

The nature versus nurture debate sociology essay



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Throughout the history of human existence, there have always been questions that have plagued man for centuries. Some of these questions are “ what is the meaning of life” and “ which came first, the chicken or the egg”. Within the past 400 years a new question has surfaced which takes our minds to much further levels. The question asked is whether nature or nurture has more of an impact on the growing development of people. It is a fact that a combination of nature and nurture play important roles in how humans behave socially. However, I believe that nature has a more domineering role in the development of how people behave in society with regards to sexual orientation, crimes and violence and mental disorders.

Height, hair color, eye color and sex are just a few examples of ways our DNA has shaped us. But could it be possible that our DNA also affects the way we behave in society. It is possible that genetics affect us in more ways than we may have imagined. Dr. Peter B. Neubaur believes that shyness, eating disorders, obsessive behavior and psychological illness can all be traced back to our genetics. Sexual orientation is also believed to be derived from genes in our body which determine what sexual preference we prefer. Violence and other types of crimes can be linked back throughout a person’s lineage to witness that other family members have been committed similar crimes without ever meeting one and other.

Throughout our lives we have all been influenced by our environment and other outside forces. Our environment may change the way we think, act and behave in life. Since we are all products of our environment, it comes to no surprise that we, as humans, tend to behave in a society the same way others around us behave but at the same time we strive to find who we

really are (Schaefer 73). Since birth, humans have always analyzed the world around them. With each day that passes, humans take in more and more information from the outside world. The information which humans obtain through their environment subconsciously influences the decisions people make throughout their daily life (Neubauer 16). On the other hand, our genetics also play a vital role in determining what type of person we are and what will we become.

The sexual orientation of a person has been a critical debate over the past several centuries. For several decades many people believed that nurture had a more profound impact on the sexuality of humans than did nature. Even the famous psychologist Sigmund Freud believed that sexual orientation was derived from nurture. Freud developed a theory which explains that at birth till the age of four every child is bisexual. When the child reaches the age of around four, he/she begins to learn to withhold their feeling for members of the same sex and start expressing those sexual feeling to members of the opposite sex. Freud proposed the idea that male homosexuality originates when this crucial developmental stage is hindered by some outside force also known as nurture. According to Freud, this can occur when either a child is raised in a fatherless household or with an overbearing mother figure. However, when this idea was actually tested, it did not fall through as many would expect it would (Steen 185). Since many years after Freud's passing, it has become apparent that nature holds a strong role in the development of sexual orientation of humans.

If nurture isn't the cause for sexual orientation then nature must be.

According to Grant Steen, a professor at the University of California, Los

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Angeles, a large study was recently conducted which gathered gay males who have either identical or fraternal twins or adopted brothers. The goal of the study would be to see if genetics played a role in twins. At the end of the survey more than half of the identical twins of gay men were also found to be homosexuals. At the same time only about 22% of the fraternal twins were found to be gay and only 11% of the adopted brothers were gay. What these statistics show is that DNA plays a very important role in determining sexual orientation. Nature seems to have such a large impact on the sexual orientation of individuals that I feel that nurture has almost little or no effect on whether a person is homosexual or not.

If homosexuality is genetic then there should be a dramatic occurrence of homosexuality with families who have many homosexual relatives than to families in the general public who do not have homosexual relatives. Another survey was conducted in which 114 openly homosexual men were asked questions about the sexual orientation of their relatives. The study showed that "homosexuality is indeed strongly clustered in some families; among the brothers of men in this study, the incidence of homosexuality was nearly seven-fold higher than in the population at large" (Steen 197). Homosexuality can be considered hereditary because families with one gay relative are more likely to have others somewhere in their family lineage.

Some skeptics may begin to raise the question that if homosexuality is genetic then there should be a "gay gene" in our DNA. After many studies, scientists have found that there is at least one gene which is responsible for homosexuality. Though this is not conclusive evidence because scientists still

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haven't unlocked all of the DNA strands, scientists figure that with time and the advancement of technology we one day might be able to actually pinpoint this "gay gene" in DNA (Plomin 337).

