

Nurture Over Nature
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Abstract

Nature versus nurture has been a controversial topic for many years now, challenging science and the beliefs of many people. Causing people to wonder and debate as to whether behavior is influenced by nature or by nurture. In the book *Frankenstein*, the author has showed us a clear use of nature and nurture in relation to behavior. This story captivates the influence of nature and nurture as well as nature versus nurture. The debate as to which one is more dominant and influential towards human behavior has no official answer. But one thing is certain, based off scientific research a person's behavior is the most influenced by their nurture.

Background

The idea of someone's nature or nurture affecting and influencing their behavior has sparked an ongoing debate between people, doctors, and scientists for many years often leading to disagreement. One's nature appertains to their DNA or their genetic and hereditary factors, for example appearance and personality traits. Nurture applies to the environmental elements that help shape who one is, such as childhood experiences or the way they were raised. There's believers who affirm nature is dominant of nurture, while others believe it is the other way around claiming nature is submissive towards nurture, yet it still has not yet been established which dominates the other or if that's even the case. To better understand the nature versus nurture debate, it is essential to look at the characteristics that make up this polemic. Such characteristics are found within its background, in literature, and in arguments composed by firm believers of one of the two sides.

The nature side of this feud is supported by biology, DNA which is found in a person's genes and almost every cell in their bodies, is known as the code of their being which influences everything about them from their personality to their intelligence (goodtherapy.org). This is why many nature believers, strongly believe nature is responsible for the majority of a person's behavior as it is a science. Since genetics have been established as an important factor within the development of health conditions like schizophrenia, major depression, and bipolar it has been determined that in a family with a history of bipolar, the condition is four to six times more likely to develop proving the actual development is not genetic. For example, twins share genes, but if one of them develops a health condition the other is only 50% likely to also develop that same condition. Additionally, within addictions such as alcohol, an addiction can recur in

families and even cause the genes to impact the way it tastes and affects the body as the genes are inherited (goodtherapy.org). Furthermore, supporting the nature supporters claim that a person's behavior is defined based off their genetic heredity.

On the other hand, the nurture theory proposes the existence of genetic influence over theoretical traits, but declares that the real origin of our behavior comes from environmental factors (Sincero). This being said a person with the genetic factors of an illness has the probability of obtaining said illness depending on the environment in which they are in. So when a genetic variant (mutation) shows signs of a possible mental illness, the knowledge of its presence can help to bring and give positive behavior in a way that will either prevent or lessen the severity of the illness (goodtherapy.org). This claim has fed the minds of the nurture defendants who assert the environment one is exposed to can either help prevent or arise behavioral issues. For example, a man named James Fallon, neuroscientist at the University of California-Irvine, made a shocking discovery about his own brain. Fallon studies the biological basis for behavior and specializes in figuring out how a killer's brain differs from non-killers. And almost ironically, he discovered he had the "brain of a psychopath." Conveniently, he had the necessary material to see if his family had an behavioral issues after having discovered about his family's long history of violence. So he compared the PET scans on his mother, wife, children, and himself which all came out normal except for his. The PET scan of his brain looked exactly as those of the killers. He claims that having grown up in a loving, nurturing environment he was able to become the successful man he is today (Bradley). This being said, environmental aspects like the habits of parents, friends, or partners can influence the prevention and triggering

of possible mental illnesses. Nevertheless helping the nurture supporters with their stance on the nature-nurture debate.

