

Are babies born bullies?

UBC study shows infants learn social stratification as early as nine months

Babies today are all about blankies, bottles and ... bullying?

A new University of British Columbia study done by the Centre for Infant Cognition suggests naptime may be the new frontier in the war on bullying.

Bullied children may bring exclusion on themselves with gene-linked behavior, study says

The episodes of bullying that mar early grade school years for hundreds of children may be a partial result of the victim's DNA, a new study suggested Wednesday.

The behaviors that most often lead to exclusion and victimization in the classroom or schoolyard have their roots in a student's genes, the study said, arguing that children's genetic makeup has a direct impact on the quality of the interactions they enjoy with their peers.

The findings were published on the website of the journal *Child Development*.

Michel Boivin, lead researcher and psychology professor at Laval University, said a child's genes will often dictate the way they act, which will in turn shape their experiences both in and out of the classroom.

In experiments conducted by UBC psychology professor Kiley Hamlin, babies aged nine to 14 months were found to take pleasure in the bullying of individuals they saw as different from themselves.

The study, in a terrifying preview of the social minefield that is the high school cafeteria, offered the infants a choice between a snack of graham crackers or green beans. The children were then shown a video of two puppets. In the video, one puppet favored the same snack as the child while the other puppet made a food faux pas by choosing the snack the child had passed on.

The children, when asked which of the puppets was their favorite, selected the puppet with similar tastes.

The experiment takes a slightly sinister turn when the children are shown videos of the puppets bullying each other. Not only did the children not mind when their favorite puppet picked on the puppet who chose differently from them, they also showed favoritism to new puppets who bullied the puppet that liked different snacks from the infant.

While the study's findings could inform future anti-bullying strategies, for now they are a mere chilling peek-a-boo into the world of baby bullies, and how infants learn to make their way in the world.

[Via the Vancouver Province]

Bullied children may bring exclusion on themselves with gene-linked behaviour, study says Canadian Press 1/17/13

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"We know that it's behavior that drives the peer difficulties," Boivin said in a telephone interview from Quebec.

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"It's the genetic factors that underlie the tendency to behave in a certain way that explain how the group reacts to the child and then rejects and victimizes the child."

Boivin said a child's genetic makeup lies at the root of certain behaviors that are more likely leave children on the social sidelines

Limiting social ostracism would have innumerable educational and mental health benefits for the five to 10 per cent of students who report feeling marginalized in school, he said.