

Liking through other's eyes: social moderators of mimetic desires

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Gaze-following and joint attention have been extensively studied in developmental, clinical and cognitive psychology. It is only recently, however, that researchers examined its evaluative effect: objects are evaluated more favourably when perceived to receive others' attention, an effect coined "mimetic desire". In this talk, empirical evidence will be presented suggesting that this effect is moderated by social factors that are assumed to influence observers' appraisal of the gazing person. Specifically, the presented data shows that mimetic desires are facilitated with trustworthy gazing persons, but reversed with untrustworthy gazing persons (Study 1) and that they are facilitated following the administration of oxytocin to the observers (Study 2). As a whole, the latter evidence supports the involvement of interpersonal rather than purely attentional effects in mimetic desires. More generally, whereas psychological research has been mostly interested in the effect of valence on attention, research in mimetic desires speaks to a blossoming interest in the opposite relationship: how attention impacts attitude acquisition.