Nature Vs Nurture Essay, Research Paper

Nurture or Nature?

The controversy over what determines who we are, whether it is Nature (heredity, our biological make up) or Nurture (our environment) is taking a new shape. Through the past decades, psychologists have developed different theories to explain the characteristics of human-beings. Usually, these theories were one directional in the nature / nurture question. Today, a new approach to deal with this question is emerging. This new approach finds a middle ground between nature and nurture. The conclusion that nature and nurture are complementary and work hand and hand to shape a behavior is not a compromise. It is a result of numerous studies. Studies on heredity and environment plus their affects on determining one s development and behavior. In fact, the more we understand about development and behavior, the more obvious it becomes that nature and nurture are similar influences rather than determinants. Ultimately, What is it that makes us who we are?

Our genes made us. We animals exist for their preservation and are nothing more than their throwaway survival machines. This is what Richard Dawkins states in his book, The Selfish Gene. Dawkins argues that we are merely a product of our genes and our main purpose in life is to serve the genes, become distribution agents and ensure their continuance. Before we consider Dawkins statement, the term nature must be defined.

Nature represents what we are born with and cannot control. Our biological make up is determined by the genes we receive from our parents, residing in the 23 pairs of chromosomes, 23 from each parent. A gene is a segment of DNA that provide a blueprint to pass on genetics or hereditary information (Microsoft). These genes not only affect our outlook, but also play a significant role in determining our behavior and our characteristics.

Through new genetic studies, clinical observation, and research on identical twins and adopted children, we are becoming increasingly aware that many of the human characteristics previously taken for granted as products of childhood rearing and environment are rooted in the genetic matrix (Neubrauer 38). Studies of identical twins, whom were separated at birth, have provided researchers with a lot of clues about the role of heredity factors in every day life behavior. Twins (monozygotes) are of extraordinary importance when studying heredity because they share identical copies of genes. An interesting study on twin brothers who were separated at birth and raised in different countries by respective adoptive parents showed that they both kept their lives neat, neat to the point of pathology. Their clothes were preened, appointments met precisely on time. When asked about the reason they felt to be so clean, the first one replied, My mother, when I was growing up, she always kept the house perfectly ordered. She insisted on every little thing returned to its proper place,… I learned from her. What else could I do? When his twin brother was asked the same question he answered The reason is quite simple. I m reacting to my mother, who was an absolute slob (Neubrauer 21). In this example, we see a natural preference based on heredity. Both twins blamed their mothers for their behaviors, while none of the mothers required such neatness.

Take for instance schizophrenia, a disease characterized by hallucinations, delusions, flat or inappropriate emotional expression, paranoia and suspiciousness. New findings point out to its relatedness to genetics. Genetic markers for schizophrenia are founded on chromosomes 22, 19, 15, 13, 9, 8 and 5 ( Shore 1). These examples reveal the genetic role in our development. Genetic analysis of behaviour is complex because behaviour reflects both genetic and environmental influences (Rydelius 1). Even though scientists have only identified 16,000 out of the total 100,000 genes, many psychological diseases are on the verge of being unraveled

The second theory for our characteristics, personality and behavior is nurture. Here, nurture represents our surroundings. Our parents, class-mates, colleagues, our value system and our society as a whole. Nurture advocates argue that man is a product of his environment. Some extremists went as far as saying: give us any new born infant and we will shape him/her just the way we want, by placing him/her in the desired environment. The absence of a nurturing caregiver in the earliest, most vulnerable stages of life can result in a failed development of a conscience, a bad seed (De Angelis 1). Here we are told that social deprivation at different stages of development can lead to abnormalities in personal characteristics, which may produce severe and long-lasting physical, neural and psychological consequences.

It is also interesting to consider the gender differences due to the change in environment. Unfortunately not long ago, women were considered inferior to men in their achievements. Today, even though the misconception of gender roles in society is still present, we can clearly see the gap between men and women narrowing due to the change in environment.

The new prospective emerging to help bring the nature / nurture argument to rest displays that there is no war between nature and nurture. This war seems irrational because it is the interaction of nature and nurture that defines our behavior, who we are. A question such as, Why did you kill your parents? cannot be answered by, They were mean to me. In contrast and an even more absurd answer such as, My genes made me do it, obviously the answer is a combination of both. In understanding a behavior, both nature and nurture are taken into consideration. Moreover, it is perfectly obvious that human social life is related to human biology…Of course, neither biological nor cultural determinists ever wish entirely to exclude the significance of the other (Lewontin 267-268).

Many psychological illnesses can be explained as a result of combined genetics and environmental factors. As already stated, schizophrenia has genetic basis. It is also a fact that this mental disease is triggered by environmental factors including family factors and external stress. No two individuals are the same. Not even monozygotic twins have the same environment. Every person is unique and nonrecurrent (Dobzhansky 8).

In conclusion, it can be stated that our development and behavior are products of the interaction between nature and nurture. Scientists confirm that we are predisposed to certain traits and behaviors but this predisposition is susceptible to modification by genetics as well as environmental factors. It is no longer necessary to develop opposing arguments to, “Is it Nature or Nurture That Determines Who We Are?” We learn that it is the combination of these two vital factors that shape and define our development and behavior.

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