

Acquiring Social Bias in Early Childhood

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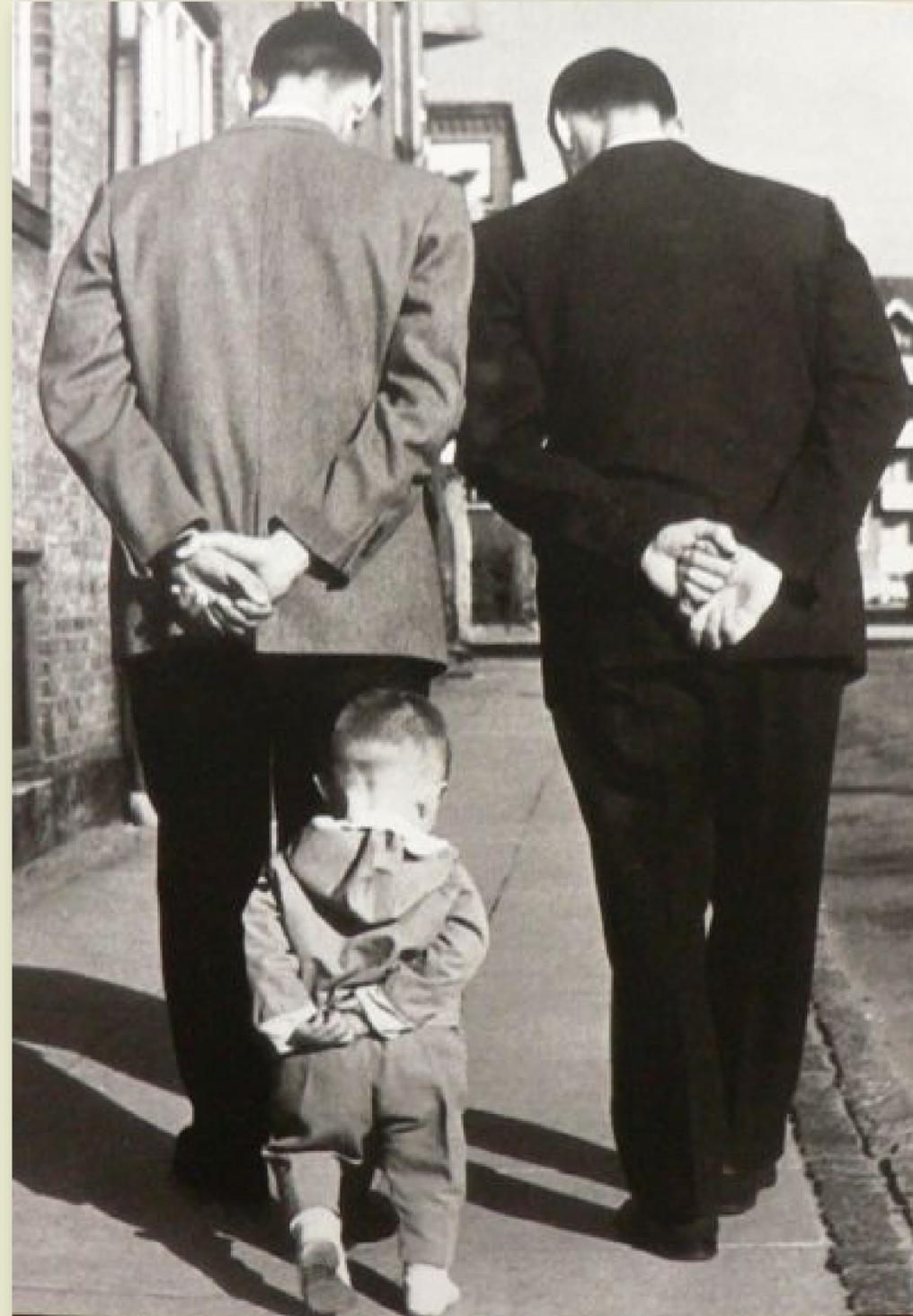
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Ubiquitous Implicit Learning



Observational Social Learning of Social Bias

Two experiments:

Learning social biases from observing others (4-5 yr olds)

Social bias can be 'caught' even if not explicitly 'taught'

Young Children Catch Bias from Watching Us



Film Credit:
Mind in the Making

Skinner, Meltzoff, & Olson
Psychological Science, 2017

Skinner, Olson, & Meltzoff
J. Pers. & Social Psych., 2020



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Behavioral Measures

- **Liking.** Which person children liked more
- **Prosocial behavior.** Which person children wanted to share with
- **Action imitation.** Which person children imitated
- **Word learning.** Which person children learned a verbal label from

Skinner, Meltzoff, & Olson
Psychological Science, 2017

Skinner, Olson, & Meltzoff
J. Pers. & Social Psych., 2020

Test of Generalization of Group Bias

Blackpine



Redvale



Skinner, Olson,
& Meltzoff,
*J. Pers. & Soc.
Psych.*, 2020

3 Features of Observational Social Learning of Bias

- **Rapid.** Preschoolers rapidly adopt biases they observe, and then generalize biases to whole groups of people who ‘look similar’
- **Observation only.** Children caught biases from ‘mere observation’ of the way adults acted
- **Societal importance.** Rapid and unintentional transmission of group bias, including intergenerational transfer. Children are social *pattern detectors*. Their own behavior is influenced by the patterns of bias they observe

Meltzoff, & Marshall
Curr. Opinion in Beh. Sci., 2018

Skinner, Olson, & Meltzoff
J. Pers. & Social Psych., 2020

Open Questions

- **Duration.** How long do these generalized biases last?
- **Peers.** We used adults; what if bias had been modeled by peers?
- **Close others.** What if demonstrated by own parent vs. stranger?
- **What can we do?** Mitigation with adults; prevention with children.
Immediate action: Message to parents = our children are watching us.

Thank you for listening!