

Nature vs nurture essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Nature vs. Nurture is a topic that has been long debated by psychologist and everyday individuals alike. Twin studies have been used by scientists to provide enlightenment on environmental and hereditary influences on behavioral development. While certain elements in a child's upbringing and environment are bound to influence the way he or she will grow up to socialize, interact, and internalize this world we live in, researchers are interested in the relative importance of genetic predispositions.

Our social and antagonistic experiences help to shape our personality and mental development, but what about what has already been "wired" into our DNA? We can physically see that characteristics like height, weight, hair color, eye color, and other facial and body characteristics can be passed from parent to child. However, epigenetics research often questions if mental or behavioral characteristics such as personality traits, or mental abilities are also etched into our DNA.

Although inquisitiveness about the importance of both environment and heredity has existed for centuries, scientists are at the earliest stages of investigating which factor plays a bigger role. (Powledge 2011)

Inconsistencies in the arguments between leading psychologists have led to the reformation of the "nature - nurture" theory. Since heredity and environment have been proven to both influence our future outcomes the only fair question that can be posed is "How Much" of a role does either side play in the mental and physical development of a child.

One of the most amazing things in science is the study of multiples. For decades, psychologists have tracked the growth, development and mental

capabilities of twins, triplets, etc. Identical twins specifically, who originate from a single sperm and egg share the same genetic make-up, yet this does not mean that they are exactly alike. Environmental factors, as well as chemical changes within DNA influence the physical appearance and personality of twins as they age. Hypothetically, the separation of these monozygotic creatures would answer any question about which factor has more influence- nature or nurture.

But, since it is ethically impossible to separate identical twins and provide the EXACT same environmental factors, many questions have been left unanswered by the few known cases of intended separation. During the 1950s and 60's, a leading expert in psychiatry, Dr. Peter Neubauer, collaborated with a New York City adoption agency to conduct a research project on the nature vs. nurture debate known as the Minnesota Twin Studied. Five sets of identical twins and one set of triplets were all separated from their fellow sibling(s) during early infancy and studied intermittently through the course of their childhood.

Neubauer, along with a consultant to the agency, child psychologist Viola Bernard, believed that twins were a burden to parents and should be raised separately to improve their psychological development. Known as " Amy" and " Beth" for psychological literary purposes, Paula Bernstein, and Elyse Schein are the only individuals involved in the study who are now aware of their " twin-ship. " The multiples were placed as babies, with loving families that were very similar- the mothers stayed home, both families were of Jewish religious descent, and each family had a son that was seven years older than the twins.

Although the twin's upbringing shared several similarities the differences were also profound. Amy's family was considered of a lower class than Beth's, and the team conducting the study noted that Amy's overweight, insecure mother viewed her as a disappointment, while Beth's slim, youthful, and self-confident mother "went out of her way to minimize the differences" (Wright1997) After turning 33, Elise Schein gained inquisitiveness about her biological history. She was raised by an extremely loving family who never hid from her the fact that she was adopted.

With her mother's absence, Schein found "awareness" of her own "presence." (Schein, 2007, p. 8) She sent written correspondence to the agency she was adopted from, and months later received a reply that stated only that her mother was a 28 at the time of her birth, of Jewish descent, and had not attempted to search for her daughter. Thinking that this was the only information she'd get, Schein ended her search, but several months later she received a certified letter from the adoption agency that said she was the younger of twin girls, and that her mother had been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

This completely exuberated Schein and she continued to dig for more information- now searching for her twin sister. She flew to New York City, where she had been born, to search through public records. With the help of a social worker from the adoption agency, eventually Schein reconnected with her twin sister. The social worker told her that the pair had been a part of a research experiment but that she was unaware of the details. Schein, 2007) After meeting they had a never ending list of questions for each other, and found that despite the differences in their environments, they still

shared many similarities. They both were thumb suckers as infants; they shared the same Sulfur drug allergy, struggled with acne during adolescence, studied and liked French as well as film theory in college. The girl's infancy through adolescence was fundamentally the same.

The twins continued to search for information about their birth, their mother, and the reasons for their separation. Their continued search led them to Viola Bernard who had died several years earlier. They also uncovered Dr. Neubauer, several months after meeting each other and she had hoped he would show some sympathy for conducting such a crude study. He showed no compassion or remorse, nor did he reveal any information about the experiment. (Richman, 2007) The findings of Dr. Neubauer's study will be kept secret until 2066, when they will be donated to Yale University.

He fears that the public view of the findings of his experiment on lives of "Amy and Beth" as well as the other unknowns would be judged as "unethical". Neither the birth parents, nor the adoptive parents knew that their children were actually a part of a separation study. The birth parents did not know that their children were being separated. The adoptive parents were aware that their children were a part of some kind of developmental study, but they didn't know that they even had twins.

Four of the children involved in the study are still unaware today that they have a twin. (Richman, 2007) Although Schein and Bernstein's separation still allowed them to grow and develop at the same rate, upon meeting they wondered which aspects of their "personalities were forged by genes and which parts were influenced by environment" (Schein, 2007, preface) "

Identical twins reared apart differ far more in their; attitudes; values; chosen mates; need for intimacy, comfort, and assistance; and even drinking habits” (Witt, 2012, p. 5) Because of this, and the inconclusiveness of the Minnesota Twin Studies, it is impossible to determine whether nature or nurture played a bigger role in the their lives. So the argument can be made that both nature and nurture, sometime equally shape us into what we are as people.