**Sociobiology Theory**

While the term *sociobiology* can be traced to the 1940s, the concept of *sociobiology* first gained major recognition with Edward O. Wilson’s 1975 publication *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* . In it, he introduced the concept of sociobiology as the application of evolutionary theory to social behavior.

Sociobiology is based on the premise that some behaviors are at lease partly inherited and can be affected [by natural selection](http://evolution.about.com/od/Overview/g/Natural-Selection.htm). It begins with the idea that behaviors have evolved over time, similar to the way that physical traits are thought to have evolved. Animals will therefore act in ways that have proven to be evolutionarily successful over time, which can result in the formation of complex social processes, among other things.

According to sociobiologists, many social behaviors have been shaped by natural selection. Sociobiology investigates social behaviors such as mating patters, territorial fights, and pack hunting. It argues that just as selection pressure led to animals evolving useful ways of interacting with the natural environment, it also led to the genetic evolution of advantageous social behavior. Behavior is therefore seen as an effort to preserve one’s genes in the population and[certain genes](http://evolution.about.com/od/Terms-A-G/g/Gene-Pool.htm) or gene combinations are thought to influence particular behavioral traits from generation to generation.

[Charles Darwin’s](http://history1800s.about.com/od/innovators/p/darwinbio.htm) theory of evolution by[natural selection](http://history1800s.about.com/od/scienceculture/a/darwin-on-origin-of-species.htm) explains that traits less adapted to particular conditions of life will not endure in a population because organisms with those traits tend to have lower rates of survival and reproduction. Sociobiologists model the evolution of human behaviors in much the same way, using various behaviors as the relevant traits. In addition, they add several other theoretical components to their theory.

Sociobiologists believe that evolution includes not just genes, but also psychological, social, and cultural features. When humans reproduce, offspring inherit the genes of their parents, and when parents and children share genetic, developmental, physical, and social environments, the children inherit the gene-effects of their parents. Sociobiologists also believe that the different rates of reproductive success are related to different levels of wealth, social status, and power within that culture.

Example of [Sociobiology](http://sociology.about.com/od/S_Index/g/Sociobiology.htm) in Practice

One example of how sociobiologists use their theory in practice is through the study of[sex-role stereotypes](http://sociology.about.com/od/Disciplines/a/Sociology-Of-Gender.htm). Traditional social science assumes that humans are born with no innate predispositions or mental contents and that sex differences in children’s behavior is explained by the differential treatment of parents who hold sex-role stereotypes. For example, giving girls baby dolls to play with while giving boys toy trucks, or dressing little girls in only pink and purple while dressing boys in blue and red.

Sociobiologists, however, argue that babies do have innate behavioral differences, which trigger the reaction by parents to treat boys one way and girls another way. Further, females with low status and less access to resources tend to have more female offspring while females with high status and more access to resources tend to have more male offspring. This is because a woman’s physiology adjusts to her social status in a way that affects both the sex of her child and her [parenting style](http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/parenting-style.htm). That is, socially dominant women tend to have higher testosterone levels than others and their chemistry makes them more active, assertive, and independent than other women. This makes them more likely to have male children and also to have a more assertive, dominant parenting style.

Critiques of Sociobiology

Like any theory, sociobiology has its critics. One critique of the theory is that it is inadequate to account for human behavior because it ignores the contributions of the mind and culture. A second critique of sociobiology is that it relies on genetic determinism, which implies approval of the status quo. For example, if male aggression is genetically fixed and reproductively advantageous, critics argue, then male aggression seems to be a biologic reality in which we have little control.