This nature versus nurture argument has dated back to as long as 300 BC in the time of the Greeks Socrates and Plato. They introduced the term “nativism” (nature), the idea that our thoughts, characteristics, and ideas are inborn within us in other words, we were born with them. At the same time, Aristotle had introduced the idea of “empiricism” (nurture) which he claimed was the gaining of knowledge as a result of experiences and that the way we are and think isn’t defined by our genetic makeup, but by the way we were raised (Wein). Ultimately he published a book called *De Anima* also known as the *Tabula Rasa*, a theory of the nature and ground that individuals are born without built-in mental knowledge and that it comes from both experience and perception. Later on John Locke had expanded on Aristotle’s theory of Tabula Rasa as the idea of the mind being a “blank slate” which can only be written on by experiences. In addition, he stressed the importance of rewards, imitation, and punishments within behaviorism and so he believed that since children were always curious they were also more open to environmental influences. Contradicting him, Jean Jacques Rousseau a philosopher, was a nativist that believed children were born with a conscience and that human nature was good up until corrupted by society (MacDonald). Although these philosophers had contradicting beliefs, the actual debate between the hereditarians and environmentalists was sparked by the English scientist Francis Galton. In 1865, he commenced studying heredity as he developed a new found interest in the variations within human intelligence and ability. He opposed the beliefs of the environmentalists, the nurture supporters which led him to introduce the concept of twin studies in order to examine how nature and nurture affected them (macalester.edu). So despite the counterclaims, scientific

evidence supporting nurture has been substantial against nature putting it in the forefront within this feud.

Literature

The theory of nature versus nurture is expressed throughout the 1818 gothic novel of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. The novel tells the story of how sailor Robert Walton, on his way to the North Pole comes across a man named Victor Frankenstein. Weakened by the cold, Walton takes him aboard his ship and as he is nursing him back to health Frankenstein tells him the story of the monster he created. After first viewing the behavior of Frankenstein's monster, many readers come to decide that he was just blatantly wicked, but they fail to realize that's not completely true. Victor Frankenstein's nature is from a rich ancestral inheritance in which he is ultimately cast to suffer from. While the monster having been abandoned, is left to pity as he is of a different nature. Frankenstein was subject to privilege and nurture favored him positively influencing his behavior up until that nurture began to work against his intuitive desire for strength leading him to a ruin. In turn, his monster had a natural want for knowledge and acceptance, but his lack of nurture is to blame for his wrongdoing and the terrible acts he commits. Since the beginning, the readers are able to see the complete oppositeness of Frankenstein and his monster. It ordained them to a downfall, Frankenstein a victim to nature and his monster to nurture.

The father and son relationship perceived from Victor Frankenstein and his monster is that of a dysfunctional one. Frankenstein neglected his monster from the start and left him to fend for himself. As a result, the monster becomes filled with rage and vengeance for his creator, but it hadn't always been that way. Previously, after having found refuge in the forest, the

monster comes across a family living in the same woods, the De Lacey's. They indirectly help him talk and read, but he is still not given any sentiment or kind nurture. He yearns for their love, but unfortunately he is rejected yet again in a brutal manner. Throughout the story the monster is seen have been rejected multiple times, ultimately leading to the change in his behavior (Shelley). Eventually he realizes that if he will never obtain the love he wants from the humankind then he shall need a companion of his nature in order to be content. He tells Frankenstein, "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (263). He feels an innate urge for love and the environment in which he is in drives him to do what he does.

The nature of the monster is still unknown, so it can't be fully blamed even though it does play a part in the issue. When Frankenstein created his creature he used remnants which he could effortlessly access. In the late 18th century scientists would often hire body-snatchers, or resurrectionists, these resurrectionists would go to places where they could easily snatch bodies. Such places included vaults, charnel houses, and unhallowed cemeteries like those of inmates, which were not blessed by the church (Miller). Making it seem quite reasonable that the monster had the nature of a criminal and with the inadequate nurture given to him by Frankenstein, his behavior was triggered and at length led him to such violent conduct. If only Frankenstein had been a stable father figure to his monster he could've righted his wrongdoings and have prevented the monster's brutal outburst.

