

Hello, class. So in today's lesson, we're going to take a look at psychopathology, which is the study in psychology of mental disorders, and, in particular, we're going to be identifying what are the causes of different kinds of mental disorders. Now, it's important to identify what causes a mental disorder so we can determine what would be the best treatment for it. But it's difficult to actually determine which factors within a person have the most influence.

So to examine this a little bit further, we're going to frame it within another concept within psychology that you may or may not be familiar with called nature versus nurture. Now, there is a debate about which one of these has the biggest effect on different kinds of psychological development. So nature refers to any kind of innate biological and genetic factors that a person is born with or they develop normally over the course of their lives. So these are the kind of internal factors that are difficult for a person to influence in any kind of way, because frankly, it's something they're born with.

An example of a mental disorder that heavily relies on the nature aspect, the innate factors within a person, is psychopathy, or sociopath, which is to say, kind of what we call someone who is psychotic in some kind of way. And originally, a lot of psychologists thought that this was due to a person's abusive childhood. So a lot of that early kind of mental trauma was what actually caused the development of these mental disorders.

But recently a lot of people have been finding that there are a lot of innate genetic factors that go into the development of sociopathy, which is to say that a person who has a normal childhood can still develop psychopathy and still develop into a person with these kinds of severe mental disorders. It's regardless of the environmental factors.

Now, the other side of the coin from nature is the nurture aspect. And nurture is, as I said, those environmental factors. This can be things like culture, the culture that person grows up in; their childhood, any kinds of early developments within their life, say, their parents and those influences; and also any kinds of significant life events that might have some kind of large mental injury or shock on the person. Oftentimes it's resulting from some kind of violence or abuse or neglect or any kind of extreme stress that that person might have. In other words, this is what we call psychological trauma, any kinds of negative psychological affects that cause large amounts of stress on a person.

An example of something that develops due to nurture would be a phobia, which is a say any kind of large fear or unfounded fear of another kind of objects, which can develop due to some kinds of traumatic experiences within especially the early childhood, but throughout a person's life. Another example would be post-traumatic stress disorder, which is a disorder that develops as a result of severe psychological trauma. For example, when soldiers

return from a wartime setting, oftentimes the trauma of being within that setting causes them to develop this mental disorder.

The psychologist Donald Hebb once answered the question about which one is more important-- nature or nurture-- by saying, which contributes more to the area of a rectangle-- the length or its width? Which is to say that both of them are equally important to determining how something actually develops. So we need to consider both of them to have a full picture of psychological disorders.

So a good way of framing this is what we call the stress-vulnerability model, which is a theory of psychopathology which says that the cause of mental disorders is a combination of both biological and environmental approaches. So basically what it says is that people are born with certain kinds of genetic susceptibility to a mental disorder. So you're more inclined to develop that mental disorder, but that disorder doesn't actually develop unless that person is exposed to some kind of environmental stresses or, in other words, psychological trauma. So if that person doesn't receive that psychological trauma, they don't necessarily develop that disorder, which is to say that nature isn't fully causal for the development of that mental disorder, and neither is the nurture. Both of them work in conjunction.

A good example of this model is the mental disorder of schizophrenia, which has shown-- it has been shown to have a large biological component, which is to say that certain people are more-- that are more closely related genetically are more likely to actually develop that disorder if another person in their family has it. But environmental factors are also related to the development of schizophrenia, which is to say prenatal nutrition is important for the development of schizophrenia. So lack of nutrition could cause a person to be more likely to develop this.

Early childhood trauma has also been related to the development of schizophrenia and living within some kind of disturbed family environment as well. So stresses that cause those people with biological predispositions to develop that disorder can help us to identify those kinds of people with those biological predispositions and also to help prevent those things from occurring within environmental factor or an environmental level as well. So you can see how this model is really helpful, especially in the development of treatments for different kinds of mental disorders.