

How does society influence individual human behavior, and is that influence great...



Human behavior is influenced by a combination of factors including biological and social forces but the extent to which one is greater than the other has always been debatable. The “nature versus nurture” phenomenon has outlived many different theories in psychology and philosophy. While it is generally accepted that hereditary factors are of great significance to individual human behavior one cannot deny that societal environment is of equal importance to the development of the individual.

Each individual is born into a different social cultural background. From birth or even before the child is born, humans have to learn to respond and interact to different stimuli unique to his environment. One of the primary influences of the society comes in the way of family structures. This is where the first pattern of behavior is learned outside of the hereditary traits. The family, to a large extent helps to shape the belief system and influence other social habits such as dressing, eating, speaking. Emotional bonding can also be seen as an outcome of the family’s treatment of the individual. Parental favoritism can be an influence. A sibling receiving more love may develop differently from his or her less favored sibling (Rowe, 1994).

The school also plays a major part in how the society influences behavior. This usually acts as a measuring stick in determining what are acceptable and non-acceptable patterns and standards of behavior. Through the existence of positive and negative reinforcement humans are guided as to uplifting moral and social behavior and are exposed to a certain way of thinking that should help them to strive toward self actualization. A person’s value system is also developed largely through a combination of home and school influences.

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The larger society, group alliances and cultural settings also influence human behavior. Religious beliefs also help to set the norm. According to Rutherford and Ahlgren (1990), “ Culturally induced behavior patterns such as speech patterns, body language, and forms of humor become so deeply imbedded in the human mind that they often operate without the individuals themselves being fully aware of them (Rutherford & Ahlgren, 1990, p. 89).

The age old question of whether the influence of society is greater or lesser than the biological influences is really difficult to determine. In many cases persons from the same social and cultural backgrounds and from the same family in some instances end up displaying different behavior patterns. In cases like these intelligence plays a major part. Two studies have shown that the genetic influence on variations in intelligence is much stronger in children from well-educated or socially advantaged families than those children who were less advantaged (Rutter, 2006). The cases of feral children also show the strong influence that society has on human behavior. In many of these cases such as the case of Victor of France the child learned to perform certain tasks and exhibit certain learned human behavior after some levels of intervention.

The influence of the society as well as the personal and biological forces are strong determinants in human behavior. It is difficult to reason which is the stronger. Undeniably, while the person’s genetic disposition sets the tone for his behavior the society to a large extent is responsible for continuing to build on the framework.

Rowe, David C. (1994). *The Limits of Family Influence: Genes, Experience, and Behavior*. New York: Guilford Press.

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