



The Abbey

KINDNESS



Why are some people kinder than others?

Grace, Upper IV (Year 9)



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The question ‘Why are some people kinder than others’ is a widely debated topic, and a very interesting one. This question has been the driving force behind many scientific studies, and in this article I hope to debunk some myths surrounding this.

We encounter acts of kindness on a daily basis, whether it be smiling at someone, or lending your friend some money when they're low on funds. Kindness is all around us, big acts or small. To start with, I think I should define kindness, and according to Oxford Languages' Google dictionary, 'Kindness is defined as the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.'

The origins of kindness can come down to many different aspects, but the most widely debated concept is the Nature vs Nurture debate. In the debate nature suggests that behaviour and personality traits are in our nature and these come down to our genetics; whilst on the other side, nurture suggests that our environment, upbringing, and life experiences determine our behaviour as we are nurtured to behave in certain ways.

I think that they both contribute to how we act. One of Nelson Mandela's most famous quotations tells us, "no one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite". In 1961 the world-famous social psychologist Albert Bandura carried out a study named the 'Bobo Doll Experiment'. In this experiment Bandura split a group of children aged three-

six into six different groups: male aggressive, female aggressive, male non-aggressive, female non-aggressive, male control, and female control. The aggressive and non-aggressive groups each had their own adult 'role model'. These groups then got further split in half and one half had a role model of the same gender, and the other had a role model of the opposite gender. The control groups didn't have any role models and were left to their own devices throughout the experiment.

The role models would then enter the room and either verbally or physically attack the doll for the 'aggressive groups', or just ignore the doll and play/interact with other objects in the case of the non-aggressive groups. All of the children were then allowed to go to a second room where they had many toys at their disposal, but after a few minutes the object they were playing with was taken away each time. The purpose of the second room was to start annoying the children in preparation for the third room. Once the toys had run out the children were led to the third room, which contained aggressive and non-aggressive toys. The children in the aggressive groups took out their anger on the Bobo dolls, whilst the non-aggressive groups were content to play with the other toys and each other peacefully.

These children were shown how to be aggressive or kind to others and copied that behaviour when put into a situation, which shows us that aggression and kindness is a learned behaviour - this supports the nurture perspective. Haim Ginott, a child psychologist, said, "Children are like wet cement: whatever falls on them makes an impression". Another, more simple example is from Supernanny, when Jo Frost visits the George family. At the parent meeting in the episode she notes that the younger children are now starting to hit each other and this is due to the fact that their siblings' behaviour is rubbing off on them. Then later on in the episode the older children are tidying up the room and the toddlers help too, which shows us that the environment really does affect us.

However, nature and genetics are still a very prevalent factor regarding our kindness levels. When we think about happiness from a nature point of view, it can all be linked to our DNA. Research by psychologists at the University of Buffalo and the University of California has found that part of the reason some people are kind and generous is that their genes nudge them towards it. Their study indicated that the people who showed higher levels of kindness in various different situations e.g. helping neighbours, blood donations, money donations, volunteering etc. tested positive for higher levels of the hormone oxytocin.

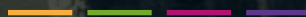


Oxytocin is often thought of as the 'love' and 'happiness' chemical - this is because when you are feeling happy your brain releases dopamine, which produces oxytocin and this in turn causes you to feel a rush of positive emotions as well as increasing your self-confidence and optimism. Kindness stimulates the production of serotonin, which makes you feel happy, and a research study in Japan showed that people who were happier were more likely to pass the action forward and be kinder to other people. When writing an article for Mayo Clinic Dr Amit Sood stated that "researchers estimate about 30-60% of our kindness is genetically determined" whilst the rest falls down to our surroundings. Based on this you could say that nurture and nature play an equal role in our levels of kindness.

What do you think: why are some people kinder than others?

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Nelson Mandela





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