Nature Versus Nurture In Adoptive Families

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Abstract

The controversial issue regarding nature versus nurture has been said to date back from the Victorian era and like all heated arguments, it seems that the debate is never ending. This paper, in APA format, observes information from three pieces of work: a scholarly journal, a popular magazine and a website. These works will argue the concept of nature versus nurture and its effects on families considering adoption. Therefore, this paper will force the reader to question whether or not a child’s biological structure, rearing, or a combination of both has the most impact on a child’s behavioral development. In order to fully understand the significance of the sources discussed in this paper, I will address the following criteria: suitability, scope, audience, timeliness, authority and objectivity.

Keywords: nature, nurture, adoption, genetics, environmental, behavior
While this piece generally addresses the basic concept of nature versus nurture, it specifically observes the I.Q. levels in children before and after they were adopted. The research discusses several studies resulting in differing opinions on the issue (“Education,” 1940). It states how Harold Manville Skeels, a University of Iowa professor, was shocked to hear that the state orphanage was placing babies, born from feeble-minded families, into highly intellectual households through adoption. Thinking there needed to be some kind of intervention, Skeels did a study and gave I.Q. tests to these babies. Contrary to his belief, the average I.Q. was a couple points above average.

Further looking into the matter, the University of Iowa’s Child Welfare Research Station found that babies in nursery schools or desolate orphanages that transferred to good homes generally had an improved I.Q. Dr. George Dinsmore Stoddard, of the University of Iowa’s Child Welfare Research Station, concluded that rearing would make the most impact on a person’s state of mind. However, due to arguments about technical errors made by Stoddard’s researchers, the study was subject to doubt. After much debate, a consensus was reached that it was both a child’s biological makeup, as well as his or her environment, that would determine the type of person that child grows up to be (“Education,” 1940). After reading articles, listening to discussions and watching documentaries on the issue about children’s nature and nurturing, I would have to disagree with the consensus because I strongly believe that a child’s upbringing is the determinant of how they turn out.

Because the magazine article raises the question of family dynamics, it can be geared toward anyone, especially those who consider adopting children at infancy. The studies discussed in this article reflect a more technical, rather than clinical, approach, where the premise
is pretty much basic. It brings awareness to possible adoptive parents and enables easier understanding of the situation at hand.

Although I would have much preferred an article more recently written and not one a couple decades old, the article still presents valid argument, where there are legitimate points that serve to prove one side of the issue. The article describes that a consensus was reached. However, I do not believe this represents the author’s point of view. Rather, it is an informative piece. *Time*, in association with CNN, has always advocated bringing awareness worldwide, in which I think is the point of this article and all articles written in *Time*. It is to bring awareness and force people to think about the topic of discussion.

**Website**

Like the *Time* article’s central theme, Freivalds’ (2002) research weighs the effects of genetic and environmental influence on a child’s psyche. She goes on to say how little information there were on outcomes of adoption, which she suggested was due to early and biased studies. She explains that some studies found their subjects through mental health clinics, and therefore one could expect a reflected response. While a participant’s willingness gave the impression that he or she must be a happy person to willingly volunteer and that, too, would be a skewed outcome.

Enter the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS). SIBS wanted to observe interaction between siblings and how that might affect psychological behavior, asking the age-old question: Was behavior encouraged by the fact that a child shared the same genes with his or her siblings or was it because they grew up in the same family? SIBS was sure to eliminate any factors that might limit or skew their outcome by: recruiting subjects through adoption agencies, maximizing participation, including biological families in the study for characteristic
identification and assessing families who choose not to take part in the study to see if they differ from those that do (Freivalds, 2002).

Also interested by the issue of behavioral studies on subjects put up for adoption was Matt McGue, a University of Minnesota psychology professor and adoptive father. After numerous studies, his findings concluded that: 1. Children are as well off in a biological upbringing as they are in an adoptive one. 2. Siblings are more affected by birth order than adoptive status, where the eldest sibling (biological or adopted) expectedly holds the most power. 3. Adopted children account more conflict with parents than did biological offspring. 4. Adoptive siblings are psychologically similar to some extent, where sibling influence has more impact over parental (Freivalds, 2002).

Although Freivalds’ (2002) research explains the ways a study should be properly conducted, the basis of the article still seems too basic because it lacks the one thing that it said most adoption outcomes lacked—statistics. However, even though Freivalds does not take a stand on the issue of nature versus nurture, I find myself agreeing with her. To get accurate results, one must conduct a study properly and efficiently, and those who read Freivalds’ article, can find consolation in knowing that such results are accurately attained. This would be ideal for those who want to know the outcomes of adoption, most likely because they are considering adoption themselves.

Freivalds’ article was published as a March/April 2002 issue. Because it is pretty recent, I would consider its essence still strongly valid. The author, Susan Freivalds, is the Editorial Director and founder of Adoptive Families and, as stated in her biography page on the Adoptive Families website, “she was previously the executive director of Adoptive Families of America. [Freivalds] also served as director of Hague Convention Policy for the Joint Council on
International Children's Services. Susan is the mother of three daughters, the eldest adopted 28 years ago as an infant from Korea.”

Mentioned earlier, Freivalds does not take a stand on the nature versus nurture debate. Rather, she makes her readers aware of the limited information there is on adoption and how the Sibling Interaction and Behavior Study (SIBS) plans on changing this. As said on their official site, “Adoptive Families is the leading information resource for families before, during, and after adoption…. Each issue of Adoptive Families is built around stories of adoption.”

**Scholarly Journal**

Consider this journal article a general overview of the nature “and” nurture matter, whereas the magazine and the website go into specifics regarding adoption. As indicated in their review, “the theme of [Plomin & Asbury’s research] is that both genetics and environment, and the interplay between them, contribute importantly to the development of individual differences in behaviors including mental health and cognition” (Plomin & Asbury, 2005). Plomin & Asbury (2005) states that their research justifies genetics influence behavior, while at the same time, the research supports environmental influence.

In detail, Plomin & Asbury (2005) argue that the environment works differently than how people expect it to contribute. They claim that siblings are similar due to their genes more than the environment had any effect. Although environmental factors play a huge part in human development, they say genetic research proves that the most effective evidence of the environment makes children in the same family different, not similar.

Although they have provided technically basic points as to why they think this, I would still have to agree that a person’s behavior is due to how they were raised, or at least this environmental influence having more impact than genetics. Simply put, Plomin & Asbury think
that without one factor, the other factor will not hold up, where each side is critical to the other’s existence.

According to their footnoted biographies, Robert Plomin is Medical Research Charities’ Research Professor of Behavioral Genetics at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, where he is deputy director of the SGDP, or Social, Genetic and Development Psychiatry Centre. Its goal is to combine genetic and environmental research strategies to tackle behavioral development. Also in the footnotes, Kathryn Asbury is a postdoctoral researcher at the SDGP Centre. Her research focuses on the developmental boundary between genes and environment (Plomin & Asbury, 2005). Plomin has almost fifty journal articles in the JSTOR database, whereas Asbury has two journal articles.
References

