

# , writing, and rhetoric

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The power of situations versus individual character traits Human behavior can get influenced by a range of factors such as; culture, emotions, genetics, authority, and or genetics. In the word of psychology, determining which between situation and personality that most affects human behavior always raises a controversial topic. There are those who believe situation affects an individual's behavior more than anything else while there are those who believe an individual's character traits influence his or her behavior more than any other factor. I believe that situation or role influences human action more than individual character traits.

An experiment conducted by Stanley Milgram proved the notion that what is considered ordinary, normal, stable, and decent people who got considered as non-violent or non-radical in their behavior could and did certain irrational actions under certain conditions (Fiske, Gilbert & Lindzey 1972). This experiment proved that situation over individual traits had more of a determining factor on human action. The experiment got designed to test if people were more submissive to obedience as a result of an authoritative power. The experiment demonstrated the dangers of obedience. It determined that situational variables provide a stronger sway on determining obedience than personality factors. Milgram showed that honest, decent and rational people could commit atrocities when caused to do so by an authoritative power. Well behaved people could not refrain from committing atrocities because of the situation or role they got asked to perform by a higher authority.

Experiments conducted by Solomon Asch also showed that situations have more influence on human behavior than character or personality (Fiske,

Gilbert & Lindzey 1172). Asch showed that a majority of people want to fit in than they desire to do the right thing. Asch through his experiments showed that people would do the wrong thing even if it means that they get hurt. People are afraid to undertake personal decisions and are quick to lay blame on circumstances rather than their personal flaws when things go wrong. Asch's experiments show how an individual's opinions get influenced by the decisions of a majority. His experiments demonstrated the power of social pressure. When people believe that the majority is right and they do not want to be seen as opposing to them, they are likely to agree with their decisions even if they are wrong. Here, the person overlooks his or her personal traits to appease the views of a majority even if they are wrong. Asch's tests were a further proof to the fact that situations overpower personal traits to determine how humans behave.

Supporters of the 'naturalist theory' argue that human behavior is determined. Biologists argue that human beings behave in various ways as a result of their genetic predisposition (Icek 41). The genetic makeup of an individual may affect how he or she acts in different scenarios. One may carry a certain gene that predisposes him or her to influence their behavior. Social experiments conducted by social psychologists prove that situations have a stronger sway on human behavior compared to personality. The experiments by Asch and Milgram discussed above help to demonstrate how situation impacts on human behavior and determine how they act.

Naturalists on the other hand believe that the genetic make up of an individual determines their behavior. The experiments conducted by Milgram and Asch help to disprove that the character trait of an individual can

override the situation to determine human behavior.

#### Works Cited

Ajzen, Icek. *Attitudes, Personality, and Behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill International, 2005.

Susan T. Fiske, Daniel T. Gilbert, Gardner Lindzey. *Handbook of Social Psychology, Volume 2*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.