

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Imitation, Autism & Theory of Mind: A comparison of the copying abilities of autistic and normally developing 3 & 4 year-old children on 3 social learning conditions using the simultaneous chaining task

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zv8q59v>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 25(25)

ISSN

1069-7977

Authors

Subiaul, Francys
Lurie, Herbert A.
Romansky, Katherine
et al.

Publication Date

2003

Peer reviewed

Imitation, Autism & Theory of Mind:

A comparison of the copying abilities of autistic and normally developing
3 & 4 year-old children on 3 social learning conditions using the
simultaneous chaining task*

Francys Subiaul¹, Herbert A. Lurie², Katherine Romansky³, David Holmes⁴, Tovah Klein⁵,
Ralph L. Holloway¹, Herbert S. Terrace³

Columbia University in the City of New York

¹Department of Anthropology,

²Teachers College, Department of Psychology,

³Department of Psychology,

⁴The Eden Institute,

⁵Barnard College, The Toddler Center, Department of Psychology

Various researchers have suggested that autistic children have a specific imitation deficit (Rogers, 1994; Rogers and Pennington, 1991). The current study sought to investigate cognitive imitation among autistic children, controlling for motor confounds and feedback provided by the model. An absolute measure of imitation was employed in the current study. Subjects either discovered the answer faster in the imitation condition than at baseline or compared to logical chance. Results suggest that when motor confounds are eliminated from the imitation task, autistic children appear capable of learning serial information from a model. However, when different types of feedback (social, non-social, combination of social and non-social feedback) are provided in the course of learning from a model, autistic children failed to distinguish between social and non-social feedback. This is consistent with the view that this population of children may have a specific deficit in social cognition. to copy abstract information may be a shared-derived catarrhine trait.