

NEWS

Video: Of mice and men

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If you give most mice a choice between sniffing a new playmate and a new object, most will choose the new playmate every time. But not an inbred strain called **BTBR**, which is far more antisocial than most mice. These mice prefer to engage with objects — much like some people with autism. Mice with a mutation in SHANK3, a protein that interprets signals at synapses, also spend less time engaging in social interactions with other mice.

Does that mean these mice have autism?

Not exactly, says **Jacqueline Crawley**, chief of the laboratory of behavioral neuroscience at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda. Crawley says it is not possible to recapitulate the very human disorder of autism in a mouse. But mice are social animals, and it is possible to create a mouse with features analogous to those of autism.

SFARI caught up with Crawley at The Emerging Neuroscience of Autism Spectrum Disorders, a satellite meeting of the **Society for Neuroscience's annual meeting** in San Diego, to talk about mice and how they are, sometimes, like men.