

# A review on nature vs nurture



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For decades it has been debated that humans' intelligence, behavior, and socioeconomic status are determined by the surrounding environment a human grows up in rather than the genealogical history they are born with. While humans may inherit physical traits from their biological parents, there is no reason genes should affect intelligence or behavior. It can be argued that human intelligence and behavior is passed down generations through genes, but there is evidence countering such theories. I firmly believe that humans come into this world as a blank slate and that behavior is formed as well as influenced by the surrounding environment in which they are raised. I will present both sides of this argument and provide both scientific and personal evidence. While both sides hold valid claims and possess good supporting evidence, the nurture simply more logical. This commonly known argument is known as the debate between nature and nurture.

In this debate, nature argues that behavior and intelligence are affected genetically and that a person is able to maintain their mind's ability solely through what they are born with. Those backing this belief in this case are known as nativists. Nativists in one way or another assume that human characteristics as a whole are a product of evolution. This debate only began over a century ago when Charles Darwin brought up this theory between the environmentalists and nativists. Darwin's cousin, famous English scientist Francis Galton (1822 -1911), believed that intelligent families brought up intelligent children. Galton was the most famous explorer of human intelligence and made important contributions to criminology, physical anthropology, and meteorology. He made the most significant contributions to both psychology and genetics. Galton was convinced that intelligent

humans came from families which possessed other intelligent family members. Professions of art, science, and politics often ran in those families that he observed. Galton theorized that people had the potential to produce a highly gifted race of men by “judicious marriages during several consecutive generations” (Neill, “Nature vs Nurture in Intelligence”). He called this eugenics. He also argued that intelligence was bred and not trained, siding with nature. Though arguably, Galton was raised through means of great wealth as his father Samuel Tertius Galton was a prominent banker. His family contained rich bankers and gunsmiths. There is no doubt that his family had easy access to high education. In his time, good education and the idea of attending a great college usually happened to wealthier folks. So it could instead be said that intelligent humans actually came from families who possessed great wealth and were actually able to afford a quality education.

After World War I, several psychologists started to reconsider their nativist views and sought intelligence to be influenced through environment rather than through genealogical history. At the time African Americans were given IQ tests to compare with that of whites for a mass study. The end results showed that African Americans from Illinois scored higher on IQ tests than whites from nine other southern states. Through this analysis some scientists found it difficult to make peace with the basic idea that whites were intellectually superior to blacks. Evidence soon seemed to support a closer link between intelligence and social class, rather than race and intelligence.

Following in the 1960s, the focus of an individual pertaining to hereditary studies began to shift towards social determinants. The idea started to move

away from the nature and genetic outlet to the environmental and nurture end. In this case, nurture refers to the surrounding environment.

Environment plays a huge factor as it may be the air we breathe, water we drink, food we eat, people we speak to, people we see, etc. Parents aren't the only aspect of environment. There is also the surrounding culture. After this general idea began to be widespread, America reformed its public education and improved poor living conditions with welfare in order to better the environment. Talk of nature playing a role in contributing to any individual differences, especially intelligence, became minimalized through the present political stance. However, evidence of the differences in intelligence between racial and socioeconomic groups did not dissipate.

In 1994, the Bell Curve controversy began. Richard J. Herrnstein's and Charles Murray's "The Bell Curve" swung the idea of nature back into the minds of the general public. This 800+ page book re-ignited the nature vs. nurture debate and generated massive controversy in sociology, education, psychology, and politics. It implied that an individual's intelligence, which was partially inherited from both biological parents, would determine that individual's socioeconomic background and future life experiences. So it claimed that your IQ could determine your job, annual income, education, criminality, relationships, and socioeconomic status. Now this is where the debate gets really heated. Readers from the left viewed the authors as racist scientists, un-American, and the book as a complete joke. Then you have the readers on the right seeing the authors as brave, powerful and respectable scholars.

The nurture end of this debate claims that the behavioral differences and psychological characteristics that emerge from infancy to childhood are the simple result of learning. It leans towards the idea of how a human raised and nurtured affects solely the psychological aspect of childhood development. The only thing that biology here has to do with this is with the physical maturation of the human. Those with strong views on nurture in this debate are known as environmentalists. Environmentalists believe that the human mind at birth arrives into this world as a blank slate and that future actions along with personality and intelligence are gradually nurtured as a result from experience. Intelligence is very important to this debate. Nativists say that differences in intelligence are determined through means of certain “ smart genes” that are being passed down generations -wealthy ones at that, if anything.

Some environmentalists believe that differences in intellectual ability are a result of certain social inequalities relating in access to opportunities and material resources. For example, if a child is raised in a ghetto neighborhood, the likelihood that they will earn a good score on an IQ test is rather low because they were denied the exact same life chances that other more privileged members of society had. This is why the nature vs. nurture debate gets heated, and it’s understandable too, because what starts as an attempt to understand how the neighborhood that a child is raised in or the public school that they attend is able to determine the causes of behavioral differences can sometimes get into a politically motivated dispute about distributive power and justice in society. Thankfully I was raised in a nice neighborhood that consisted of friendly neighbors and calm locals. I had a

good friend who lived two houses down and we would go to the same school together almost every day. His parents had college degrees and earned a good average living. I always thought he would turn out to be something big since he was very bright. Later I guess he moved in with his aunt in some other town because his mom and dad were fighting and arguing a lot. They ended up getting a divorce I figured, as the home he used to live in began to welcome moving trucks at the garage door. Last I saw him, we were both 12. The next time I saw him was when I turned 17 and it was on the local county news. He had assaulted a liquor store clerk and attempted to rob the place for a gang initiation. I wasn't so sure it was the same person because of the generic name until it was later confirmed through Facebook that evening. I looked through at his location, friends, and education and not surprisingly, he had moved to a very low income neighborhood that held a bad reputation that was located nearby downtown. So how could it have been that such an environmental shift affected his lifestyle so drastically? He befriended gangsters and he lost interest at the public school that he attended nearby. When we were younger we went to the exact same school and lived in the exact same neighborhood. I surely did not turn out that way. I can't think of any one of my neighbors who had such a tragic change like that happen to them and affect them harshly. I always said that it was merely his environment.

If parents talk, read, and listen to their kids, then they tend to do well academically and are very bright. If parents provide firm and flexible rules, then their children tend to be well behaved. If parents treat their kids harshly then they tend to be anxious, aggressive and stressed out. A child

can also acquire bad habits from their surrounding environment. Today in society, our environment isn't just about our families and friends. We have cellphones, television, music, and social networking which influence us in different ways. Today's youth is just a button away from sending a text message, searching the internet, or turning on the television.

To conclude, the debate between nature and nurture consists of two ideas, both with much supportive evidence and criticism. The belief that nature is responsible for human intelligence, behavior and socioeconomic status is interesting, but does not convince me that those characteristics can be inherited. All I can see inherited are merely physical traits that appear through maturity. Nurture seems more plausible as it brings up the idea that a human's surrounding environment affects not only its intelligence and behavior, but its social life as well. This debate is still very current today as scientists battle over how much human intelligence and other behavior are determined by genes and how much by the environment.