

Nature vs. nurture: do we have control over our destiny or is it pre-determined f...

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Do we have control over our destiny or is it pre-determined for us? This age-old question, which has been pondered since the age of Socrates, continues to cause much debate today. Psychologists will favor one side or the other with much controversy on the issue. They have been trying to explain or excuse human behavior in order to have a deeper understanding for development. Many professions have solicited the assistance of psychologists in trying to pre-determine the psychology of potential people for areas such as employment and placement.

The legal profession has sought out psychologists on both sides to prove their theories of the mental abilities, behavior explanations or predictions of behavior of a defendant or plaintiff. " Society has been fighting a continuous fight from the debate nurture to nature, leaving behind a number of bewildered social scientists. Yet we still love to phrase everything in terms of one influence or the other, rather than both. " (Waal, 1999). In the educational profession, understanding the balance or affect of both nature and nurture is essential to designing an effective plan for each pupil's advancement.

Even though, today, it is widely accepted that the child's culture interacts with his or her genetic traits to determine the kind of adult he or she will become, it is worth looking at this centuries' long debate. The central dispute in the study of human development is the nature-nurture controversy. It is the continuing debate over whether the individual's various traits and characteristics are influenced more by inborn factors or by experience. The

nurture debate stresses the importance of cultural influences and other aspects of the environment that influence human development.

Theorists, who share this view, believe that human development can be controlled by manipulating the environment. The nature debate refers to the idea that biological heredity is the only factor that determines differences among individuals. Nature refers to the traits, capacities, and limitations that each individual genetically acquires from his/her parents. Some of those traits are physical characteristics, diseases, athletic and intellectual abilities, etc.

At the end of the eighteenth century, a debate began about the nature of human beings, the influences of the mind on behavior, and the differences between humans and animals. On one side of the debate were people who believed that newborn babies were born without any knowledge or skills. John Locke, a British philosopher, suggested in the 1690s that the human infant is like a blank slate, on which experience in the form of human learning and it writes messages on the infant's unformed mind. This view is known as empiricism.

It credits human development to experience. What directs human development is the stimulation people receive as they are nurtured (Berger, 1988). Several years later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that children are capable of discovering how the world operates without adult teaching. He believed that children should be allowed to grow as nature dictates, without guidance or pressure from adults. This view is known as nativist. It argues

that people's heredity is the mold that shapes development (Cranston, 1991).

John Watson, the founder of behaviorism, argued that the environment and not nature, was the key to human development. His theory states that most human behavior is learned, or conditioned. In 1918, he began conducting a series of highly controversial experiments with children. The results of these experiments demonstrated that an infant could learn to fear an object he or she previously perceived to be harmless, and he or she could come to fear similar objects. From his experiments, Watson inferred that children learn everything from skills to

Nature vs. Nurture 4 fears. Watson showed that childhood learning experiences could have lasting effects in people's lives (Crain, 2000). In Sigmund Freud's theory, development was the product of both internal urges and external conditions, particularly children's sexual and aggressive urges and how parents handled them. His theory incorporated both nature and nurture. Freud was the founder of Psychoanalysis, a theory that stresses the influence of unconscious motivation and drives [on not needed] all human behavior (Bee, 2002).

In the 1970s, the theory of Jean Piaget dominated the developmental psychology field. Piaget suggested that nature and nurture are inseparable and interactive. His theory states that at each age, people develop schemas. Schemas are general ways of thinking about ideas and objects. According to him, as children actively manipulate and explore their surroundings, internal

mental images of objects and actions guide them. Experience modifies these schemas. These schemas, in turn, organize past experiences and provide guidelines for understanding future experiences.

Human development is accomplished by a process of organization and adaptation (Berger, 1988). Erik Erickson's psychosocial theory of human development proposes that individuals are influenced by the interaction of physical characteristics, personal experiences, and social forces. In his view, each culture greatly influences each person's ability to deal with the most significant tasks of psychological development (Crain, 2000). Nowadays, it is accepted in the developmental psychology field that both heredity and environment contribute to human development.

The degree to which nature or nurture influences Nature vs. Nurture 5 a person's development varies according to the different characteristics. Although some human characteristics are more influenced by external characteristics and others are more influenced by internal conditions, nature and nurture interact to determine behavior. The environment encourages or discourages the expression of an individual's inherent potential; at the same time, genetic characteristics affect an individual's environment. In other words, in terms of human development, nurture and nature complement each other.

Reference

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