

## **I. Nature Vs. Nurture**

The nature vs. nurture debate explores the relative importance of cultural (social environment) and biological (heredity) factors in the developmental process of human beings. Is our biology most important in determining who we are or is our social environment? Do we learn our character or is it determined at birth genetically? In all likelihood the answer to this question is a complex interaction between the two.

Few would reject the position that biology plays an important role. Biology provides us with large brains that allow us to think abstractly (e.g., we can create things in our minds and build them in reality). Biology also provides us with opposable thumbs that allows us to grasp tools.

Learning is also very important in determining who we are. The chapter on culture points out that culture defines much of what is important to people. Further, it is responsible for our ability to adapt to the environment.

### **A. Twinning Studies**

It is often difficult to separate learning from our biology because we begin learning at the moment we are born. In order to document the effects of learning, social scientists sometimes use "twining studies."

By following the life course of twins, which are separated at birth, we are able to lend support to the hypothesis that the environment (e.g., learning) has far-reaching effects in human development. Social experiences appears to override biology.

For example, Appelbaum and Chambliss (1997: 103-104) describe research involving twins, which compares criminal records of twins. The research shows a low correlation between genetic factors and criminal behavior. In other words, people learn criminal behavior.

## **II. Problems with the Concept Human Nature**

### **A. What is Human Nature?**

Charon (1987:56-59) points out that our acts and beliefs are often based on our assumptions about human nature. Human nature refers to nearly permanent qualities which humans' posses. They are also biologically based. One should be able to see these characteristics in every culture (e.g., people have an innate urge to reproduce, find shelter, and find food).

Human nature should not be used to refer to characteristics that come about because of the environment or our society.

### **B. Impossible to Determine Human Nature**

Biology certainly determines part of what we are, but we start learning as soon as we are conceived. Sense what we learn is so important to who we are and what we do, how can we separate biologically determined behavior from learned behavior

### C. Human Nature: An Excuse to End Discussion

The second problem is that human nature is often used as an excuse to close off discussion on social topics. Human nature is used to justify inequality rather than search for reasons for inequality.

**Example:**

If we blame prejudice on human nature, we may tend to assume that solutions to that social problem do not exist. Note how in South Africa, "it's natural to hate."

### III. Social Survival

Physical contact with others is essential to meet our social and emotional needs. The very survival of the individual and the group depends on its members being properly socialized (See Robertson, 1989:69-74).

#### A. Feral Children

Feral means untamed, savage, and wild. Feral children literally describe children raised in the wild by wild animals. Appelbaum and Chambliss (1997:68-70) contend that numerous accounts exist which describe children raised by animals. They argue that most stories of children raised in the wild are untrustworthy.

Appelbaum and Chambliss (1997:68) call attention to one reasonably well documented case of a boy named Victor who was apparently found in a rural area of France. Victor, a seven-year-old boy had apparently been raised in the wild.

In general, the explanation that "wild children" are raised by wild animals is more than likely an excuse to cover up extreme child abuse. On occasion, children are discovered who have few social skills and who lack the ability to speak. Upon closer inspection, it is discovered that these children suffer from extreme social isolation.

#### B. Children Raised in Isolation

There are numerous accounts of children raised in near total isolation. Appelbaum and Chambliss (1997:70) introduce us to a girl named "Genie." Genie was raised in near isolation for the first twelve years of her life. She was often strapped to a child's potty or confined to a sleeping bag. She saw only her father and mother and this contact was occurred only at feeding. Needless to say, she failed to develop social skills.

It is apparent that sever social isolation contributes to poor social development, but it's difficult to prove "scientifically." Social workers encounter children raised in isolation at the end of the process of isolation. (Presumably, the children are removed to more "humane" surroundings.) It's impossible to

say whether the "wild" behavior is a result of the isolation or the result of genetic problems that may have caused the isolation in the first place.

Ethics rule out doing experiments on the effects of isolation on children. One cannot simply isolate a child from human contact to see what happens. Therefore, research on isolation has to focus on children who have experienced isolation in the past or it has to investigate the effects of isolation on animals.

### **C. Institutionalized Children: Rene Spitz**

Rene Spitz explored the development (or lack of development) of institutionalized children. In the 1945 study involving human babies, Spitz's followed the social development of babies who, for various reasons, were removed from their mothers early in life. Some children were placed with foster families while others were raised in institutions (e.g., a nursing home). The nursing home babies had no family-like environment. The setting was very institutional. Care was provided by nurses who worked eight hour shifts. The babies raised in the nursing home environment suffered seriously. More than a third died. Twenty-one were still living in institutions after 40 years. Most were physically, mentally, and socially retarded.

### **D. The Harlow Study**

The importance of the social environment is demonstrated by Harry and Margaret Harlow. In a laboratory setting, the Harlow's removed baby monkeys from their mothers at birth. The babies were provided with all the necessities of life such as food and warmth (temperature), but the babies had no contact with other monkeys. Bazaar behavior developed. The Harlow's concluded that social isolation caused the monkeys raised in isolation to develop abnormally.

