

Nature vs nurture, heredity vs environment



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Questions about crime have been around ever since man first committed it. One of the most questions today is whether criminal behavior is the result of nature or nurture. As the debate continues today, research has shown evidence for both sides. Reports would claim the used of nature vs nurture as a topic that would tell about the significant roles of environment and heredity in human development.

Some argue that genetic influences might actually increase the likelihood that an individual will experience certain life events (Rende & Plomin, 1992). Thus, certain individuals may have the genetic tendency to experience or seek out certain stressful situations. For example, someone with a genetic tendency toward aggression may develop into a full blown criminal if it is triggered. The reciprocal-gene-environment perspective suggests that there is a close relationship between biological or genetic vulnerability and life events such that each continuously influences the other.

Albert Bandura has contended that aggressive behaviors are acquired through the following: bizarre beliefs, observation of others, direct experiences that have either positive or negative reinforcements, instructions or trainings (1986). Once the aggressive behavior has been established due to these different cited causal factors, the behavior has been done or executed due to the following reasons: they experience pleasure or enjoyment upon inflicting pain to other people (positive reinforcement that strengthens and increases the probability of repeating the behavior), they try to avoid the consequences of aggression done by other people (negative reinforcement), they experience punishment or injury or harm when the aggressive behavior has not been performed, they have live up or inculcated

their aggressive behavior in their way of living, they have observe others who receive rewards or reinforcement in doing aggressive behaviors (Feist, J and Feist G., 2002). This implies that aggression is learned. Thus, children can learn aggressive behaviors through their interaction and observation from the environment.

The argument above that states the genetic factor in developing aggressive behaviors by which can be developed into criminal behaviors have been supported by Plomin which states that: “ suggests that behavioral genetics must become a prime component within the study of psychology in the future, not in the traditional and much criticized sense of genetic determinism but because ‘ behavioral genetic research provides the strongest available evidence for the importance of environmental factors’.

Furthermore, he added that most behavioral disorders reveal some genetic influence, in fact rather more so than common medical disorders, but that the exact nature of the ‘ genotype-environment correlations’ will require sensitive and sophisticated analysis. Intervention is then more likely to involve changes to the environment rather than genetic engineering (2001).

It has been proven through scientific test that the color of the eye and hair, and other traits were product of a genes embedded in human cell. Nature Theory states that even abstract traits such as intelligence, aggression, personality, temperament and more, are traits that could be inherited due to individual’s DNA. On the other hand, the nurture theory states that the behavioral aspects of person are products of individual’s interaction with the environment.

Although neither behavior nor mental disorders are determined exclusively by the genes, there is substantial evidence that many mental disorders show some genetic influence. Thus the many recent studies suggesting that heredity is an important predisposing causal factor for a number of different disorders - such as depression, schizophrenia, and alcoholism - - are consistent to biological viewpoint. (e. g., Plomin, De Fries, et. al., 1997, 2001). The evidence from twin studies indicate that genetic influences accounts an approximate 40% personality traits and 60% environment interaction (Bouchard, 1999; Loehlin & Nicholls, 1976; Plomin, Chipeur, & Loehlin, 1990).

Previous researches and studies have identified that brain abnormalities is a great contributing factor of aggressive behavior and other psychopathology (Raine, 1993). While other studies have tried to established correlation between serotonin levels and aggression. Findings of this study could not prove that the levels of serotonin and aggression weren't enough stimuli that could lead a person to commit crime or violence (Meloy, 1988; Raine, 1993).

On the other side, in the study conducted by Lykken have demonstrated that there were several factors or stimuli from the environment that could lead to violence. And these factors includes the following: sexual harassments or exposure to x- rated movies, peers, family discord, neglect, abuse and more. These factors were all stimulus that could condition a person to respond violently to his behavior (1995).

Genetic influences rarely express themselves in a simple and straightforward manner. This is because behavior, unlike some physical characteristics such

as eye color, is not determined exclusively by genetic endowment. In other words, genes can only affect behavior indirectly. Though the evidence is quite considerable, the result is not conclusive, for the environment takes its role as well. Given that all personality traits have a substantial heritable component, evidence that a given trait is heritable provides relatively little information (Turkheimer, 1998). The value of evidence of heritability in clarifying personality structure is also limited by the fact that heritability explains only the variation in a single trait. Information on heritability does, however, provide the foundation for understanding the etiology of personality.

