Psychology: Case Study – Eric B. Essay, Research Paper

Case History of Eric B.

Eric is a 6-year old African-american male who was raised in an impoverished inner city neighborhood in Chicago. Drugs and violence surrounded his daily life. With a single-mother who involved herself in a series of relationships with abusive boyfriends, Eric found himself beat with a belt, and may have been sexually assaulted. His mother was not home that often, and he was forced to sit outside on the stoop so that his grandmother, that also lived with them, could sell drugs. His mother was uneducated and supported the family with her public assistance grant. He has never met his father, and his uncles are in jail. His father was convicted of robbery and drug charges but Eric was told that he was shot to death in an attempted robbery. He dreams of one day avenging his father’s death and acts it out when he plays alone. He has a history of terrorizing animals and killed the family cat. He also did poorly in school, being diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. He is constantly involved in fights and has no companions. When home, he mostly involved himself in action movies and cartoons. Eric b efriends a boy who lived next door to him. One day he steals the boys bicycle and when the family comes to claim it, Eric threate ns the boy by saying that he was going to kill his baby brother. A few weeks later, Eric broke into the apartment and assaulted the baby, beating him nearly to death.

According to Eric Erikson, a student of Freud, his psychosocial theory states that you have to move through stages of development to have your needs met. One needs to be psychologically ready to move on to the next stage. This depends on the social environment they are in Eric, being six years old is in the iniative vs. guilt stage of Erikson’s Stage Theories. In this stage, he is suppose to be ready to take iniative in his own activities and make plans and goals for the future. If his mother does not allow him to take iniative then he will feel guilt for his attempts at independence. He may also be in the industry vs. inferiority stage. This means he should be aware of his responsibilities such as homework and chores. He should be able create a sense of industry, if praised and rewarded by his mother. If not, then he will feel inferior. He would also be influenced by his peers and teachers.

However, this is merely how is should be, but is not how it is for Eric. Lack of iniative is not the problem. Without a parental figure present, Eric was forced to take on too much iniative and make too many decisions on is own. He feels no guilt in being independent but according to Erikson, should feel inferior due to the lack of praise and reward from his mother.

According to Jean Piaget, and his stages of cognitive development, kids construct their knowledge of the world through reorganization and they move to higher levels of psychological functioning. Piaget looked at how kids think of themselves and their environment, when moving through each stage. In these stages, children select what they see and they interpret. In the preoperational stage, ranging from ages 2-7, children should have a mastery of language and use words to represent objects. In this stage, children cannot use developmental capacities systematically. They are quite egocentric, having the tendency to interpret the world through your own position. They attribute their own thoughts to inanimate objects, known as animism. For example, a child may say that the sky is sad because the sun is not shining. They have no sense of centration, a tendency to concentrate on one aspect of a problem, like having tunnel vision. These are called conservation studies, which are a series of tests for children to test their concepts of length, quantity, area, and volume. For example, if you were to place two glasses in front of a child, one tall and thin, the other short and stout, filled with the same amount of liquid in each, he will think the tall one contains more liquid because the glass looks full.

In the story, Eric is in the preoperational stage of Piaget’s cognitive development stages. Eric is probably not moving to a higher level of psychological functioning. He seems to have trouble socializing. He has no friends at school and is constantly getting into fights with his peers. I feel he is unstable, both emotionally and psychologically.

When dealing with Mead’s theory of development, he says we learn through two stages. These two stages are the play stage and the game stage. In the play stage, usually infancy to age four, we imitate others behaviors and there seem to be no rules. The game stage, commonly age five through twelve, children play games like hide and go seek, tag, and there is a lot of group involvement among peers. Rules and regulations are important in this stage. According to Mead, in order to take on the role of another you need to know the rules to play. This leads to taking on the role of the generalized other, which means children know general morals, values, and rules of his or her particular culture.

In the story, Eric seems to have been left in the play stage, when according to Mead, should, be in the game stage due to his age. He does not seem to have any rules to abide by which is part of the description of the play stage. If Eric was in the game stage, he would be playing games like hide and go seek, instead of torturing animals. Another part of Mead’s theory was that in the play stage we imitate others behavior. Eric was abused and so I feel that this is where the violent behavior in school and towards animals came from.

Albert Bandura and his observational learning theory corresponded with the play stage. It states that children learn by imitating others. He did research on the effects television violence on children. He took groups of children and exposed half of them to violent television, while the others watched regular t.v. stations. He then observed them as they played together and noticed more aggression in the kids who had been exposed to the violent programs.

Socialization is the lifelong process by which people learn their human potential and the culture of their society. Culture consists of values, languages, norms, rules and beliefs of a society. There are many agents of socialization that account for human behavior. Cultural learning is most intense during infancy and early childhood. Eric was probably neglected of many experiences that would teach him this knowledge. If socialization is absent during early stages, we can never regain it and this presents a lack of social experience. This has an effect on relations the child will have later in his childhood. This is obvious in Eric’s case, through his behavior in school. Once again we see that his constant fighting and lack of friends is due to his lack of socialization skills. Some of the outcomes of socialization are intended. Tracking in schools is intended, where children of different skill levels are seperated so that smarter children are not held back by the slower ones. Eric was put in a special education class when he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder.

Eric was a troubled child. Before the actual beating of the baby, there were several warning signs that he might snap and committ acts of violence. He often fantasized about avenging his father’s death through violent means. He also killed his own pet, and terrorized stray dogs. Another warning sign was his constant acts of violence in school, fighting with peers and even hitting a teacher on one occasion. The fourth sign was that Eric mostly enjoyed watching action movies, and cartoons, where violence was displayed regularly.

There are also many risk factors that made it more likely that Eric would grow up showing violent behavior. He grew up as an African-American male living in poverty in a single-parent home. He was surrounded by drugs and abuse and grew up without a father figure. There was evidence of sexual assault, and if that happened that would attribute to violent behavior. Attention deficit disorder, although not directly related to violence, may have attributed to frustration, which in turn could lead to anger and aggressive behavior. Also, lack of socialization leads to deviant behavior and juvenile delinquency.

Eric is now in a facility for troubled children. If he were to be returned to the same environment that he was taken from, I feel that he would revert back after a period of time. He is still young and very impressionable. His surrounding is still responsible for much of his behavior. Even if he was much better in the facility, I think he would get back his old habits, and become violent and introverted. I strongly feel that he should not be returned to his home. If he was taken from the facility and put into a good home, I think that he would have a good chance of becoming a more social person and have the possibility of leading a normal, healthy life.