

# NATURE VS NURTURE

Nature versus nurture is an ongoing debate about the degree to which human behaviour is determined by genetic inheritance (nature) or learned through interactions with the environment (nurture).

## NURTURE

Empiricists suggest behaviour is determined by the environment and personal experiences. They believe all human characteristics are a result of social and natural environmental forces that influence development from birth onwards.

**John B. Watson (1902)** conducted a case study on a child known as **'Little Albert'** to see if it was possible to condition a child to fear a previously unfeared object.

- Little Albert showed no fear response to any stimuli before the experiment.
- Little Albert was presented with a white rat. Each time he reached for it, a steel bar was hit. After seven repetitions, Albert reacted to the rat alone, crying and quickly crawling away, without the bar being hit.
- The fear had been transferred to similar looking objects, including a rabbit and a fur coat.
- One month later, Albert continued to show fear reactions to all similar objects. This provided evidence that the environment can be manipulated to create a phobic response and behavioural change.

**Zimbardo (1973)** conducted the **Stanford Prison Experiment** to investigate the effect that roles and the environment can have on people's behaviour.

- 24 male students were randomly assigned to the role of 'prisoner' or 'guard'.
- A simulated prison was built in the basement of the psychology building at Stanford University.
- Guards were hooded with uniforms, batons, whistles and handcuffs as symbols of control and power.
- As students settled into their roles, their behaviour was affected. Guards became aggressive and abusive. Prisoners became increasingly dehumanised and several experienced acute anxiety and the early stages of deep depression.
- The experiment had to be stopped after just six days.

**The Humanistic Approach** - explains how people's behaviour is influenced by their perception and understanding of the world.

**The Behaviourist Approach** - believes all behaviour is learned through a process of conditioning.

**The Social Approach** - explains how people's behaviour is influenced by the presence of others.

## PROBLEMS WITH THE NATURE VS NURTURE DEBATE

1. It is reductionist because it states that behaviour is solely caused by genetic factors or experience.
2. It is deterministic because determinists suggest that behaviour is determined by pre-existing factors, and interactionists suggest that behaviour is the result of interactions with the environment.
3. It is difficult to control variables. For example, the similarities in twin studies could refer to how the twins were raised. All nurture influences cannot be looked.

## NATURE



Nativists suggest that behaviour is caused by innate characteristics that are inherited from our ancestors and from our genetic make-up. They believe genes programme all of our behaviours: some are present from birth and other behaviours are pre-programmed to emerge in later life.

**Gottesman and Shields (1976)** reviewed twin and adoption studies to determine whether schizophrenia has a genetic link.

**Adoption studies** found an increased occurrence of schizophrenia in adopted children with a schizophrenic biological parent. Children raised by schizophrenic parents and adoptive parents of schizophrenic children showed little evidence of schizophrenia. This indicates a significant genetic input into the onset of schizophrenia.

**Twin studies** found a higher concordance rate for schizophrenia in identical twins than in identical twins. (A concordance rate is the probability that both individuals in a pair will have a certain characteristic, given that one of the pair has that characteristic.) Importantly, there was a concordance rate of 38% in identical twins compared to 12% in non-identical twins.

**Plomin (1986)** found that the overall heritability of IQ in identical and non-identical twins was about 68%, which means 68% of IQ was influenced by genetics. When only identical twins that lived apart were studied, the concordance rate increased to 74%, which means they were 74% similar despite living in different environments. Genetic influence appears to be stronger than environmental influence.

**The Biological Approach** - explains behaviour in relation to the functioning of the brain and nervous system.

## NATURE AND NURTURE INTERACTION



Psychologists generally agree that behaviour is a result of the interaction between nature and nurture.

People may contribute to their own environments. As individuals' characteristics may cause people to respond to them in a particular way in turn, this may reinforce the individual's behaviour, emotions and beliefs.

**Maguire et al. (2000)** conducted a study of taxi drivers and found that the structure of the brain can change as a result of environmental demands.

They studied structural MRI brain scans of London taxi drivers to see if the hippocampus would change because of their high dependence on navigation skills. The posterior hippocampus, which stores a spatial representation of the environment, was larger in taxi drivers than in control participants who did not drive taxis. This indicates that the posterior hippocampus may expand in people with high dependence on spatial skills.

Genes can be seen as setting the upper and lower limits for people's behaviour.

The environment can determine where an individual's behaviour falls within these limits.



hippocampus

**The Psychodynamic Approach** - explains how people's behaviour is influenced by unconscious factors. Freud's theory of personality is the product of unconscious and conscious experiences.

**The Cognitive Approach** - focuses on the brain's role in behaviour, but explains that behaviour is influenced by experience.

**The Developmental Approach** - emphasises the developmental nature and process of behavioural development.

# Nature Vs Nurture Psychology Paper

**M Tight**



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