

Personality: from Nature or Nurture?

What is personality? Many people define personality as a person's usual manner or style of behavior. These patterns of behavior tend to be predictable throughout a person's lifetime. Some people are introverts; others are extroverts. Some people have easygoing personalities: they are usually cheerful and calm and able to cope with life's difficulties without much trouble. Their emotions are usually under control: they don't get extremely angry about little things. Others, at the other end of the personality spectrum, are more emotional, experiencing higher highs and lower lows. Most people's personalities, however, don't fall at the extreme ends but rather fall somewhere in between.

Where do we get our personality?

For hundreds of years, psychologists and ordinary people have never stopped debating this fascinating question. Some people think personality develops as a result of the

environment—the combination of influences that we learn from, such as our families, our culture, our friends, and our education. The people who believe this theory believe that all babies are born without a personality and that it's the environment that determines, or forms, each child's personality. This school of thought is called the "nurture school."

At the other end of the continuum we find people who believe that personality is determined by "nature," or the characteristics we receive, or "inherit," from our parents biologically, through their genes. These people believe that our personality is not determined by the environment, but rather by genetics, and that each baby is born with a personality.

The "nature-nurture controversy"

The nature-nurture controversy is very old. Experimental psychologists



have tried to discover which of these two factors, genetics or the environment, is more important in forming our personality. However, it's very difficult, if not impossible, to conduct research on real people with real lives. There's just no way to put people in a laboratory and watch them develop. For this reason, there's no scientific way to settle the nature-nurture controversy. Recently, however, most researchers have come to believe that both the environment AND the genes—nurture and nature—work together and are both important.

Even though the experts have largely discarded the idea that personality development is so black and white, the nature-nurture controversy remains a popular discussion among friends. It seems that everyone has an opinion.

Activate a Cor

A UNDERSTAND VOCABULARY FROM CONTEXT Match the words and phrases in the two columns.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 genes | a a person's usual pattern of behavior |
| 2 environment | b what we feel, such as anger, love, and happiness |
| 3 emotions | c the source of traits we inherit from our parents |
| 4 the "nature school" (of thought) | d the world around us |
| 5 the "nurture school" (of thought) | e the belief that learning determines personality |
| 6 personality | f the belief that genetics determines personality |

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

A. Check the statements that are true, according to the article.

- ☐ 1. A person's personality is not predictable throughout his or her lifetime.
- ☐ 2. Most people are not total extroverts or total introverts, but somewhere in the middle.
- ☐ 3. People who believe babies are born with their personalities are in the "nurture school."
- ☐ 4. The nature-nurture controversy is very recent.
- ☐ 5. It's very easy to conduct research on real people.
- ☐ 6. Today most experts believe that personality development is not so black and white.
- ☐ 7. Environment and genes probably work together to create personality.

CRITICAL THINKING

B. PAIR WORK. Discuss: According to the reading, are these people probably introverts or the extroverts? Explain your answers.

1. My friend Ted is a media consultant for an advertising agency. His hobbies include skydiving and skiing. Every time I call him, he's always busy with some social event.
2. My cousin Valerie is an editor. She spends her days reading books. Valerie keeps to herself. She's a very private person. I never know what she's thinking about.
3. My husband loves telling jokes, and he's always the center of attention at parties. But, when we're at home, he can be really quiet. He's also very sensitive and interested in how I feel. When I need to talk, he's always right there and ready to listen.

ANSWERS

1.

2.

3.