

# Social Isolation: How Fifth Grade Students Identify It

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### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to see if fifth grade students agreed with the research that says that children can easily and rapidly identify social isolation within their peer groups (Dodge, Coie, Pettit, Price, & Joseph, 1990).

### Methods

There were 9 participants, 5 boys and 4 girls, from two fifth grade classes in a local public school. The school is a small rural school with only 350 students. The town is a small agriculture based town.

The participants were interviewed individually and asked questions to determine what they felt were the reasons why kids were isolated and how they are identified by their peers.

The participants were shown a picture at the beginning of the interview and asked to identify who they would like to be friends with and who they would not like to be friends with and why. This was followed by a series of questions designed to understand why children think their classmates get picked on and become isolated.

### Results

#### Socio Economic Status

- Researchers say:  
Kids Identify and classify by Socio Economic Status (Dodge et al., 1990).
- Boys Say:  
"If you have bad grades you get picked on the most and if your clothes are not as nice they get picked on the playground. Whoever has the most stuff (i.e. Xbox 360) is the ones with the most friends."  
"If they dress a certain way it makes them cool and if they don't dress a certain way they get picked on."
- Girls Say:  
"People get judged by their home life and get picked on by what they wear."  
"One girl has more stuff than I do and sometimes I don't want to hang out with her because I am jealous and that is rude of me... If you don't have the in style or cool shoes then people will pick on you."

#### Social Skills

- Researchers Say:  
Kids develop positive social skills through peer interactions and when those skills are missing kids are quickly identified and separated from peer play groups (Rubin & Coplan, 2004).
- Boys Say:  
"I can tell if I don't like someone by their tone of voice. If it is whiny or they are mean, I don't like them."  
"They get picked on if they don't fit in. The way they act and look makes them not cool."
- Girls Say:  
"People judge each other based on how they look and talk."

#### Intelligence

- Researchers Say:  
Children who are focused on failing cannot excel and learn from their mistakes like their peers (Nelson, Rubin, & Fox, 2005).
- Boys Say:  
"If you do bad in school you get picked on. You can tell because when the teachers calls on them they don't know what the answer is."  
"Kids who don't do as good in class get picked on more than if they do good. They get picked on because they are quiet and people think they are not as smart."
- Girls Say:  
"Kids also get picked on because of their grades. In our class the teacher has a board on the back of the class that says what assignments you have turned in and what you have to do and there are kids that have not turned in anything and they get picked on because of it."

### Interpretation

The boys and girls both talked about how socioeconomic status was a factor, as well as perceived intelligence either too much or too little.

The boys also talked about participation in sports and knowledge of current trends and things seen on MTV as factors that can contribute someone to being more likely to be isolated or not isolated.

With the girls, they focused more on appearances such as clothing, shoes, hairstyles, and earrings. Being the first to wear earrings or a new hairstyle would bring on criticism and could lead to somebody withdrawing.

### Conclusion

Despite the study's limitations, it does provide insight into an area of research that has not yet been explored. Previous research has shown what adults think is happening based on observations, but there is a lack of work done on what the children actually think. This project could serve as a springboard for further research into why fifth graders are able to easily identify the social outcasts so quickly. Future research should include both observing children at play and interviewing them in depth about their ideas. A larger number of participants could help to identify what the markers are that children use to classify and isolate each other.

### References

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