

# The Ontogeny of Cultural Learning

Friday,  
November 4  
12-1:30pm  
SSM 317  
(Half Dome)



CIS Invited Speaker  
**Cristine H. Legare**

Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
The University of Texas at Austin

**Abstract:** Humans are a social species and much of what we know we learn from others. To be effective and efficient learners, children must be selective about when to innovate, when to imitate, and to what degree. I propose that the psychological system supporting the acquisition of instrumental skills and cultural conventions is driven by two modes of interpretation: an instrumental stance (i.e., interpretation based on physical causation) and a ritual stance (i.e., interpretation based on social convention). I will discuss cross-cultural research in the U.S. and Vanuatu (a Melanesian archipelago) on the interplay of imitation and innovation in early childhood. I then will draw upon the anthropological and evolutionary science literatures to provide a psychological account of the social functions of ritual. Solving the adaptive problems associated with group living requires psychological mechanisms for identifying group members, ensuring their commitment to the group, facilitating cooperation with their coalition, and maintaining group cohesion. The intersection of these lines of inquiry promises to provide new avenues for theory and research on the evolution and ontogeny of social group cognition.