Nurture Plus Nature Essay, Research Paper

Nurture Plus Nature

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The classic debated topic of nurture versus nature has been, and always

will be an argumentative subject in the scientific world. Some psychologists and

scientists share the view that our behavioral aspects originate only from the

environmental factors of our upbringing. While other opposing specialists argue

the outlook in science that agrees with the naturalist idea. This concept of

naturalistic ideas supports the hereditary genetic framework, inherited from our

parents, is the sole determining factor in our behavioral characteristics. These

two opposing viewpoints have produced a multitude of ideas, theories, and

arguments in the history of psychology.

John Broadus Watson, the father of American behaviorism, greatly

reinforced the source of nurture by studying learned and adaptive behavior

patterns in our environmental surroundings (Rathus p.13). During this same time

of revolutionary ideas in psychology, American psychologist, Arnold Gesell

supported the opposite views of Watson. Gesell theorized that “physical and

motor growth and development is monitored and regulated by an automatic natural

process”(Rathus p.13). Each of these ideas has persisted strongly in the world

of psychology from the nineteenth century on into the twentieth, but now a new

and united psychology world acknowledges both theories equally. It is imagined,

today, that the explanation of our behavioral characteristics originates from

both our heredity, and the environment in which we were raised.

This report supports the theory that both aspects of nurture, with the

addition of nature are involved in and explain our complete behaviors. Many

studies and experiments have been conducted in recent years of psychology to

give this combined idea its appealing thesis. A great deal of research and

experimentation has been conducted in order to solve the puzzling results that

derive from situational differences in being raised. The different causes and

effects of various situations, focus on the actual importance, and necessity of

proper nurturing in childhood development (Turecki). Studies on the early

developing years in children show how effects of various environmental

situations can cause mixed attitudes, personalities, beliefs, sexual preference,

and other behavioral patterns in children (Turecki & Adams).

For example, studies have been conducted on whether children that have

been raised by single parents are going to develop differently than if both

natural parenting members were present through a child’s infancy and adolescents.

There are also cases being studied about step parenting, or entirely different

parenting with the process of adoption. With a shocking change of one or both

parents in any stage of life, attitudes, and reactions are apt to become altered

with a new lifestyle. Also with step or adopted parents, entirely different

siblings could possibly become added to the family structure, altering the

environments of all affected children. Psychologists have found that, although

various situational differences can be traumatic in a child’s life, the

influence of the upbringing environment doesn’t overshadow the hereditary

source of behavior (Rathus p.112).

Extreme concern has also risen about the effects of such traumatic

childhood events and genetical characteristics on sexual orientation. The

subject of gay or lesbian parenting is also a major concern not only in

psychology, but for many people around the world. Psychologists wonder if the

affects of this erratic situational difference will result in a inner-conflict

between a child’s hereditary instincts and environmental behavior. Although the

factors of genetics may have a small deciding component to sexual orientation,

psychologist John Money, concluded that “sexual orientation is not under the

direct governance of chromosomes and genes” (Rathus p.367-368). Children from

these conditions have usually been found to acquire a more admissible attitude

towards homosexuals through this altered environmental upbringing. However,

children raised in these same conditions may, or may not display homosexual

tendencies determined by both genetic factors and environmental experiences.

In other exceptions, children often develop problems even though their

environment seems to be entirely common. Psychologists have come to question

the quality of the relationship between parent and sibling, and also the raising

and discipline methods. Take the example of a naughty or extremely hyperactive

young boy raising hell, and throwing tantrums out in public. When we witness

children in this category, we often automatically think, “Why doesn’t his mother

control him?” We assume that the cause of his behavior problems can be found in

his environment, possibly poor parenting techniques. This false assumption,

however, may be an unfair judgment upon actual quality parenting. Recent

researchers have shown that children may be born with a variety of personality

characteristics which can lead to behavioral problems, and are not related to

poor parenting techniques (Turecki).

Psychologist and twin researcher David Rowe stated that “Parents should

be blamed less for kids who have problems and take less credit for kids who turn

out well” (Turecki). In the circumstance of rowdy children, psychologists often

question both sides of genetic and environmental factoring. Are mischievous

children born that way, or raised that way? The answer may be both. With

pioneering studies on temperamental children, Stella Chess, M.D., and Alexander

Thomas, M.D., concluded that children were initially born a certain way, and

then because of the way they interacted with their environment, they continued

to grow this way. Chess and Alexander also concluded through their “difficult

child” research in the late 1950’s, that ten percent of normal children were

difficult children from birth (Tuecki). Expanding on the research of Chess and

Alexander, Stanley Turecki, M.D., reestimated that twenty percent of normal

children were temperamentally difficult from the time of birth. Turecki, a

confused parent himself, recommended that “parents of difficult children make an

important distinction between willful misbehavior which is under the control of

the child, and expressions of innate temperament, which are really beyond a

child’s control” (Turecki). Thus it is crucial for parents to recognize which

misbehaviors are related to genetic aspects and which are associated with

behavioral decisions when discipline is necessary.

