

The Nature - Nurture Debate

In Sociology, we are looking at human behaviour. **Human behaviour** is the term we use that refers to all of the things that people **do**. There are many ways of explaining why certain people do things in certain ways.

Some biologists think that people behave as they do because they are animals who act according to animal instincts. This is known as a Nature theory of human behaviour.

Most sociologists believe that people do certain things and think certain things because they are taught to do them. This is known as a Nurture theory of human behaviour. Sociologists think that people act as they do because they learned to be the people that they are.

Explaining human behaviour

What behaviour is believed by some people to be 'natural' for the following people? Jot down some ideas.

Boys	
Women	

Biologists put forward nature explanations of human behaviour. They say that people behave the way they do because they are just animals. Biologists say that men are aggressive because they have different hormones.

Think of some other reasons why some men are aggressive

Are all of the men that you know aggressive?

Nurture explanations of behaviour

Nurture means the way you were brought up. Sociologists say that some people were brought up to be kind and others are brought up to be tough. Children are made to be the people they are by others around them telling them what is right and wrong.

Write down a list of things that you were taught by other people about how to behave.

Nurture: the evidence that Sociologists use.

We have two different ways of explaining human behaviour. One uses nature to explain behaviour, the other uses nurture. The question is, which is the best explanation?

If you explain human behaviour as being the same as animal behaviour, that means that humans would all behave in the same way. French cats behave in the same way as British cats. Do British people behave like French people?

People in Britain do tend to behave in a similar way. They do similar things and wear certain types of clothing. Do all people all over the world behave in the same way? Sociologists tend to say 'no' and use three types of evidence to prove the point.

Historical Evidence against Nature theories

If human behaviour was animal then human behaviour over a period of time would hardly change, in the same way that animal behaviour only changes very slowly.

Think of two ways in which we are different from people in the past.

1.	
2.	

Anthropological Evidence against Nature theories

The second argument uses anthropological evidence. Anthropologists are people who study and compare societies from all over the world.

If our behaviour was in our genes then people all around the world would behave in the same way. Anthropologists show that people behave differently in different societies. For example, among the Sioux Indians of North America people show wealth by giving what they own away.

Think of four ways in which people in other countries are different from people in Britain.

1	
2	
3	
4	

Case Studies argue against Nature theories of behaviour

A case study is a study of one particular person. We study individuals to find out about all people.

If our behaviour is just to do with nature, then people who are brought up **without** other people will behave as other people do. Dogs who are brought up without other dogs will still wag their tails and bark, will humans brought up without other humans learn to talk and seem normal to us?

You will be given notes on the Chicken Girl of Portugal or the Wolf children of India to support this work. Make sure that you revise them.

When you have read the unit and completed all the boxes, plan a piece of writing about the Nature – Nurture debate using the following wordframe.

Why do sociologists reject Nature theories of human behaviour?

What is a Nature theory of human behaviour?	
What do sociologists think about human behaviour?	
What historical evidence do they use?	
What anthropological evidence do they use?	
What do case studies tell us about human behaviour?	
What is your conclusion after looking at the evidence?	