

Nature vs nurture debate referencing to eating disorders



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This essay will be discussing one question that has stumped philosophers and psychologist alike since the eighteenth century. The nature verses nurture debate which has been one of the most controversial questions debated throughout the decade by students and lectures. Galton (1883) was the first to term the phrase nature-nurture. Gross (2005) which questions the amounts our psychological characteristics are due to our genes also the amount our psychological characteristics are due to the environment including social influence what we learn as well as.

In psychology two main psychological approaches have put forward . different views on the nature verses nurture issue. The first is the biological approach (nature) which bases it strength on genetics and the study of MZ (identical twins) and DZ (non identical) twin studies in its argument. Nurture on the other hand states that all is a learned process and uses modelling and the environment (including western influence) to explain its argument. Both have strong arguments to support their claims both backed up by empirical evidence and theories.

Using eating disorders as a reference especially anorexia and bulimia to the nature nurture Anorexia nervosa is a condition where the person loses weight or tries to maintain a abnormally low weight through dieting often masked by the use of vegetarianism. Whereas bulimia involves binge eating followed by purging (vomiting or over use of laxatives). One way the nature theory explains this disorder would suggest that it is caused by genetics, which could be hereditary. Strober et al (2000) theory gives weight to this by suggesting that first degree relative of women with anorexia were ten times more likely to get this disorder than children from families without anorexia.

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These results were collated through the use of interviews of 1, 831 relatives of 504 probands and family backgrounds. According to this research best-estimate diagnoses was based on all available information. In a further study a year later Stroder et al (2001) went on to suggest that as well as women men could now also get this disorder. However, it can also be said that environment may play a big part in the development of this disorder. If we take environment as another influence then studies carried out in countries that may be starting westernization could show us if there is a link between eating disorders and different cultures.

This can be seen in the nurture argument by suggesting that this disorder is due to environment and western society influence. This helps explain how more eastern countries have now due to pressure of turning to more western ideals in their culture, and ways of thinking, are having more problems now than before, they took on the Western ways. This can be seen in Lee et al (1993) Westernization has been linked to an increase in eating disorders in other parts of the world, including Hong Kong and Japan. Nadaoka et al, (1996) suggested that due to the changing roles for women cultural approval has also been suggested for a slim body. Increased wealth and availability of food, were also thought to be implicated in this change. Dolan (1991) study carried out in the United States which suggested that in it was more common for white women to have anorexia than coloured women; implying that race could be linked to anorexia. However some have argued that this could be due to genetic make-up. Evidence to support Dolans theory has come from Powell & Khan (1986) who asked why “ white women are more prone to eating disorders than black women”. Their study revealed that white women

were engrossed in how much thinner they looked than black women and showed more concern about weight and dieting. This showed their results as a black society is more tolerant of larger body size than white society and that the black society places less importance on thinness and appears to prefer a more rounded shape.

Another theory put forward by the nature approach which backed up Stroder's theory. Holland et al (1988) who also carried out twin studies which have also suggested a strong genetic influence as twin studies showed MZ twins have a higher concordance rate than DZ twins. The problem with this study is there's never a hundred percent concordance rate which may suggest that other factors need to be taken into consideration and we have to look at other influences even though there is evidence to support that anorexia and bulimia have strong genetic ties. Furthermore we cannot ignore the strong influence that media plays in the development of this disorder. This can be seen in teenagers and adolescences using their role models as there is an ideal shape which is portrayed by fashion magazines and models as well as other role models and icons. This we call socio-cultural opinion. You may have read/heard in the media stories of celebrities in the public eye being criticised by the media about how they dress, how they look have they put weight on or even have they lost weight. These sort of high profile celebrities such as Victoria Beckham etc have pressure to watch their weight as its constantly under scrutiny and so have been called size zero This supports what the behaviorist claim to be cause of anorexia and bulimia in saying that we learn through modelling. So by high media profiling of these role models and icons we can see how teenagers and adolescences in

general may view their own bodies and so this disorder may result from this type of influence, This can be linked to Banduras social learning theory in that children model the adult which can be seen in adolescence and teenagers who have eating disorders.

Another explanation from the nature side is that anorexia may be due to unbalanced chemicals in the brain particularly if there is low serotonin. Some studies have linked low serotonin with depression and low self esteem in anorexic patients. Kaye, Ebert, Ralieggh and Lake (1984) studies support this theory in which they discovered anorexic patients that had not gained a healthy weight gain were compared to patients who had achieved a normal amount of weight, they put forward the theory which suggests this is due to norapinephrine. The study of genetic research in anorexia is still in its infancy stage unlike established research for example schizophrenia and diabetes. We may discover through future DNA studies a gene specific to anorexia. It may also suggest a link to depression, in playing a part in anorexia & bulimia. This however could be argued against in that low serotonin could be the effect and not the cause of anorexia.

As mentioned earlier twin studies have been used to strengthen the nature argument but there are flaws with type of study besides the concordance not being one hundred percent. As well as the twins may not be from the same environment. The results may be down to environmental influences rather than just genetic.

The nature argument assumes that behaviour is innate and we are born with it and might explain why their arguments strength is based on genetic and

hereditarianism theory. Furthermore the nurture argument relies on our environment, which includes cultural and societal pressure as well as media influence. However with the evidence presented in this essay the only conclusion to draw from this question is that anorexia and bulimia can be attributed to a combination of both the nature hypothesis in basing its facts on heredity and genetics and the nurture hypothesis basing its facts on environment, media and social structure. Some people may have a biological tendency to anorexia. However there is strong evidence to support the environmental influence, as this is needed to start it off.

As you may have noticed the nature nurture debate is quite complex and not easy to tackle. From the time Galton first thought about this question is it nature or nurture responsible for our development to the present with the breakthrough in technology, we have to study DNA the human blue print. We still don't know the answer both side provide strong arguments but with the evidence this essay has found it would be inconsiderate to assume that one factor is solely responsible for eating disorders. It is obvious that both aspect contribute to anorexia and bulimia