

# Socialization and Social Interaction

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will be introduced to the debate over whether our biology or our environment has the biggest impact on who we become. You will learn about the process by which humans learn to live in a society. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Nature vs. Nurture

Some experts argue that who we are is based entirely on genetics or our biological makeup. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth. From this perspective, who we are depends on nature. Others, including most sociologists, assert that who we are is a result of nurture—the relationships and environments that surround us.

There has been a longstanding debate within the social sciences of nature versus nurture, with respect to personality development and change throughout the life course. “Nature” refers to your biology: your biological instincts to survive and reproduce. “Nurture,” then, is the idea of society’s cultural standards of parental care.

Which of these factors is more important in developing our personalities and determining the people we become? We're dealt a biological deck of cards at the start. We get a set of genetic propensities, and we have biological impulses, of course, but these interact with society and are mediated by society in culturally specific ways.

### IN CONTEXT

One way researchers attempt to measure the impact of nature is by studying twins. Some studies have followed identical twins who were raised separately. The pairs shared the same genetic inheritance, but in some cases were socialized in different ways. Instances of this situation are rare, but studying the degree to which identical twins raised apart are the same or different can give researchers insight into the way our temperaments, preferences, and abilities are shaped by our genetic makeup versus our social environment.

For example, in 1968, twin girls born to a mentally ill mother were put up for adoption, separated from each other, and raised in different households. The adoptive parents, and certainly the adoptees themselves, did not know the girls were one of five pairs of twins who were made subjects of a scientific study.

In 2003, the two women, then age thirty-five, were reunited. Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein sat together in awe, feeling like they were looking into a mirror. Not only did they look alike but they also behaved alike, using the same hand gestures and facial expressions. Studies like these point to the genetic roots of our temperament and behavior.

Though genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, sociology's larger concern is the effect society has on human behavior—the “nurture” side of the nature-versus-nurture debate. What race were the twins? From what social class were their parents? What about gender? Religion? All these factors affected the lives of the twins as much as their genetic makeup, and are critical to consider as we look at life through the sociological lens.

## 2. Introduction to Socialization

**Socialization** is the lifelong process of learning one's culture and of internalizing the norms and behaviors that are considered appropriate for adults in society. Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. As individuals, social interaction provides us the means by which we gradually become able to see ourselves through the eyes of others, and how we learn who we are and how we fit into the larger world. In addition, to function successfully in society, we have to learn the basics of both material and nonmaterial culture, everything from how to dress ourselves to what's suitable attire for a specific occasion; from when we sleep to what we sleep on; and from what's considered appropriate to eat for dinner and even how to use the stove to prepare it. Most importantly, we have to learn language—whether it's the dominant language or one common in a subculture, whether it's verbal or through signs—in order to communicate and to think.



### BIG IDEA

For society to function, the socialization of individuals is necessary. Although how this occurs and what is transmitted in terms of cultural norms and values differs, every society relies upon socialization to ensure its survival.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A core value in the United States is democracy, so children in the U.S. might hear about voting or go to vote with their families before they even begin school. Once in school, they will learn about American history, civics, and citizenship. Students also learn the ways that the U.S. has not upheld democratic ideals and has disenfranchised various groups of people. Thus, in addition to voting and learning how to use material objects such as voting machines, children also learn about various social movements and leaders who resisted the existing social norms in order to facilitate change. Learning about how society has failed to live up to its ideals (and continues to struggle in certain areas) helps citizens not only to understand values and norms on a personal level but also to see the importance of values and norms in society, as well as how these can change over time. Remember that socialization is a lifelong process, so in our example, people will continue to examine whether or not the U.S. is living up to its democratic ideals over many years.



### Self and Social Awareness: Skill Tip

Having strong self and social awareness is beneficial in sociology, as well as in society in general. You may reflect on your behavior and see how it has been influenced by nature and nurture. You may also see how you have been socialized due to norms. This enables you to see society from a bigger picture and how others' behaviors and thought patterns might have also been influenced. Our similarities and differences have a great impact on how we function as a society.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Socialization**

The lifelong process of learning one's culture and internalizing the norms and behaviors considered appropriate for adults in society.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the ongoing debate between **nature and nurture** as the most important influences on a person's development. You learned about the process of **socialization** and how it continues throughout one's life.

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