Reporter Jeff McMullen of ABC interviewed David Reimer in May of 2000 who fell victim of a botched circumcision when he was only eight months old. The doctors at the time felt that David would be better off living the rest of his life as a girl. The doctors believed that the nurturing of a child and not nature would determine their psychological make-up. David explained to McMullen that throughout his entire childhood he felt out of place. It seemed that even though David grew up as a woman, inside he felt something was wrong. This interview strongly supports the idea that nature plays a vital role in determining sex. No matter how much of an effort was put in to surround David's environment with feminine characteristics, it would not be strong enough to overcome the resilient power of nature. From the time of conception, nature has already planned out many important factors which will affect our lives in so many ways. If nature does control our sexual preferences then it is possible that it could control many other facets of human existence.

In the United States about twenty million crimes occur each year and most of the time the criminals are repeat offenders. One may begin to speculate whether society in the United States promotes crimes or are criminals born with the desire to commit these heinous crimes. According to Steen there is "evidence from a large study of adopted children which shows that there is a tendency for children to reenact the criminal behavior of their biological parents". So even if a child was adopted and was raised in a house which

had no criminal activities, the child would be more likely to commit the same crimes as their biological parents which they have never met. This obviously disproves the notion that people are taught and raised to commit crimes.

The East Coast sniper John Lee Malvo would hide in remote places all along the east coast and would shoot and kill people when the opportunity arose. Doctor Patricia Haensly believes that the DNA of John Lee Malvo differed from most peoples DNA. She came to the conclusion that most criminals are born with the genes that allow them to not think about the actions that they are coming are immoral. This is a very true statement because most people commit some type of crime, granted not murder but more along the lines of littering, but we tell ourselves that it's not a problem and forget about it moments later. Murderers may feel the same way about killing as some people feel about littering. Nature also has a strong impact on domestic violence. In the United States over 18% of all homicides involved family members killing each other (Steen 228). This can lead to the deduction that just as the households which have one gay member are more likely to have other homosexually oriented family members; households which have one member who commits violent acts are more likely to have other family members who commit similar acts of violence.

Sometimes nature cannot explain all the crimes committed in the United States. Some may feel that " simply living in such an environment places young people at special risk of falling victim to aggressive behavior" (Ferguson 81). For example, if a person is constantly surrounded by crimes and violence, then that person is more likely to commit the same crimes. However it may just be that people who live in bad areas would still commit

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those same crimes even if they resided in a low crime environment. Nevertheless your environment should not allow you're to commit the same crimes no matter how much crime is going on. If a person keeps committing crimes in a bad neighborhood then it is most likely that the DNA of that person convinces them that it is all right to commit murders. This explains why many people in jails in the United States are repeat offenders. One may begin to wonder if there is more to these criminals than what is on the surface

Many mental disorders have been scientifically proven to be heritable. Manic-depression is a trait which is inheritable through family lineage. Many separate studies have arrived at the conclusion that identical twins are more likely to acquire manic-depression than do fraternal twins. In fact four out of every five twins tend to share the same types of mental disorders (Steen 141). One study found that risks of clinical depression are much higher in certain families than in others. Close relatives of those who are depressed are three times more likely to suffer from depression than people who don't have depression in their family history (Steen 147). This further secures the fact that nature plays such a crucial role over nurture in our lives and within our own families.

There are some mental diseases such as schizophrenia which adults may suffer from which some people believed is cause from various problems in a person's childhood. This leads many so speculate that the roots of schizophrenia extend far back into childhood. Within the past ten years a discovery was made which scientists were able to link a gene on our chromosome to schizophrenia. This "schizophrenic gene" would be a

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dominant gene which means that if any person had this gene in their DNA then it is likely that he/she would suffer from schizophrenia. Even though more research needs to be done on the “schizophrenic gene”, it still provides us information which could one day lead to the solving of schizophrenia and many other devastating diseases (Steen 151).

It has become clear that nature and nurture both play very important roles in how humans behave in a society. I feel that nature plays the more domineering role in the foundation of human existence. All though every day we are bombarded with outside forces, it is our internal make up that determines how we would react to our environment. Our environment only adds to what nature has given to us. If we use it in the correct ways then it will be beneficial to society and our selves. However, once the environment starts to turn to the ways of violence and crimes we can only assume that it will only have negative effects from any point you look at it.