required to wear uniforms.

To incentivize excellent behavior, my school instituted a points reward system. The premise behind such a system was that should a student be found exhibiting above-average behavior, they would be able to earn points. At the end of every Friday, students would be able to trade in their points in exchange for a dress-down Friday, which allowed them to dress out of uniform, but with some restrictions. The system did instill good behavior in some students, and it was easy for those who were already behaving in the first place. Although the points system stayed up for a few months, it is a notable example of operant conditioning as people behaved with the expectation of a reward.

## **Intelligence**

The official definition of intelligence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills. However, what this shallow definition does not mention is the types of intelligence. Traditionally, intelligence is assumed through the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to apply skills. People who are unable to do either are presumed to be below average intelligence and thus face ridicule and/or potential exclusion from society, with the added possibility of limited job opportunities. According to web.cortland, “The nine types of intelligence are Verbal-Linguistic, Mathematical-Logical, Musical, Visual-Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Naturalist, and Existential Intelligence.” (cortland.edu) Verbal-Linguistic intelligence deals with well-developed verbal skills, Logical intelligence pertains to the ability to master competency with abstract concepts and problem solving, Musical intelligence deals with appreciating rhythm, Visual intelligence goes with perceiving patterns in images, Bodily intelligence is defined as the ability to control one’s bodily movements, Interpersonal Intelligence allows others to sympathize and commiserate with others, Intrapersonal Intelligence allows you to be self-aware, Naturalist Intelligence helps with categorizing nature, and

Existential Intelligence is what many philosophers are apt in. It pertains to the ability to ponder the existential questions that are ever so present in science. I personally excel most in linguistic and logical intelligence, as I can write eloquently at times, but I am very shy when it comes to verbal communication. I am also average in math and other subjects, but I shine in English and History. As for the other faculties of intelligence, I do give some thought to them, but I am average in those areas.

### **Stress**

And for the final topic I will touch on, the feeling everyone is familiar with, stress. According to the World Health Organization, Stress is defined as a state of mental or emotional strain and/or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. (who.org) There are two distinct types of stress which are eustress and distress. As Drake University explains, “Eustress is stress that inspires you to make a change and has a positive effect on you, and distress is stress that negatively affects you.” (drake.edu) The type of stress most people are familiar with is distress. Distress comes during times of hardship and has mental, psychological, and even physical consequences for the afflicted. It has been proven by multiple scientific studies that stress can exact a physical and mental toll on the body and lead to headaches, sleep problems, fatigue, and panic attacks. I personally have had a few experiences with stress, especially when I was struggling in some classes.

When I was in tenth grade, I was struggling in math class. Despite going to tutoring and trying to practice math during my own time, I still struggled to pass basic concepts of math 4. I remember being under constant stress during that harrowing time and I even broke down a few times as I tried to get through my work and get my grades up. I also suffered from headaches and constant anxiety when I woke up as I would fear the day ahead and I tried to figure out how to

pass prerequisite courses. Fortunately, I managed to score an A in the final exam and get my final grade up to an A in math. Although my stress completely passed instantaneously after the event, I still look on that time as a horrifying time, and it made me more reluctant to take more challenging courses for fear of repeating a similar experience. However, I am incredibly grateful to be in my current position where I am relaxed and have minimal stress.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, General Psychology has taught me quite a lot about myself and others. I have not only learned how to examine myself from a psychological perspective, but I have a better appreciation of the human mind and how to better take care of my mind for myself and others. I have made some changes to my life ever since I took the course, such as going out more and socializing with friends, or even doing something small such as skipping out on junk food for the day and eating a healthier alternative. The five topics I have covered have had the most profound impact on me as I deal with them most on a day-to-day basis, whether indirectly or directly. To conclude, I hope to continue making a name for myself and building my future to new heights with the aid of the newly acquired knowledge from this course.

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