

Lecture 2 - Gadgets for Mindreading and Imitation.

12th December 2017. 5.30pm – 7.00pm

Compared with chimpanzees, most adult humans are strikingly good at reading the minds of others, inferring their thoughts and feelings, and at copying the fine details of what others are doing. Mindreading and imitation enable humans to cooperate on grand scales, and to accumulate wisdom over many generations. Given their importance in making human lives so different from those of other animals, it's tempting to think that mindreading and imitation are 'in our genes'. However, I argue, using evidence from developmental psychology and social cognitive neuroscience, that mindreading, like print reading, is taught by experts to novices. Similarly, the capacity to imitate is built from 'old parts' in the course of childhood, and the construction process is powered by culture-specific patterns of social interaction.