

Imitation, Mirror Neurons, & Mimetic Desire:

Convergent Support for the Work of Rene Girard

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Convergent evidence across the modern disciplines of developmental psychology and neuroscience demonstrate that imitation based on mirrored neural activity and reciprocal interpersonal behaviors are what guide and scaffold human development. Not only does imitation function powerfully in the mother-infant dyad to bring about experience-dependent neurocognitive development and self-other differentiation, but it also continues to thrive in adulthood as perhaps the most organizing characteristic of human behavior. The purpose of this discussion will be to illuminate some of the most recent findings concerning imitation and the central role it plays in human development, cognition, and intersubjective experience. I hope to demonstrate the valuable contribution that developmental psychology and neuroscience provide for Girard's work by clarifying many aspects of imitation that are not accounted for by mimetic theory, and in complementary fashion, how imitation research may benefit from the implications of human imitative phenomena already outlined by Girard from a more anthropological perspective. Since there have been no substantial studies concerning the pressing issue of human imitation, which have synthesized recent findings with Girard's theories, it is my hope that this unique and schematic discussion will serve as a catalyst for more detailed and comparative analyses between these diverse bodies of work.