

Nature v nurture debates in socialisation



Socialisation is the process whereby people learn the attitudes, actions and values appropriate to individuals as members of a particular culture. Give an account of the Nature versus Nurture debate.

Introduction

It is an age-old question – ‘Was I born this way?’. When we think of what makes us who we are, whether it is nature or nurture – is it our DNA or our lifestyle and the environment?

Socialisation process is critical to a human society, as it allows individuals to understand societal norms and expectations. Individual is not only social, but also cultural, it is the culture which provide opportunities to develop into personality. Because society is always changing, we never stop learning how to behave in different situations.

Socialisation and culture

The nature and nurture debate would not be complete without getting into subject of socialisation, which ‘refers to the way we absorb the rules of behaviour which is common in our society’ (McDonald, 2006). The process of socialisation starts when we are babies and continues right through our lives (Giddens, 2009).

Socialisation is critical to both individuals and societies where they live, it shows how intertwined the individuals and their social worlds are. McDonald (2006) notes that socialisation is culturally specific, but this does not mean certain cultures are better or worse than the others. Therefore, socialisation process is identified by two different stages (McDonald, 2006):

- Primary socialisation occurs in infancy and childhood and it is the most intense period of cultural learning, as it forms the foundation for the later development. During this time children learn language, social skills and what constitutes acceptable behaviour from the parents, near family and main carers, who are closest to the child.
- Secondary socialisation stage takes place in the later childhood and maturity, when children adapt to the wider surroundings and learn to relate to different people, peers, schools, clubs, churches etc, in order to make up and form patterns of their culture (Giddens, 2009).

Socialisation is a life-long process of inheriting and sharing norms and attitudes, customs, values and ideologies, providing an individual with skills and habits within his or her culture, usually by the traditional agents of the socialisation which include family, schools, peer groups and mass media (McDonald, 2006).

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Socialisation teaches individuals the cultural values and norms, that provide the guidelines to their everyday interactions and life, therefore culture could be defined as the way of life that a number of people have in common.

According to Marsh (2000), culture refers to non biological aspects of human societies – values, customs and models of behaviour that are learned, rather than being genetically transmitted from parents to a child.

It is important to note, that since every society has its own different culture, socialisation process would also differ from society to society. Furthermore,

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the same ways of socialisation and the same culture may have diverse effects on the development of the personalities in the same society.

Despite different cultures found throughout the world, they all seem to be built on the following major components (McDonald, 2006):

- Symbols
- Language
- Values
- Norms
- Material objects

Symbols are basis of the culture, as they carry particular meanings recognised by people who share the culture, language – is the most often used form of symbols; values – are the standards people have what is good and bad, norms are agreed ways of the behaviour in various social activities; material objects are important components of the material culture and generally are used to indicate status (Macionis and Plummer, 2012).

Through the culture individuals attempt to make sense of themselves and surrounding world.

Nature versus nurture debate

Nature versus nurture debate has been dominating not only the field of sociology, but also philosophy and psychology and has a long history. As McDonald (2006) note, in nineteenth century, Charles Darwin, who specialised in the theory of evolution and process of the natural selection was the first to recognize that there were traits and characteristics which

were passed down from the parent to a child, those traits helped them to be more effective at surviving and reproducing. However, these views were challenged later on by a well known behaviour psychologist John B. Watson, who stated that human behaviour was not instinctive, but learned instead and the only difference was individuals' cultural surroundings, which developed to a 'nature' idea (Rakos, 2014).

There has always been a controversy on whether our inherited genes or the environment influences our behaviour, personality, development and intelligence. In other words, are our behaviours fixed and are an inevitable result of our genetically inherited characteristics, also known as 'nature'? Or the behaviours are the result of our learning, people, objects, environment and social media, which surround us - known as nurture?

In the context of this debate, the terms 'being yourself' and 'being who you are', even if sound alike, have a different meaning. Therefore, the nature versus nurture debate concentrates on how far our behaviour is determined by nature at birth or by nurture after birth.

Conclusion

Each side of the nature versus nurture debate have valuable points and it is hard to determine whether the persons' development is predisposed in his DNA or it is influenced by life experiences and surrounding environment.

When we think of what makes us who we are, whether it is nature or nurture, the answer in my view is- both. Genetics plays a role, but it is usually not the

only factor, as individuals are both products and producers of their environment.

Socialisation is seen as society's principal mechanism for influencing the development of individuals' character and behaviour.

Additionally, the debate allowed to produce many research advances in the area of a human development, as both nature and nurture play a significant role in the personal growth.

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