



THE NATURE VS NURTURE DEBATE

It is unclear who initially described the impact of genes and biology (nature) versus environmental influences (nurture), but Sir Francis Galton used the Nature vs Nurture theory in 1869.

To simplify – Nature is what we think of as genetic pre-wiring from our parents and is influenced by genetic inheritance and other biological factors. Our genes pre-wire us to look a certain way. This includes the colour of our eyes and hair, skin pigmentation, and the tendency to develop certain diseases. Conclusively, this happens as an attribute to heredity. Moreover, our physical appearance is determined or influenced by the genes we inherit from our parents.

Nurture, on the other hand, is generally taken as the influence of external factors after conception, the impact that life experiences and learning have on us as individuals. Nurture believes that the human brain is a 'blank slate' at birth that gets filled up by experience and education. For example, how our parents raise

us and the environment in which we grow up help determine our behaviour.

The nature-nurture debate is concerned with the relative contribution that both influences make to human behaviour, such as personality, cognitive traits and temperament.

When it comes to Nature vs Nurture, in practice, hardly anyone today accepts either of the extreme positions. There are simply too many facets on both sides of the argument which are inconsistent with an “all or nothing” view. So instead of asking whether psychological traits are influenced by nature or nurture the question has been rephrased as “How much?” That is to say, given that nature and nurture both influence the person we become, which is the more important?

Unsurprisingly, much of the research on nature vs. nurture involves twins, twins can be either identical (sharing the same genes) or non-identical (sharing 50% of genes). Studies typically involve identical twins because they share the same genome and come from the same fertilized egg. Therefore, any differences between identical twins must exist due to environmental factors.

However, as it turns out, there comes no clear winner to this debate – it is a tie. Research published in the journal ‘Nature Genetics’ compiled results from most twin studies conducted between 1958 and 2012. The statistics indicated that 51% of human diseases and traits

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come from the person’s environment. 49% is affected due to genetics.

If we agree that there is roughly a 50/50 split between nature and nurture, what can we change? It is accepted that the nature part of us remains relatively fixed throughout our life because it is genetically based whereas nurture changes as a result of life experiences. So although we may be able to cosmetically alter our appearance and until genetic engineering becomes the norm, it is pointless to attempt to change the nature part of our being as it is fixed, however remember that is only 50% of who we are. So, change is possible if we focus on the nurture part which changes with our life experiences. We can change if we need to, by flexing and modifying our behaviour. In order to make these changes, we firstly need to understand our behavioural preferences, how these preferences impact on our life both personal and professional and how they impact on others. Once we have this intimate understanding of our behavioural preferences, we can look at areas where we need to flex our behaviour to have the best effect.

This makes absolute sense, many learning interventions, coaching for example would be pointless if people could not change. To enable us to grow both personally and professionally an innate understanding of our behavioural preferences and an understanding of others and how we relate to them will be an asset to all our relationships. We will become more responsive and adaptable, be able to create positive relationships and build individual and team potential.

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