

The inheritance of genes and the environment

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Throughout the history of psychology, one of the most predominant arguments is the debate on nature versus nurture. There is much discussion on what forms one's cognitive abilities and habits.

People have studied for years and years on the psychological development of a person, attempting to determine what influences one to behave a certain way. In the novel *The Other Wes Moore*, two men with the same name grow up just blocks away from one another in the suburbs of Maryland. The two both come from single-parent households and face a great deal of adversity, yet one becomes a successful writer and businessman while the other serves a life sentence in jail. This then poses the question: Does one's genes or environment determine how they choose to act? The discourse describes "nature" as an individual's innate qualities. The basis for this argument lies on the assumption that one's characteristics, whether they be mental or physical, are a result of one's genetic code. Although one's genes are coded more dominantly on physical appearance, it also influences one's mental features, such as intellect and personality.

People who support this idea of nativism believe that a person's behavior is due to the way that they were chemically composed. On the other end of the spectrum, "nurture" refers to one's environmental conditions and personal experiences. This concept argues that one acts a certain way based on his surroundings in life and not due to his genetic makeup. Those who defend this position believe in the idea of empiricism, as well. Empiricism idealizes that a person is born with a "blank slate" and that one's mind occupies habits over time.

Thus, “nurture” states that the origins of a person’s behavior come from environmental factors. Wes Moore grew up in Baltimore, Maryland with his mother, two sisters, and father. However when Wes was three years old his father suddenly passed away from an allergic reaction. Wes’ father’s death had a rough impact on his life. He became very depressed and angry at the world, unable to comprehend why such a terrible thing happened to his family. His anguish even caused him to embark on a troubled path.

Yet, when Wes enrolled in military school his academics, attitude, and behavior changed. He became a Rhodes scholar, Oxford graduate, decorated combat veteran, and an established writer. The other Wes Moore was not as fortunate, though. The other Wes’ father abandoned his family when Wes was just a child, leaving Wes without a suitable role model to look up to. Despite his mother attempting to be exemplary, she did not encourage him to succeed as strictly as she should have.

Wes followed in the footsteps of his criminal brother, and after a mishandled robbery, he was convicted of felony murder and sentenced to life in prison. The childhoods of both Wes Moores were very similar, however their choices led them to completely different fates. I support the empiricist view in the nature versus nurture debate. In my opinion, I believe that one acts due to the people, places, and materials that they encircle themselves with.

Although a person’s genes play an important role in her life, one has ultimate control over what her future holds.

The debate on whether a person functions by “nature” or “nurture” is still being argued even in today’s society. Many years worth of studies have been

conducted, all which are attempting to determine what influences one to behave a certain way. Whether it's one's genes or one's environment, both play important roles in determining the psyche of a person.