Regardless of the unknown and the obvious, Mary Shelley undoubtedly was still able to capture the nature versus nurture tandem in *Frankenstein*, highlighting it with the use of light and fire as symbols for a destructive force. In order to regain the control Frankenstein wanted he

manages to use a “spark of electricity” to give life to a raw unrestrained nature. Ultimately what he believed would give him a regain of power, instead creates chaos. The power of both him and his monster clash and create a tension between nature and nurture, representing the power of a nurturing family bond which is the base on which the fire sits and the power of nature being the uncontrollable fire which arises from the base. Frankenstein had always been accustomed to having everything decided for him, never having any power it’s expressed when he says, “The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover...” and “Such was our domestic circle, from which care and pain seemed forever banished... neither of us possessed the slightest pre-eminence over the other” (49). Being constrained eventually, created the yearn for Victor Frankenstein to want more, impelling him to create his creature. Such creature eventually, breaks through and becomes too much for Frankenstein to have power over, the creature is now a fire destroying what Frankenstein would find comfort in. The creature now holds the power of fire in his hands and dominates it to Frankenstein's dismay and thus creating a power struggle between him and the monster. They begin to mirror themselves both fighting for different types of power, the creature sees fire as a domestic forte which brings warmth and comfort while Frankenstein only views it as chaos. Eventually, their struggle leads to the slow disappearance of Frankenstein's “domestic circle” where his control lays. As the monster is destroying it in order to break through Frankenstein and take control over him, it leads him to Victor who he ultimately destroys as well leaving the monster equally powerless. It is seen the monster and Frankenstein are each other’s other half and at the end of the story the monster still finds his final comfort in the nature of fire as he says, “I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames” (429). Furthermore, the monsters lack of love and being in a

caring environment resulted in the behavior he attained and demonstrated throughout the novel. Leaving him to find comfort in the fire that brought him to life and will ultimately lead him to death.

Argument

Regardless of what genetics may determine, the nurture one is exposed to holds greater influence towards behavioral features. Especially with the data collected from identical twin studies, the evidence supporting it has definitely helped to change the minds of many once nature supporters. Propaganda that has spread such a myth of people being “born gay” has effectively deceived Americans. Although most Americans seem to be convinced a person’s sexual orientation is predetermined since the moment of conception, this statement has been falsely affirmed by the media. There is no stable scientific evidence that would support such a preposterous claim.

Studies done on identical twins has made it difficult to claim a “gay gene” exists, explains Peter Sprigg from the Family Research Council. He additionally states that both twins would be homosexual if sexuality were to be inborn. Yet, a study done by Yale and Columbia Universities concluded only 6.7% of male twins and 5.3% of female twins were both homosexual (Helper). Furthermore proving a person’s sexuality can't be innate, but rather a choice they made.

Two researchers named Peter Bearman and Hannah Brueckner have also bluntly concluded that a person's environment was the major influence on someone's sexuality. Completely rejecting the “genetic influence independent of social context” or nature as the cause and instead stated that the research they had gathered strongly showed different results. It

supported a hypothesis that boys without a positive father figure and girls without a positive mother figure eventually tend to have same-sex preferences (Helper). So it honestly cannot be stated that someone's behavior turns out how it does because it is in their genes. Also, if people were to be born gay, then there would be a consistent amount of homosexuals seen throughout history. Additionally, studies conducted in the past on children raised by animals have also fueled the nurture side of the spectrum. One being of two girls found in the 1920s, the girls, Amala and Kamala had been raised by a single mother wolf and her cubs. When observed, the girls had adapted the nature of wolves, they walked on all fours, licked liquids with their tongues, their tongues also permanently hung out, and they panted just like wolves (edublox.com). The behavior they adopted was acquired from the nurture of the mother wolf they were raised by. So with no firm evidence to support nature and plenty to support environmental and nurturing influences, a person's nature can not be the sole purpose or most important effect over their behavior.

Simply because one's genetics determines majority of their being doesn't mean it is responsible for everything about themselves. People on the nature side seem to have forgotten that people can learn from experiences, adopt new beliefs, form different opinions, and make choices because they want to, not because their DNA tells them to. Times have changed and so have the mindsets of people allowing them to be more accepting to things that had never been considered "normal" in the past. Though nature can affect a person's behavior it is not always certain, people can make changes to their lifestyles, the way they care for themselves and their environment in order to help prevent conduct issues. Thus, proving why environmental factors can strongly influence a person and their behavior.

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