

Nature and nurture: forming attitudes and behaviors



How far is that human feelings and behaviors are inborn and how far are they all learned? This has been a very controversial issue over century and it is now come across as the nature versus nurture debate. " By birth the same, by custom different" is a quotation by Confucius which means that all human being are naturally alike, it is the habits that make each of every human being far apart and different from each other. Evolutional perspective which emphasizes on human kinship and cultural perspective which focuses on human diversity are the two main ideas that dominating the thinking of human similarities and differences in societies nowadays. Some scientists held the opinion that people behave as they do because of their genetic makeup. This is what we known as the " nature" of human behavior or attitude. While on the other hand, some scientist suppose that people think and act according to the way they are being taught and this is then known as the " nurture" of human behavior. A lot of research have been done and proved that both sides are partly right. Nature bequeaths us with innate traits and talent and nurture uses the environment factors to mold and shape these genetic tendencies. In my opinion, I think that human behaviors are largely shaped by the environment, in other word " nurture" play a bigger part in designing our personality and behavior.

Evolutional psychology acknowledges that nature and nurture interact to form our behavior and personality. Our biological traits are not fixed blueprints, their expression rely on the environment factors. One of the classical examples is the experiment done by an American psychologist John Watson with a young orphan name Albert. The result shows that phobia could be explained by classical conditioning, an environmental learning. The

little Albert started crying every time he see a furry object because he has learned that the furry object will always accompanying by a loud “ Bang” sound that going to scare him. Other psychologist like B. F. Skinner, the father of behavioral science has also done experiments which produced dancing pigeons and proved that human behavior could be conditioned in similar way to the animal. Besides, a study published in “ New Scientist” propose that sense of humor is not genetically inborn but a learned trait that induce by people and cultural. Obviously, environment definitely plays a role in shaping human’s behavior and traits. If this is not the case, the identical twins should be exactly the same theoretically even they have been brought up in different place. But studies reveal that they are never exactly the same even though they are very much alike in most aspects.

Cultural diversity is one of the dominant factors that cause differences among people. There are millions of different culture exist across the world, cultural diversity even exist within nation. Malaysia is a very good example for cultural diversity within nation, despite the different of the physical look among Chinese, Indian and Malay, we are all living under the same environment and taking the same food and yet what make us so distinct from each other? Each of us practices different culture and tradition base on our race and religion, so base on different believe that we held, our behavior and thinking will never be the same even though we are all basically living under the same roof. On the other hand, the cultural diversity is even more obvious when people are from different part of the world. The language, customs, culture, and expressive behaviors that vary from one country to another country make people different from each other. And due to the

factors above, people from different part of the world could hold different opinion about the same issue. Some societies do not wear shoes in house while other societies practicing it; some societies consider looking into people's eyes while talking is a show of politeness while some other societies consider such action as disrespectful. In addition to that, vary in parenting style in collectivist culture and individualistic culture provides a very clear example of cultural diversity between different societies. Parenting style is greatly influenced by the cultural context of a particular society because the cultural context is going to have impact on parents' moral values, believe, and socialization goals. So, what is consider normal in one culture maybe labeled as abnormal at another culture. Studies have shown that individualism and collectivism societies often hold different attitudes and value when teaching their child. The parenting style in collectivism societies emphasize on obedience, self-discipline and the importance to do well in school. Moreover, the children are expected to live with their parents until they get marry. While on the other side of the token, the parents in the individualism societies treat their children totally in an opposite way. They encourage their children to voice out their opinion and fight back whenever the children think they are correct. The parents in individualism societies, normally the westerners give much more freedom to their children compare to the parents in collectivism societies. Furthermore, the children of the westerners are expected to live with their own when they reach the age of 18 because they are considered as adult and must be able to stand on their own feet. Thus, we can imagine that how huge the different is it when people are being brought up with different culture.

Sometime, all the people behave in the same manner under certain situation; this has nothing to do with our biological trait but is due to the social norm. Social norms are also one of the factors that guide human behaviors and attitudes. Norms is the standards for accepted and expected behavior which society prescribe as “ proper” behavior. Most of our behaviors are largely shape by the society and people seldom go against what the society expect us to do as we scared that we will be rejected by the society. For instance, stop when the traffic light turn red, open the door for an old lady, and keep quiet in the library. Try to imagine you speak loudly while everybody is silently studying in the library, what will happen? Definitely everybody will look at you one kind. Furthermore, there are also norms that we share across different culture. No matter what country are we in and what culture are we practicing, we respect our friend’s privacy and do not divulge things said in confidence. This is known as universal friendship norms. Other than that, there are also universal status norms where people will talk in a more respectful way when talking to a higher-status people, for example lecturer and talk in a more casual way when the person is same level as you, for example friends. Lastly, the best known universal norms would be the taboo against incest. Sexual activity is prohibited among family member, neither parents with children, nor siblings with each other. Thus, people will govern their behavior regardless their genetic makeup in order to avoid rejection from the public.

Undoubtedly, genetic makeup makes a huge different between male and female. Male and female are born to be physically different, female is born to be has 70% more fat, 40% less muscle, 5 inches shorter and 40 pounds

lighter than male. But biological traits only make different in sexes not gender. Gender is the characteristics people assign to male and female. Again, it is the society that assign specific gender role for men and women so that the society can function well with each of the gender carry out their assigned role and responsibility properly. Many people think that men are born to be more dominant and unemotional and women are born to be more emotional and soft which I do not think is true. Due to the gender role allocate to male and female, they are being brought up in a different way since they were young. Men are thought to be more independent, protective, and unemotional because since centuries ago men have been the head of the house, they are responsible to feed and protect the family; whereas women are thought to be more emotional, soft, and obedience because they are the one who going to give birth to baby, take care and teach of the child. They do not need to be strong because their job is stay and take care of everything in the house. Thus, it is the "nurture" that causes the two sexes behave in certain way and I think that men will stand out to be more dominant is due to the gender role that has been assign to them. Men are always given priority in the work place as their wages are always higher compared to the women who have same position as them and they are typical of those in higher-status positions. So, it is unassailable that men have higher status than women in the society and hence they are more dominant. On the other hand women are more emotional attached and express empathy more often is because they are being brought up and train in that way. Hence, the emotional trait inside women is not innate but learns through the families and environment.

In a nut shell, nature and nurture interact in forming our attitudes and behaviors. But just as I indicate the points above that in fact “ nurture plays a bigger part than “ nature” in determining human attitude and behaviors. If human behavior can be determine with merely biological traits, there will not have so many unsolved question and doubt about human thinking and behavior, nor the exits of psychology, sociology, anthropology to study the existence, culture, and behavior of human being. The environment and culture play a major role in the “ nurture” part of molding our personality and behavior. If without the existence of cultural diversity, I believe that all of the people around the world will be much likely behave in the same manner as each and every one of us shares the same culture and the biological traits only play a minor role in determining our behavior traits and its major role is to differentiate us in term of our sexes. It is the same that apply to environment differences, as we are being raise up in distinct circumstance; therefore we act and behave differently. Because of the environment is changing over time, behavior and attitude of human are also constantly changing. Each and every one of us is unique due to environment and cultural that we are living in, so this is why that a same situation given but all of us react differently. In addition to that, people often choose and create their own situation base on their personal preference and believe. Thus, studying of human attitude and behavior is an ongoing process that will never end as long as human beings continue to survive in the earth.