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Nature vs Nurture

There has always been a large controversy over whether inherited genes or the environment influences and affects our personality, development, behavior, intelligence and ability.  This controversy is most often recognized as the nature verses nurture conflict. Does how you are raised affect your views as an adult more than what your genetic codes dictate? If your family has always been carpenters, are you destined to be a carpenter because of your genes or because of your familial upbringing?  Some people believe that it is strictly genes that affect our ways of life, others believe that it is the environment that affects us, and some believe that both of these influence our behavior.  Either way, social scientists have been struggling for centuries deciding whether our personalities are born or made.  Tests are done often on identical twins that were separated to see how they are each influenced by their separate environments. When identical twins are separated at birth and grow up to have identical tastes is that an argument that it has more to do with nature than nurture?

The way a child is raised is a major contributor to the child’s personality as it ages. Children are born with a blank slate, known as “Tabula Rasa”, and the first few years of one’s life are important to the development of personality.   There are many different theories about this subject, but all point out that the child’s behavior is affected by nurture. Psychologists are quick to support the nature debate because it deals with the genetic make-up of a person and biological psychology, which is fact. First of all, a person’s physical traits, such as eye color and blood type are genetically determined, even though there are certain ways to alter your look. Personality is proven to be heritable to an extent. Studies have proven that biological siblings are more similar in personality that adoptive siblings. In addition, a person’s genes can determine whether a person is predisposed to a disease or illness, such as diabetes and Alzheimer’s. A person who is affected with those types of diseases shows how nature can directly affect the development of an individual. A new technique called developmental genetic analysis is a procedure that examines the effects of genes throughout a person’s life. There is no denying the fact that a person can be affected by both nature and nurture. One topic that may fall in between is debating whether Intelligence is derived from either genes (nature) or from their surrounding and personal leanings (nurture). Intelligence is one of the most important and talked topics in psychology but even after so many time and research, there is no exact definition of what makes intelligence. Researches defined intelligence as a “single, general ability. But other people think that it is skills and talents of a person. I personally believe that a person can be affected by both nature and nurture throughout their entire life.

Nature, this is the biology of the person, the genetics. We inherit many traits from relatives such as hair color, eye color, height, and many other traits. These are traits that usually cannot be changed naturally. They are a part of our genes that are encoded on our chromosomes. It is a known fact that all of this stems from biology, there is no doubt about that. What the real questions is, when it comes to nature, is whether or not more abstract traits such as behavior, temperament, fear, and personality come from our genes as well. Twin/Adoption studies are often performed to test the nature vs. nurture issue. What a twin/adoption study, in this case, refers to is when two identical twins are separated at birth, both are living in two different parts of the world and being raised by two different families. Results, sometimes even shocking ones, are found when the twins eventually reunite and discuss their lives. What is often found is that twins raised in completely different environments share very similar characteristics such as the same interest, talents, personalities, and behavior. This goes to prove that genetics can have an effect on the way people behave and so on. This case was written into a memoir written to inform about a pair of twins who were separated at birth by two persons Peter Neubauer, a child psychiatrist, and Viola Bernard, a child psychologist. The memoir is named “*Identical Strangers*”, by the twins Paula Bernstein and Elyse Schein; both wrote the memoir to inform people about their case and how is connected to the topic of nature versus nurture.

Nurture, this has to do with our environment. The question on the nurture side of the argument is whether or not a person's environment influences the person he or she will become. For example, if nurture is indeed the cause of a person's behavior, attitude, and personality this would mean that others that surround the person have influenced a particular behavior if you may. This would mean that a person is not really born with a personality at all; it will be the people in his or her life or society that will shape the kind of person he or she will become. British Philosopher, John Locke was on the nurture side of the argument and believed that everyone is born with a Tabula Rasa, Latin for Blank Slate. He believed that at birth, the mind is a blank slate and that our experiences write on these slates. According to this theory, we are born without knowledge of what we should fear or how we should act, it is up to our environments to teach us how to act and behave. A case study was done as well in order to prove whether or not this is true, if humans are really born with a blank slate and learn to fear stuff. The case study included a baby boy and a psychological theory which included Ivan Pavlov’s classical conditioning. In 1920, an experiment was conducted by John B. Watson and his assistant Rosalie Rayner at Johns Hopkins University. This experiment included an 11 month old child, Albert. In this experiment, Albert was given a white rat to play with which was now a natural stimulus. Albert showed no fear of the rat; in fact, he reached out towards the rat that walked all around Albert. Later on in the experiment, the rat was again brought to Albert except this time the rat was repeatedly brought to him with a loud clanking noise. This scared little Albert and because of the unpleasant loud noise, Albert would begin to cry. The loud clanking noise was the unconditioned stimulus which resulted in an unconditioned response. After a while of Albert being exposed to the rat along with the loud noise, he was exposed to the rat alone, without any noise accompanied by it at all. The rat now became a conditioned stimulus. This caused Albert to cry every time he saw the rat, expecting a loud noise along with it. He now feared the rat because he feared the noise. This was a conditioned response. After Albert was taught to fear the rat, Watson continued the experiment by introducing other furry objects to Albert including a black rat, a dog, and a Santa Claus mask with a furry beard. Albert feared all of these things. Little Albert was taught to fear. With this case study it’s obvious that nurture has affected the way the child acted around a certain animal or object; concluding that a child is affected by nurture or its environment and its influence.

It seems to be that there is a great amount of evidence that supports each side of the nature vs. nurture argument. While many psychologists may choose one side as their support and as much evidence as they may have, there is what seems to be an equal amount of evidence on the other side as well. Yes, nature does affect us for the simple fact that we sometimes share the exact same characteristics as family members or by the fact that a pair of twins can share the same interests and personalities even though they have never met. And yes, nurture does affect us and we can see the proof through the Little Albert experiment alone. Nature and Nurture are both a part of our lives and they both shape who we are.

Work Cited

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