

Does Mimicry Modulate Infants' Willingness to Initiate Play

with a Social Partner?

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Introduction

- Infants as young as 9-months-old can discriminate mimicry from other forms of contingent behavior.¹
- Being mimicked by peers and adults prolongs sustained play behaviors.²
- Infants who are mimicked are more likely to subsequently initiate with an unfamiliar adult mimickers.³

Questions

1. Do infants who are mimicked more initiate play more frequently?
2. Are there differences in infant's visual attention depending on who initiates play?

Method

Participants: 5 infants mean age of 17.8 (1.3) months; 3 male

Procedure:

- Infants were seated on caregiver's lap and participated in a 6 to 12 minute play phase.
- Experimenter mimicked infants' object-directed actions, facial/body gestures, and vocalizations.
- Videos were coded for various behaviors independently by trained coders using the Observer coding software. (Cohen's Kappa = 0.80).



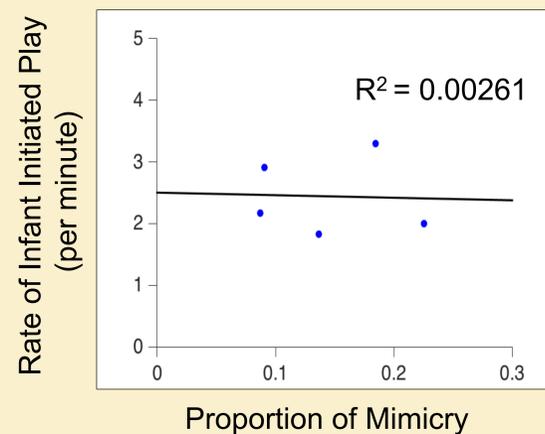
Coding Behavioral Observations

- (A) Unfiltered observational coding data
(B) The same observational data filtered by infant's visual attention to the experimenter during mimicry only.
(C) Observational data filtered by infant's visual attention during intervals of infant initiated play (IIP)
(D) Repeated for experimenter initiated play (EIP)

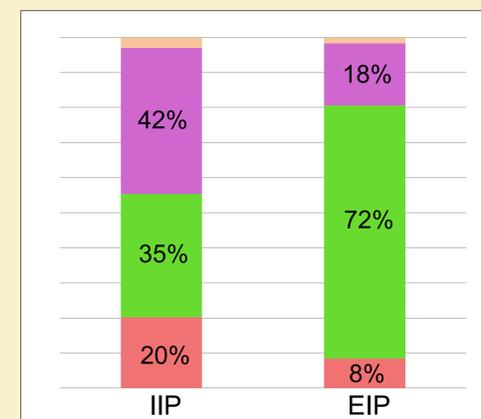


Results

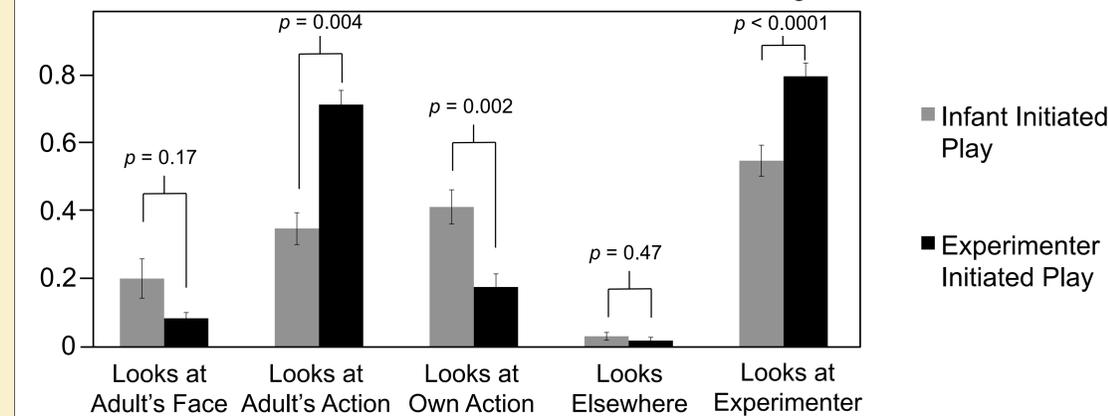
Correlation Between Mimicry and IIP Rate



Distribution of Infants' Visual Attention During IIP & EIP



Distribution of Infants' Visual Attention During IIP & EIP



Conclusions

- Although there was no significant correlation between mimicry and rate of IIP, this may have been due to the small sample size.
- The proportion of time infants spent looking to the experimenter's face or elsewhere was not significantly different between IIP and EIP intervals.
- However, infants' visual attention to the experimenter's action or their own action was significantly different for IIP versus EIP intervals.
- Interestingly, infants attention to their own actions was significantly greater during IIP than EIP; it is possible that infants are using their own gaze and action to direct their partner's attention to their own actions.

References

- ¹Agneta, B., & Rochat, P. (2004). Imitative games by 9-, 14-, and 18-month-old infants. *Infancy*, 6(1), 1-36.
²Grusec, J. E., & Abramovitch, R. (1982). Imitation of peers and adults in a natural setting: A functional analysis. *Child Development*, 636-642.
³Fawcett, C., & Liszkowski, U. (2012). Mimicry and play initiation in 18-month-old infants. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 35(4), 689-696.