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| **The nature-nurture debate** |
| **The nature-nurture debate AO1** |
| **The debate**The nature-nurture debate has a long history in psychology.**Nature:** Early nativists such as Rene Descartes (1589-1650) argued those human characteristics-and some aspects of knowledge-are innate: the result of heredity. In contrast, empiricists including the philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) argued that the mind is a blank slate at birth upon which learning and experience writes: the result of the environment (a view that was later to become an important feature of the behaviourist approach).The heritability coefficient is used to assess heredity. It is a numerical figure ranging from 0 to 0.1 which indicates the extent to which a characteristic has a genetic basis (with a value of 1 meaning it is entirely genetically determined). The general figure for heritability in IQ is around 0.5 across multiple studies in verifying populations (Plomin 1994). This suggests that both genetics and the environment are important factors in intelligence.**Nurture:** The concept of nurture and environmental influences in psychology requires further clarification as the ‘environment’ is such a broad and all-encompassing concept. Helpfully, Richard Lerner (1986) has identified different levels of the environment. These may be defined in quite narrow pre-natal terms, for instance, the mothers physical and psychological state during pregnancy, or more generally through post-natal experiences such as the social conditions the child grows up in the cultural and historical context they are part of. |
| **Relative importance of heredity and environment**In a practical sense, the nature-nurture question is impossible to answer because-vas Lerner suggests-environment influence in child’s life begins as soon as it is born. Nature and nurture are so closely intertwined that, practically and theoretically, it makes little sense to try to separate the two.For instance, in twin studies it is often very difficult to tell whether high concordance rates are more the result of shared genetics or shared upbringing. As such, the focus of the nature-nurture debate has changed in recent years, and psychologists are more likely to ask what the relative contribution on each influence is in terms of what we think and what we do.**The interactionist approach:** we have seen how attachment patterns an infant and it parents are often the result of a ‘two-way street’ in which the child’s innate temperament will influence the way its parents respond to it – and their responses will in turn affect the child’s behaviour (Belsky and Rovine 1987). Thus, nature, in real sense, creates nurture; heredity and environment interact.**Diathesis-stress approach:** Models of metal illness which emphasis the interaction of nature and nurture tend to be the most persuasive. The diathesis-stress model suggests that psychopathology is caused by a biological/genetic vulnerability (the diathesis) which is only expressed when coupled with a biological or environmental ‘trigger’ (the stressor). Pikka Tienari et al (2004) found that in a group of Finnish adoptees those most likely to develop schizophrenia has biological relatives with a history of the disorder (the vulnerability) and had relationships with their adoptive families that were as ‘dysfunctional’ (the trigger).**Epigeneticsl:** This refers to a change in our genetically activity without changing our genetic code. It is a process that happens throughout life and is caused by interaction with the environment. Aspects of our lifestyle, and the events we encounter – from smoking and diet to pollution and war – leave epigenetic ‘marks’ on our DNA. These marks-like highlighted text, or bookmarks – tell our bodies which genes to ignore and which to use, and in turn, may go on and influence the genetic codes of our children, as well as their children. Epigenetics therefore introduces a third element into the nature-nurture debate: the life experience of previous generations.Brian Dias and Kerry Ressler (2014) gave male lab mice electric shocks every time they were exposed to the smell of acetophenone, a chemical used in perfume. As many behaviourists would predict, the mice showed a fear reaction as soon as the scent was presented. Surprisingly, the rats children also feared the smell – even though they had not been exposed to acetopherone before or received any shocks. So did their grandchildren. |
| **The nature – nurture debate AO3** |
| **Implications of nativism** P: A limitation of the nature side of the debate is that because of a deterministic view, associated research can be considered unethical.E: For example, it is deterministic as it suggests that ‘anatomy is destiny’ in that our inherited genetic makeup determines our characteristics and behaviour whilst the environment has little input. E: This is an issue because it has led to controversy such as that which attempted to link race, genetics and intelligence. Shockley (1952) sparked controversy by claiming that there might be genetic reasons that black people in America tended to score lower on IQ tests than whites.L: As a result, just taking the nature side of the debate can lead to ethical implications, particularly when researching socially sensitive subjects. | **Implications of empiricism**P: A limitation of the nurture side of the debate is that, empiricists suggest that any behaviour can be changed by altering environmental conditions and ignoring genetics.E: For example, Behaviour shaping (a behaviourist concept)which is a practical application in therapy shows us that desirable behaviours are selectively reinforced, and undesirable behaviours are punished or ignored.E: This means that in extreme terms, this may lead one to advocate a model of society that controls and manipulates its citizens using these techniques.L: Therefore this weakens the credibility of the nurture side of the debate as it is suggesting that humans have no power over their action which causes controversy.  |  **Shared and unshared environments**P: A strength of the nature-nurture debate which shows us that the two cannot be separated is the idea of shared an unshared environments. E: This suggests that individual differences mean that siblings may experience life events differently as they may not have experienced the exact same upbringing whist being raised in the same family. E: This would explain the finding that even MZ twins reared together do not show perfect concordance rates.L: This supports the view that heredity and the environment cannot be meaningfully separated. | **Constructivism**P: Another strength suggesting that it is impossible to separate nature and nurture is constructivism.E: This is elaborating the notion that genes and environment interact as people create their own ‘nature’ by actively selecting environments that are appropriate for their ‘nurture’E: Thus a naturally aggressive child is likely to feel more comfortable around children who show similar behaviours and will choose their environment accordingly. This environment then affects their development.L: This shows that it is impossible and illogical to try to separate nature and nurture influences on behaviour. |