### **E. Conclusion**

Research like that of Spitz and the Harlow's prove that people need physical contact throughout life. Isolation will bring on hallucinations, extreme apathy, anxiety, and the loss of the sense of self.

## **IV. Socialization**

Socialization is learning (see Charon, 1987:63-69). Socialization refers to all learning regardless of setting or age of the individual. Socialization is the process by which we learn the ways of a particular group. In every group one has to learn the rules, expectations, and truths of that group, whether the group is your family, the army, or the state (nation).

Socialization is the process where by people acquire personality and learn the way of life of their society. Essentially, one has to learn Culture. Learning culture encompasses all the truths, values, rules, and goals that people share with one another. Culture is a shared perspective.

The most important time when socialization occurs is between the ages of one and ten. We obviously learn throughout our lives, but this first ten years is most important in determining who we are for the rest of our lives.

### **A. Primary Socialization**

Primary socialization is the process whereby people learn the attitudes, values, and actions appropriate to individuals as members of a particular culture. For example, Eskimos learn to enjoy eating the raw intestines of birds and fish while Chinese people eat Carp's heads and the tripe (stomach tissue) of pigs (Schaefer & Lamm, 1992: 98).

### **B. Anticipatory Socialization**

Anticipatory socialization refers to the processes of socialization in which a person "rehearses" for future positions, occupations, and social relationships (See Appelbaum & Chambliss, 1997:76). Henslin (2004:71) offers the example of a high school student who, upon hearing he had been accepted to a university, began to wear college student-type cloths.

In his last semester of high school, Michael has received word that he has been accepted to State University. Soon he begins to dismiss high school activities as being "too high schoolish," and begins to wear clothing styles and affect mannerisms that are characteristic of State University students. Michael is exhibiting signs of anticipatory socialization.

### **The Looking-Glass Self**

The looking-glass self is the term Charles Horton Cooley coined to describe the process by which we develop a sense of self. We see ourselves through the eyes of other people. We may even use those views of ourselves when formulating our own self-concept.

For example,

Mattie is a new sociology professor at the local college. During her first lecture, she noticed that some students were yawning. Based on her interpretation of the students yawning, Mattie has decided she is a boring teacher.

### **C. Gender Socialization and Gender Roles**

Henslin (1999:76) contends that "an important part of socialization is the learning of culturally defined gender roles." Gender socialization refers to the learning of behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. Boys learn to be boys and girls learn to be girls. This "learning" happens by way of many different agents of socialization. The family is certainly important in reinforcing gender

roles, but so are one's friends, school, work and the mass media. Gender roles are reinforced through "countless subtle and not so subtle ways" (1999:76).

Examples:

Henslin (2004:66) suggests that the fact that parents let their preschool boys roam farther from home than their preschool girls illustrates the how girls are socialized to be more dependent.

A parent who buys his male children trucks while buying his female children dolls is engaging in gender socialization.

#### **D. Resocialization**

Resocialization is the process of learning new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors. It refers to the process of discarding former behavior patterns and accepting new ones as part of a transition in one's life. Resocialization occurs throughout the human life cycle (Schaefer & Lamm, 1992: 113).

Resocialization can be intense with the individual experiencing a sharp break with past and the learning and exposure to radically different norms and values. An example would be the experience of a young man or woman leaving home to join the Marines. Radical resocialization occurs in a total institution.

#### **E. Total Institutions**

This term was coined in 1961 by Erving Goffman and was designed to describe a society which is generally cut off from the rest of society but yet still provides for all the needs of its members. Therefore, total institutions have the ability to resocialize people either voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, the following would be considered as total institutions: prisons, the military, mental hospitals and convents (Schaefer & Lamm, 1992: 113).

Goffman lists four characteristics of such institutions:

1. All aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority.
2. Each phase of a members daily activity is carried out in the immediate company of others. All members are treated alike and all members do the same thing together.
3. Daily activities are tightly scheduled. All activity is superimposed upon the individual by a system of explicit formal rules.
4. A single rational plan exists to fulfill the goals of the institution.

#### **V. Agents of Socialization**

Agents of socialization are people and/or groups that influence self concepts, emotions, attitudes and behavior (Henslin, 1999:76-81)

### **A. The Family**

The family is the most important of the agents of socialization. Family is responsible for, among other things, determining one's attitudes toward religion and establishing career goals.

### **B. The School**

The school is the agency responsible for socializing groups of young people in particular skills and values in our society.

### **C. Peer Groups**

Peers refer to people who are roughly the same age and/or who share other social characteristics (e.g., students in a college class).

### **D. The Mass Media**

### **E. Other Agents: Religion, Work Place, The State**

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