

Nature and nurture



Is a child's development influenced primarily by genetics and biological predisposition? Or, could the majority of influence be found in the child's environment? This nature/nurture question is possibly one of the oldest theories debated in psychology (Bee, 2004). Today, it is commonly accepted that most aspects of a child's development are a product of the interaction of both nurture and nature (Bee). Both sides of the nature/nurture argument present compelling evidence of how each factor impacts development.

It is no longer a question of whether it is nature or nurture, which influence development, but more importantly in what ways, and to what extent. The Impact of Nature on Development Nature, which is also known as heredity, is the genetic code you are born with. It is passed on to you from your parents. Some examples of nature or heredity could be your height, behavior, and IQ just to name a few. The issue of nature having a great impact on a child's development can be illustrated in the studies of twins. Flanagan (2002) explored the Minnesota study in which a set of twins was raised separately.

In one case, a set of identical twins was raised apart, known as the Jim twins. They did not meet until they were almost forty and had many similarities even though they were raised apart. There was no real explanation for all their similarities except that nature must play a crucial role in development. " The Minnesota twin study concluded that on multiple measures of personality and temperament, occupational and leisure-time interests and social attitudes, mono-zygotic twins reared apart are about as similar as are mono-zygotic twins reared together" (Flanagan).

This is a prime example that nature plays a significant role in our development. Another example of nature is the study of adopted babies. Families with adopted children share the same environment, but not the same genetic code (Flanagan, 2002). The Texas Adoption Project found " little similarity between adopted children and their siblings, and greater similarity between adopted children and their biological parents" (Flanagan). This example also shows how important the role of nature plays on a child's development.

Knowing that nature plays a role in a child's development, educators can use this to determine possible disabilities. For example, if two parents have a reading disability, it is more likely that their child may develop a reading disability as well. It gives teachers a heads up on what to look out for. This can help educators be proactive and intervene at earlier ages. The Impact of Nurture on Development The influence of a person's environment on their behavior is a very commonly accepted factor.

The question is how much can the environment affect the behavior and abilities of a person. Some basic factors such as nutrition can be shown to have an important influence on the abilities of a person. It has also been demonstrated that fears, through the experiences of children, can be learned. Most importantly, some behaviors, if not learned from the environment, will never develop. Environment plays a significant role in development as humans. When considering a person's environment in influencing ability, nutrition plays an important example.

In one study, a group of children were given vitamin and mineral supplements for eight months. They were given intelligence tests before and after the eight-month treatment. The result was improvements in scores as compared to another group whom we not given vitamin and mineral supplements (" Nature vs. Nurture", 2001). The results suggest that environment plays a role in the intellectual ability of people. It is not an illogical leap to understand this will probably extend to physical abilities as well.

Another example of environmental influences in the behavior of people comes from a study done to an infant of 11 months. The infant was subjected to a terrible noise whenever he attempted to touch a white rat in the room with him. The child later displayed fear whenever he came in contact with anything white or furry (" Nature vs. Nurture", 2001). A last example of environmental influences in behavior comes from France in 1799. A boy of 12 or 13 was found running with wolves. When he was discovered he was brought back into society.

He never developed as a normal human and had tremendous difficulties in society (" Nature vs. Nurture", 2001). This suggests that much of what we consider human behavior is socially learned. While no one would suggest that nurture is the only factor that needs to be considered in discussing behavior, it is definitely a significant factor in how we behave as humans. By ignoring the environment, we would miss a large part of what shapes and guides us in life. In conclusion, both sides of the nature/nurture debate present evidence which supports its impact on development.

Studies have shown that heredity is a major factor in developmental similarities among twins raised separately (Flanagan 2002). Studies have also shown that nutrition plays a significant role in cognitive development ("Nature vs. Nurture", 2001). Most experts agree that most aspects of a child's development are a product of the interaction of both nurture and nature (Bee, 2004). Interestingly, in recent years, new technology has enabled scientists to gain a deeper understanding of the genetic component of development, increasing interest on this side of the debate (Bee).

Although no longer an "all or nothing" issue, the extent to which nature and nurture affect development will likely be debated for years to come.

References Bee, Helen (2004). Child and adolescent development (Section 1, pp. 3). Retrieved July 28, 2004, from University of Phoenix website: www.myresource.phoenix.edu Flanagan, C. (2002). Nature and nurture: why are siblings so different? *Psychology Review*, 8(3), 23. Retrieved July 28, 2004, from the InfoTrac Database. Nature vs. Nurture (2001). Planet Papers. Retrieved July 28, 2004, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.planetpapers.com/Assets/3492.php>