

# NATURE AND NURTURE

---

Anyone who sets out to describe something about people—educators, psychologists, physicians, anthropologists, journalists, or even comedians—knowingly or unknowingly falls primarily into one of two camps: nature or nurture. Descriptions, of people groups or individuals or behaviors or symptoms, are rooted in the two primary forces that shape those descriptions.

Some of those descriptions (and all the assumptions that go with them) work from or reflect an understanding of nature. Nature merely refers to that which is natural; in this case, physiological realities. From a Christian perspective, we can call this design, since we believe that God intentionally created humans.

When we talk about teenagers from a design point of view, we're referring to those realities that are intrinsic

to who they are. These are internal forces that shape who teenagers are. While this is an overstatement, we're primarily referring to body and mind stuff. This is the stuff of objectivity, the observable and quantifiable.

Nurture, however, is the sum total of external forces: influence of family and friends, culture, media, and everything else outside the teenager that has a shaping impact.

These two shaping realities—nature and nurture—are often debated as to which is dominant. I'm not going to add to that debate. Instead, I'm going to work with an assumption I think you'll easily agree with: Both have an enormous shaping influence on the lives of real teenagers.

Take the examples of the teenagers above, for example. Did Jenna make the stupid choice of bringing vodka to school because it's in her nature to do so? Likely not; but we do know that teenagers have underdeveloped brains and that the most underdeveloped part of their brains is the part responsible for wisdom, impulse control, and decision making. So, yeah, there's probably a nature factor playing into that. But wouldn't there also have to be some external shaping forces in her decision? Otherwise, where would she have come up with the idea that this might be a cool thing? Or a fun thing? Even the presence of the vodka bottle in her home is an external shaping reality.

Tyler is dark and moody. Is that because all teenagers, or at least teenage boys, are physiologically predisposed to

moodiness? The first framing voice of adolescence, a guy named Stanley Hall, would have said that was the case. But surely, we know that there are external pressures adding to Tyler's mindset. In fact, while Tyler's disposition is common in the U.S., he'd be a rare teenager in most other cultures around the world.

The same dissection could be done with our other two examples (Crystal and Jason).

So that's the course we're going to chart here. We're going to start with the internal stuff—the physiological stuff; then we'll circle back around and look at the external stuff—the cultural realities.