Psychologists such as Turecki, Rowe, Alexander, Chess and numerous

others have all added contributing ideas and research to the point of nature

plus nurture, but one man’s revolutionary research and ideas could not be

ignored on this subject. Thomas J. Bouchard’s famous studies on twins at the

University of Minnesota allowed the comparison between exact human genetic

copies (”John Bouchard” Encarta Encyclopedia). These unique experiments modified

the scientific views of genetic similarities and the influence of environmental

surroundings. This research conducted by Bouchard and other twin researchers

also presented accurate information on the importance of heredity and

environment (Turecki). Similarities between identical and even fraternal twins

supports the superior importance of a genetical impact on behavior. In the

opposite view, however, differences intervening between behaviors of identical

or fraternal twins defends the importance of the upbringing environment (Rathus

p.112).

Research in this subject, originating from Bouchard and others, has

revealed an extensive range of similarities between identical twins raised

together and separately. It is evident that two children sharing all one hundred

percent of their genetic makeup (identical) will present several similarities,

compared to children that only share fifty percent of similar genes. The

physical appearance of identical twins will obviously be more alike in

resemblance, height, weight, and even have more closely related blood

cholesterol levels, than fraternal twins, or other siblings altogether (Rathus

p.112). By studying identical twins that had grown up separate from each other,

Bouchard was appalled by the similarities that endured just as though they had

been reared in the exact environment. Some of these strong behavioral traits

included shyness, activity levels, risk aversion, achievement, optimism,

irritability, sociability, cognitive development, physical gestures, patterns of

speech, and even similar hair-styles and brands of toothpaste (Turecki & Rathus

p.112).

Being a twin involves sharing almost everything together in life from

toys, rooms, or clothing to appearance and psychological characteristics.

Unfortunately, sharing psychological characteristics through hereditary can

possibly lead to sharing psychological disorders as well. It is clear that the

closer the genetic similarities are between twins (identical or fraternal),

family members, or perhaps distant cousins, the more likely similar disorders

are receptive to people in the same gene pool. Studies have proven that

identical twins have a higher fate, than fraternal twins, to share psychological

disorders such as autism, anxiety, substance abuse, and schizophrenia (Rathus

p.112). Hypoglycemia, diabetes, alcoholism, lactose intolerance, and other

biological disorders in the metabolism can also become mutual problems between

identical twins, and also, with a less chance, in fraternal twins as well

(Masters). Determining from the evidence presented by research and studies on

twins, it may appear that the genetic heredity of nature has a prevailing edge

over the environmental factors of behavior. Following his extensive research on

twins, Thomas Bouchard concluded that 1) “Genetic factors exert a pronounced and

pervasive influence on behavioral variability, and 2) the effect of being reared

in the same home is negligible for many psychological traits”(Turecki).

Following his various research on twins it is indisputable that Bouchard heavily

supported the genetical factors involved in behavioral characteristics.

Although Bouchard presented quality evidence behind his statements

supporting the general roles in behavior, the various effects of extreme

environmental situations was overlooked in his findings. This contradicting

evidence later resurfaced through research by Adler, Plomin, Rende, and others

(Rathus p.345). Bouchard also expressed his optimism in genetics, stating that

seventy percent of the variations for intelligence quotient (IQ) is linked to

heredity (Turecki). The topic over the influence of genetics on intelligence has

also become a common disputed topic. These new experts have balanced the

importance of heredity plus environment on intelligence despite Bouchard’s

original speculations through his related studies. Similar twin studies,

identical to Bouchard’s, have resulted in concluding that closely related

kindred do, infact, share similar IQs than compared to distant family members or

non-related people. These studies also revealed supporting evidence that the

influences of environmental factors can equally contribute to IQ. scores as well.

Identical twins, fraternal twins, siblings, and cousins raised in diverse

situations from one another, resulted in dissimilar intelligence levels( Rathus

p.344-345).

Dr. William Greeno, a neuroscientist at the University of Illinois, has

experimented with situational differences and the effects on intelligence.

Greeno exposed laboratory rodents to several types of laboratory environments

ranging from ordinary and plain mesh cages to complex and stimulating

surroundings. The results that Dr. Greeno found, were that rodents placed in

excelling and stimulating circumstances appear to be smarter than normal

laboratory rats having more connections per nerve cell in different brain

regions (Adams). Psychologist Craig Ramey created applicable research

comparable to William Greeno’s with the placement of disadvantaged children into

enriched environment. With his early intervention in a child’s life, Ramey’s

idea was to “cultivate their soil, so that an enriched environment would act

like a fertilizer to the developing brains of these children” (Adams). With

alike results to William Greeno’s lab rats, Craig Ramey also concluded that

factors such as socioeconomic status, educational and cognitive resources, and

resource environments, can have major effects on the outcome of intelligence.

This application of importance between circumstantial raising

environments and the origin of intelligence directs to the necessity of nurture

as well as nature in the formation of behavioral characteristics. Therefore,

Thomas Bouchard’s one-sided views on hereditary importance, can be countered

with supporting evidence of environmental importance as well. It remains clear

by the excessive amounts of research and examinations on how this engaging

argument could provoke many disputes in the scientific world. Thomas Bouchard’s

research heavily favored the effects of heredity on behavior. While Craig Ramey

and Dr. William Greeno presented opposing evidence for the importance of

environmental influences. Other theories were presented by Stella Chess,

Alexander Thomas, Stanley Turecki, and others supporting that children born

difficult can be changed with corrective parenting. Yet David Rowe’s research

related the opposite view that children were affected slightly by their raising

environment. Today with the excess of research and theories supporting each view

equally, perhaps Arnold Gesell and John B. Watson would agree that a combination

of nurture plus nature is the origin of our behavioral characteristics.