

# How environment and social situations shape our personality philosophy essay



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Since the olden days, people say most personality is inherited from their biological family and most people are born with similar biological traits. But now many argue that the way a child is brought up is how the personality is shaped. Thus, to be specific, how you nurture a child is the real reason ones personality is so. Nurturing means how a child is brought up; the environment a child is born, the type of situation, or parents' teaching methods. The family environment is very utmost important to the upbringing of a child. That is where the child firstly experience social influence. Although genes play a part in personalities, but the social environments can greatly affect human's behavior. Environment of the child is also very vital, in ways like dirty food is not taken into account or hygiene is at utter most importance. Situation by means of rich or poor background, whether the child understands hardship or was spoon fed since young. Parenting skills is at most importance, there are many types but it all has almost the same goal. But little has thought that in a different approach has a different effect on the child. For example, in a rich family a child can be either treated very strict or much laid back. The strict approach might shape a very humble child with respect to others poorer than them that are enduring hardship. While the laid back approach might result to a very egotistical child that is very status cautious whom despises the poor. In the modern world, even the media, peers, good and bad influence or even the society view of things will greatly affect the child. Every Homo sapiens are born with similar biological traits in this world. Genes may vary but the social environment is a major influence in our behavior. English philosopher and physician John Locke has a theory that every human's mind is a blank state or known as "tabula rasa" when we are born into this world. Only through our life experience that we

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collect information, and we use heuristic which is an educated guess based on prior experiences that helps narrow down the possible solutions for a problem; also known as a “ rule of thumb.”

The social environment is a major influence on human behavior. In my argument, I believe nurture plays a bigger role in our life. Humans in different culture have different sets of norm. We have norms which are standards for accepted and expected behavior. Norms prescribe “ proper” behavior. In other words, what most people do, are what is normal. The diversity of culture results in different type of behaviors because of the different kinds of norms, but mostly very similar to one another. For example, the westerners practice individualism which is the concept of giving one’s own goals and defining one’s identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group identifications. On the other hand, the Asians practice collectivism which is giving priority to the goals of one’s group (often one’s extended family or work group) and defining one’s identity accordingly. Hence, Asians are very interdependent self which means construing one’s identity in relation to others. In my opinion, nurture has a stronger argument here because we know that Asians are actually trying to follow the way of the westerners in terms of Asians still being very conservative and the westerners are more open-minded. As time pass, the newer generations in Asia are more open-minded and we can adapt to new situations and change our behavior towards something.

Every human being is unique in their personality but I think that these personalities are triggered when put in different types of situations. Some people like to believe that nature plays the bigger role in their life, but I

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would like to argue in my defense that, some people were born gifted, no doubt about that but Russian physiologist; Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) prove that everything can be learned through conditioning which is a type of learning in which a stimulus acquires the capacity to evoke a response that was originally evoked by another stimulus. Therefore, I believe that nurture is the important part of our lives because if we did not have social influence we would all be animals, relying on our innate instincts which are probably only to hunt for food when we are hungry or search for an oasis when we are thirsty. One of the major influences is religion. Religion can really change a person's thinking and behavior, especially cults.

One very good case study which is the Standford Prison Experiment conducted by Philip Zimbardo dated back to 1971. This is an experiment that shows how the power of social situation empowering a person to distort their personal identities. When a role is internalized into a person, it can change a person's behavior, it will cause the person to act the role he or she is suppose to play given with the social situation. Zimbardo set up a simulated prison at Stanford University with twenty-four students from United States of America and Canada. He divided them into two groups which are the guards and the prisoners. He wanted to note the psychological effects of becoming a prisoner or guard. The students fell into their roles fairly quick and the experiment had to be terminated earlier than the expected duration. The results clearly shows that the genetic traits are nothing compared to the nurtured traits, but we also have to put all variables into consideration; the environment, situation, methods, and pressures. Though there might be more but these are the most important ones. As for environment, the

experiment is conducted in a replica of an actual prison. In which where prison in the society has set it as a “ bad boy” place in which people there are condemned. So as you step into it, you will impose a bad impression. While situation is the roles of prisoners and guards are given, where the prisoners are expected to act with bad behavior because of the norms in every culture. While the guards in prisons are expected to act in a superior way that is suppose to overpower the prisoners at whatever cost. These norms are portrayed a lot especially in movies, so it is only natural to adapt into these characters. There are pressures on the way we act or do in our social world, and because prisoners are rebellious, being locked up is not a very nice thing. Even animals do not like to be locked up in a cage. Can you imagine the mental torture? It is like when you were still fifteen years old and your parents grounded you at home for one year. Except that your home is obviously more comfortable than a prison or a cage.

Here is another good example on how social situations can change or somewhat control a person. An experiment conducted by a social psychologist Stanley Milgram on obedience to authority figures. The experiment consist a “ learner”, “ teacher” and the experimenter. The “ teacher” is to ask questions and the “ learner” is to answer the questions. But what the “ teacher” do not is that the experimenter has instructed the “ learner” to answer the questions incorrectly. For every wrong answer the “ learner” gives, the “ teacher” has to shock the “ learner”, and for each shock increases in volts. This experiment was to test the obedience to an authority figure. The experimenter sits in the same room with the “ teacher” and the “ learner” in another. As the “ teacher” shocks the “ learner” for answering the

question incorrectly, the “ learner” screams in pain, but what the “ teacher” do not know is that, there is actually no jolts discharging. The “ learner” has to act throughout the whole experiment and to see if the “ teacher” will continue to shock the “ learner” and when he or she pleas to stop the experiment. The result from this was a whopping 65% of the participants – which is 26 of them, went all the way to 450 volts. It goes to show that, whatever the situation and especially with authority involved, we all would actually comply with almost all commands, people change their behavior according to situations. Though there are some “ teachers” that refused to go through with the experiment. It has been almost fifty years after the experiment has been conducted and yet, this experiment is still being talked about. In my opinion, it was a harsh experiment to conduct though it did not hurt anyone physically but mentally. In reality, and till today, that people still suffer the same thing especially in military forces, the navy, and other similar squads that involves taking orders from an authoritative figure. The people that join the military forces are to do as told and no questions asked which could sometimes lead to abuse of power.

In my conclusion, I still support the nurture side of this nature versus nurture debate because I believe I have given a few therioes and major experiments or examples that can support my nurture debate. At the end, the social environment is a major influence on human behavior. Given a certain social situation to a person, they will change their behavior or adapt accordingly to the situation. Humans are responsible for their own personality, for they themself imprinted social patterns in society. The society is the creator of the social norms. And thus, the majority of humans that has the same view will

influence many others into their social pattern. Social influence is a very strong thing to influence a person which involves peer pressure and pressure to conform. This makes up into a culture but culture consists of many things like the things they do, the food they eat, or even the clothes they wear. Culture is like a principle of norms. By transforming into a norm is to give in to the social culture. Thus, nurturing occurs, while nature is overcome.