

**How to Build a Baby with Social Cognition:
Accelerating Learning by Generalizing Across Self and Other**

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Humans have a long period of infantile immaturity compared to other animals. This immaturity has co-evolved with two powerful social learning mechanisms—imitation and gaze following of others—which are operative in human infants, rare in the animal kingdom, and impaired in autism. Human infants rapidly learn about physical laws and social conventions through observing the actions of others. Beyond direct manipulation of the world and learning through trial and error, children learn merely from watching and imitating experts. Human infants exploit others as proxies—a strategy that multiplies their learning opportunities prior to taking action themselves. In a sense, infants learn almost as much from watching the trial and error and insightful solutions of others as they do from their own activities. I have argued that such social learning is supported by the infants’ fundamental recognition that others are “Like Me” (‘what applies to others, applies to me’). This undergirds bi-directional mapping from others to self and self to other, accelerating early human learning. Recent work in developmental science, social robotics, and social neuroscience has helped to elucidate the mechanisms underlying imitation, gaze following, and the “Like Me” framework. I will use this research to draw more general theoretical lessons about social learning and developing theories of mind.