

Monkeys mimic kids in toy selections

December 8 2005

A Texas A&M study suggests biological pre-wiring determines why boys and girls enjoy playing with different types of toys, not sociological factors.

Psychologist Gerianne Alexander says it's commonly believed boys and girls learn what types of toys they should like based solely on society's expectations. But she says her research brings that into question.

Alexander, who studies sex differences in behavior and biological factors that influence them, examined monkeys as they interacted with toys

She and Melissa Hines of the University of London found monkeys' toy preferences are consistent along gender lines as those of human children. Young male monkeys enjoyed playing with model cars and young female monkeys preferred dolls.

"Masculine toys and feminine toys," Alexander says, "are clearly categories constructed by people. However, our finding that male and female vervet monkeys show similar preferences for these toys as boys and girls do, suggests that what makes a 'boy toy' and a 'girl toy' is more than just what society dictates -- it suggests that there may be perceptual cues that attract males or females to particular objects such as toys."

The study appeared earlier this year in the journal "Evolution and Human Behavior."

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Citation: Monkeys mimic kids in toy selections (2005, December 8) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-12-monkeys-mimic-kids-toy.html>

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