

Stealing the soul of imitation?

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The associative sequence learning theory (ASL) suggests that infants learn to imitate using domain-general mechanisms of learning and the rich resources provided by their sociocultural environments.

Addressing objections that have been raised against the ASL model, I will 1) review evidence that newborns do not imitate; 2) argue that infants receive a plentiful supply of the kind of experience necessary for learning to imitate; 3) suggest that neither infants nor adults can imitate elementally novel actions; 4) explain why nonhuman animals have a limited capacity for imitation; 5) discuss the goal-directedness of imitation; 6) present evidence that improvement in imitation depends on visual feedback; and 7) reflect on the view that associative theories steal “the soul of imitation” (Meltzoff, 2005).