

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Nature vs. Nurture Debate

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From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nature_versus_nurture • 2015

Are people the way that they are because of their genes (nature), or because of how they were brought up (nurture)? If two people are brought up in the same home environment, will they be the same? For years, scientists have been debating the answer to this question. As you read the article below, look for evidence that answers two questions: Which argument is stronger—nature or nurture? What makes you who you are?

Background

- [1] The nature versus nurture debate is about which part of a person is more important—their inherited qualities, which includes genes, or their personal experiences and the way they were brought up. For years, scientists have tried to find out what causes people to have different personalities, behaviors, and characteristics.



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Scientific Approach

The nature versus nurture debate poses a very complicated scientific question: how do scientists figure out which one plays a greater role in the development of a person? Many scientists study twins that have separated at birth to answer this research question. Scientists use twins because they have identical genes, so it makes it easier to observe the effect of a person's environment. Do you think twins raised in different homes will grow up to have the same personalities?

The Nurture Side

The view that humans acquire all or almost all of their behavioral traits from "nurture" was termed *tabula rasa*, Latin for "blank slate," by philosopher John Locke. This idea proposes that humans develop only from environmental influences. One example of a person's trait that is completely determined by their environment is native language. Studies show that children can learn any language with equal facility.¹ ;

The term "nurture" has historically been defined as the care given to children by the parents, with the mother playing an important role. Now, this term is regarded by some as the environmental (non-genetic) factor of a person's environment. This new definition of "nurture" has been expanded to include, not just a person's family upbringing, but also everything else they experience in daily life including advertisements, media, peer influences, and home environments.

1. **Facility** (*noun*): ease

The Nature Side

- [5] Some scientists have concluded that a person’s nature—meaning the traits they got from their parents—have more power in determining a person’s identity than how they are nurtured, or raised. Inherited traits are traits that are developed before birth.

Some genetic traits are highly heritable,² such as eye color. Some disorders or diseases are also heritable. However, environments are still influential in how that disease affects a person’s life; for example, people who are born with a disease may live a long time depending on how they are cared for. There are also some non-genetic factors that are highly heritable. For example, a wealth and social status are two non-genetic factors that are generally passed down from family.

Conclusions

Some people criticize the whole concept of “nature versus nurture.” They claim that it is an overly simple way to think about a person’s identity. Perhaps the answer is not as simple. *Are there other factors beyond genes and environment that make us who we are?*

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2. **Heritable** (*adjective*): able to be inherited or passed down

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Summarize the nature vs. nurture debate. [RI.2]

2. How do scientists study this question? Cite evidence in your answer. [RI.3] [RI.1]

3. Describe how the concept of “nurture” has changed in recent years. Support our answer. [RI.3]

4. Is there one side that has more compelling evidence? Explain your answer. [RI.8]
