

Hughes, C., Jaffee, S. R., Happ, F., Taylor, A., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2005). Origins of individual differences in theory of mind: From nature to nurture?. *Child Development*, 76(2), 356-370. Retrieved on February 4, 2012, from <http://web.ebscohost.com>

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is twofold. First, the researchers wanted to look at the relative contribution of genetic and environmental influences on individual differences. Secondly, they wanted to look at the possible overlap between influences on individual differences in theory of mind and in verbal ability.

Rationale of the study: The researchers wanted to establish a link between environmental influences on individual differences in theory of mind. They also wanted to see if there was a connection between environmental influences in relation to individual differences in theory of mind and verbal ability.

Methodology: This study used same sex twins in Wales and England. Questionnaires were used to determine which families would be used in the study. During the study, researchers would visit the homes in groups of two or three. This allowed one to interview the mother and one or two to interview the twins in separate locations in the house. Data was collected within two months of the twins' fifth birthday. Families are given gift vouchers and the children were given coloring books for participating in the study.

Results: It was found that identical twins score higher on similarities in theory of mind; whereas fraternal twins scored lower. On the other hand, fraternal twins scored twice as high on environmental contributions to theory of mind than their identical twin counterparts. Very similar results were found when the researchers looked at the verbal ability in the same twins.

Discussion: The researchers' first point in the discussion was that differential parenting plays a role in theory of mind when it comes to twins. The siblings become aware of "minor injustices in family life." The siblings pick up on when a parent treats the other sibling differently; giving rewards, praise, etc. For this reason families have more discussions about why one child received something and the other did not. The researchers discuss another study that supported this idea. That study showed that families that discussed conflict influence the children's later theory of mind. Students in this country start school at the age of 5. This plays a major role in theory of mind as well due to the influence of new factors. Those factors are the twins' teachers and peers. The researchers stated, "Friendships with socially skilled peers, therefore, appear to enhance children's social understanding from a very early age." These studies support the researchers' thoughts that nonshared environments play a key role in a person's theory of mind. The researchers also looked at shared environments and how they play a role in theory of mind. This study suggests "that specific shared environmental influence on theory on mind may be explained by individual differences in maternal mind-mindedness." The last part of this study looked at the correlation in theory of mind and verbal ability. The study found that twins with other siblings had a higher verbal ability. On the other twins that were the only children in the house showed a lower verbal ability at a young age but caught up as they got older. The study does state that there were other tests that needed to be run on the twins to truly get a full understanding on theory of mind and verbal ability. I do see how having siblings in the house that are older can lead to more mature theories of mind and verbal ability. The older siblings model this for the younger. However, I feel that parents can too play a huge role in this part of their child's development just by interacting with their children. Not doing baby talk and really having meaningful conversations with their children from birth.