

How can we explain human behaviour?

Learning objectives:

- To *describe* what is understood by the term **identity**.
- To *describe* the **sociological**, **biological** and **psychological** explanations of human behaviour and to *explain* the differences between these views.
- To *describe* both the **nature** and **nurture** explanations of human behaviour and to *identify* the academic subjects that support either views.
- To *explain* the difference between the **nature** and **nurture** explanations of human behaviour.
- To *discuss* the claim that sociological explanation provide the **most appropriate** explanation of human behaviour.

Key concepts: *identity, sociology, psychology, biology, nature, nurture.*

Getting you started...

Everyone has different backgrounds and preferences and these experiences has an influence on our identity (*who we are*) and it is these factors that makes every person in society is individual and unique. Use the body outline (*on a separate sheet*) to present a selection of features that are specific for your own identity. Please use the prompts to help you but do feel free to make note on anything that is not specifically on this list.



Nationality	Ethnicity	Religion
Parents	Brother / sisters	Relationships
Television	Music	Films
Celebrities	Teachers	Friends
Food	Sports	Subjects
Sociology	GCSEs	Home town / village

The debate...

Sociologists, biologists, and psychologists among other academics have debated for hundreds of years in the attempt to explain how an individual's identity is created.

Team nature: This idea suggests that an individual is born with a constructed identity. This identity will develop as the individual grows up but it is argued that very little anyone can do to influence this change.

Supporters: biologists and psychologists



Biologists look for biological causes or characteristics when studying human behaviour i.e. *genetics*.



Psychologists focus on individual behaviour and study topics such as *mental illness*.

Team nurture: This idea suggests that an individual is born as a blank canvas. Personal traits will develop as the individual grows and communicate with a range of different people i.e. parents, teachers and friends.

Supporters: sociologists



Sociologists study the influences on human life by focusing on group (rather than individual) behaviour. They also view behaviour as social or cultural rather than biological.

Over to you...

Activity 1: Answer the following questions in your work book in full sentences

- 1) *Explain* what understood by the term nurture.
- 2) Define how a sociologist would *describe* human behaviour and *explain* how this would be different to either a psychologist or biologist.

Activity 2: Read through the two items and then answer the questions beneath in full sentences in your work book.

ITEM A: The shocking truth of the puppy boy

Puppy boy Horst is three years old – and just beginning his life as a human being. He is the child raised by a devoted pet dog while his parents went out drinking.

He became so like a dog that he didn't know how to use a toilet – and cocked his leg against a bush instead.

Now, as Horst gradually learns the behaviour of a normal little boy the full story of his lost babyhood is being unravelled.

Asta the dog had a litter of eight puppies just before Horst was born and they were taken from her. Pining from her brood, the dog turned her affection to the new baby. Asta nuzzled him, licked his hands, face, and bottom clean, kept him warm in a furry blanket under her tummy.

Now Horst is in a clinic in Wuppertal being reborn. He can keep down hot food – which he had never had – and he had added weight to his feeble frame, a third underweight. The staff are talking to him, slowly, teaching him to accept and enjoy cuddles, smiling at him, showing him toys and encouraging him to explore his new world. And he's learning that humans can be loving too.

Adapted from the Daily Mirror, 24 March 1988.

ITEM B:

'On 9 January 1800 a strange creature emerged from the woods near the village of Saint-Serin in southern France. In spite of walking tall, he looked more animal than human, although he was soon identified as a boy of about 11 or 12. He spoke only in shrill, strange sounding cries. The boy apparently had no sense of personal hygiene and relieved where and when he chose ... He refused to wear clothes, tearing them off as soon as they were put on him ... Later the boy was moved to Paris where professionals tried to change him from beast to human. The endeavour was only partly successful. He was toilet-trained, accepted wearing clothes and learned to dress himself. Yet he was uninterested in toys and games, and was never able to speak a few words. So far as we can tell, on the basis of detailed descriptions he was mentally retarded. He seemed either unwilling or unable to fully master human speech.'

Sociology by A.Giddens, 3rd edition, Polity, 1999.

- 3) Using item A and item B, *identify* three strange behaviours outlined in the text.
- 4) Using item A, *explain* how Horst's behaviour changed after he went to the clinic in Wuppertal.
- 5) Using item B, *explain* how the boy's behaviour changed after he went to Paris to seek professional help.
- 6) Using item A and item B, *explain* how the evidence supports the claim that we learn our behaviour from our environment.

Wrapping it up...

Activity 3: Complete the mix-and-match activity on the additional sheet provided and then answer the following question in your workbook.

- 7) *Discuss* how far researchers agree that the nurture is the most influential argument when explaining human behaviour and identity.