

## Research Proposal

### Feral Children

On November 4, 1983 in Novaya Blagoveschenka, Ukraine Oxana Malaya was born. Oxana was born into a life that one would never wish for, a childhood spent amongst a pack of dogs. Oxana was born to two alcoholic parents who one day lost sight of their three year old daughter with no serious intentions of recovering her. The young Oxana crawled through the backyard into the dog kennel kept at the back of the property. Inside the dog kennel Oxana was kept warm by the dogs and was given shelter from the outside world. There in the dog kennel Oxana survived off of whatever the dogs had hunted or given by her parents. Sometimes the food consisted of raw meat or scraps thrown out of the house. Oxana was also sometimes nursed from a mother dog in the pack. Occasionally Oxana was allowed to enter her family's house, but then returned back to the dog kennel in the backyard. It was until she was eight years old in 1991 that a neighbor called the police and reported a girl living amongst animals. After this call police arrived and rescued Oxana and sent her to a rehabilitation center. When she was rescued officials found that Oxana barked, walked on all fours, and could not eat food properly. Oxana had developed all of the same traits as the dogs she had been living amongst for the past five years.

A feral child is a human child who has lived in seclusion from human society at a very young age. These children have little to no experience interacting with other humans using interactions such as love, affection, human language, or other common human behaviors. Feral child cases are extremely rare in the United States and are more often reported in other countries that may be poverty stricken or

poorly governed. These cases include and are not limited to child abuse, neglect and abandonment. Not all feral children have been taken in and raised by animals like Oxana's case however. Many feral children cases are reported as young children who have lived their crucial developmental years of life in solitary confinement away from all forms of human interaction.

In an article previously discussed in class, *The Power of Situations* by Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, Ross and Nisbett inform their readers that behavioral intuition is heavily influenced by environment that one is in while making these decisions. In this article Ross and Nisbett write of a psychology experiment performed by Darley and Batson in 1973 with a group of students from a religious seminary. In this experiment Darley and Batson's subjects were students who were on their way to deliver a practice sermon. The subjects would come across a person who was begging for help. Of the subjects who thought they were going to be late only 10 percent helped the subject in need and of those subjects who thought they had plenty of time 63 percent of them helped. This psychology experiment can be related to feral child cases such as Oxana Malaya. Oxana's living situation for the first few years of her life heavily influenced her behavior. Oxana's behavioral traits were adopted from the dog pack she had been living with. Because there was no human interaction in her crucial development years she adapted to her surroundings which taught her canine characteristics.

In *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, an experiment and article by Philip Zimbardo, Zimbardo places his subjects in a stimulated prison environment to see how behavior is affected by certain situations. Some subjects played the role as prison guards while others played the role of prisoner. The guards gained complete control over their prisoners and made them do things that were inhumane and question morality. After this experiment in an interview with the guards, the guards insisted that their behavior was not one of their own and that they cannot make sense of why they did the things they did. This furthermore supports the idea that situations influence certain behaviors such as Oxana's canine

behaviors. What makes us human? Being raised up by humans which is nature? Or is it our environmental surroundings that make us who we are, our nurture? Thus this brings about the debate of nature vs. nurture.

In the debate of nature vs. nurture within psychology it is the argument of whether certain behavioral characteristics are produced because they are inherited genetically or are produced because they are acquired. It is commonly known that traits such as hair color, race, eye color, and height are all inherited through nature. It is in our genetics that we receive those characteristics. But the conflict comes into play when we question where does our behavior come from? According to Nick Collins, Science Correspondent, strong environmental factors determine a certain ones characteristics behavior and all characteristics differ greatly across the country and the world. In this essay I will be covering topic of nature vs. nurture in the context of cases of feral children such as Oxana Malaya.