The person's total genetic endowment is referred to as his or her genotype. The observed structural and functional characteristics that result from an interaction of genotype and the environment are referred to as phenotype. In many other cases, genotype may shape the environment experiences a child has, thus affecting the phenotype in yet another very important way. For example, a child who is genetically predisposed to aggressive behavior may be rejected by his or her peers in early grades because of his or her aggressive behavior. Such rejection may lead the child to go to an associate with similarly aggressive and delinquent peers in later grades, leading to an increased of likelihood of developing a full-blown pattern of delinquency in adolescence and eventually may lead to criminal behavior.

This only shows the interaction between the heredity and environment, that these two theories do determine the development of criminality among humans. We cannot discount the importance of the other. The effects of heredity and environment are difficult to untangle. For one thing, human

beings continue developing throughout life and the development generally reflects a combination of the two forces. Also, the mechanisms by which environment operates cannot be described as precisely heredity. Nor can controlled comparisons be made, since no two children – not even twins growing up in the same household – have exactly the same environment (Papalia, 2001). This also shows that the association between genetic or nature and environmental or nurture factors is fundamentally intertwined.

Certain behaviors even personality disorders and criminal behaviors illustrate the interrelationship of heredity and environment. There is evidence for a strong hereditary influence on alcoholism, aggression and depression. They all tend to run in the families and to show greater concordance between monozygotic twins and dizygotic twins. However, heredity alone does not produce such behaviors; an inherited tendency can be triggered by environmental factors. People who usually commit crimes have a history of law-breaking activities during their childhood, they were exposed and genetically predisposed to it. Parents of aggressive individuals tended to be hostile. Thus, since a tendency toward aggression may be inherited, the environment can accentuate or modify the tendency. Some aggressive individual, especially those who are not extremely aggressive, may become more considerate and less violent in response to parent's efforts to help them to become more understanding and less destructive.

We cannot conclusively state that criminality is solely inherited. No new evidence has substantiated that. Similarly, we cannot also conclude that this is due to environmental influences. Some behaviors are inherited however the expression of such depends upon the environment. The expression of a

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particular behavior such as criminal behavior might be genetic in nature however, it depends on the environment the expression of which. If the individual is predisposed in this kind of conducts he is most likely to elicit the same behavior from which he is exposed. For instance, people may become criminals if they are genetically predisposed into it and was exposed in an environment which exhibits that kind of behavior. Moreover, genes do not typically operate without influence from the environment. Research has emphasized the importance of gene-environment interactions. Genes do their work via the environment. They cannot be separated from one another.

All theories of criminal behavior try to address the question of why people commit crime on the assumption that such a course of action merits explanation of the inexplicable, that criminals are somehow different from the rest of us, and that there might be a single cause of criminal behavior. Thus a child born with some potential to offend may, depending upon their family environment, come to realize that potential or not. The discovery that our genetic make-up may not be as complex as was once believed suggests that the interaction between genetic vulnerability and environmental protection has become even more worthy of investigation.

People are not born criminals, but they may build up into ones if they are raised in an environment that encourages them to do criminal acts. If someone has parents who are criminals and he/she looks up to them, then there is a great possibility that he/she will be a criminal also.

However, one of the major reasons offenders commit crime is simply because they enjoy it. (Katz, 1988) has spoken of the 'seductions of crime',

while another study (Hodge, McMurrin and Hollin 1997) refers to criminal behavior as an 'addiction'. Some psychologists do believe that criminal behaviors are just a mere result of some psychological disorders, such as anti-social personality disorder and obsessive compulsive personality disorder. People who are serial killers or just plain criminals may have a psychological disorder that causes them to act in the way that they do, but there are plenty criminals and killers out there that do not have any sort of psychological disorder to explain why they do what they do.

Criminals may start a psychological addiction to unlawful activities at their young age. But their criminal behaviors could still be corrected or improved through proper care. This proper care should be given by the person's support group (including the family and friends and other concerned agencies) so that adequate care will be provided.

Conclusion

Question on criminals' behavior has become a long topic of debate among psychologists particularly on the issue of criminal behavior as a nature or nurture. The relationship between the two is direct. This states that their functions or effects are intertwined. One can affect the other, which means the presence of environmental factors could stimulate the genetic traits of a person.