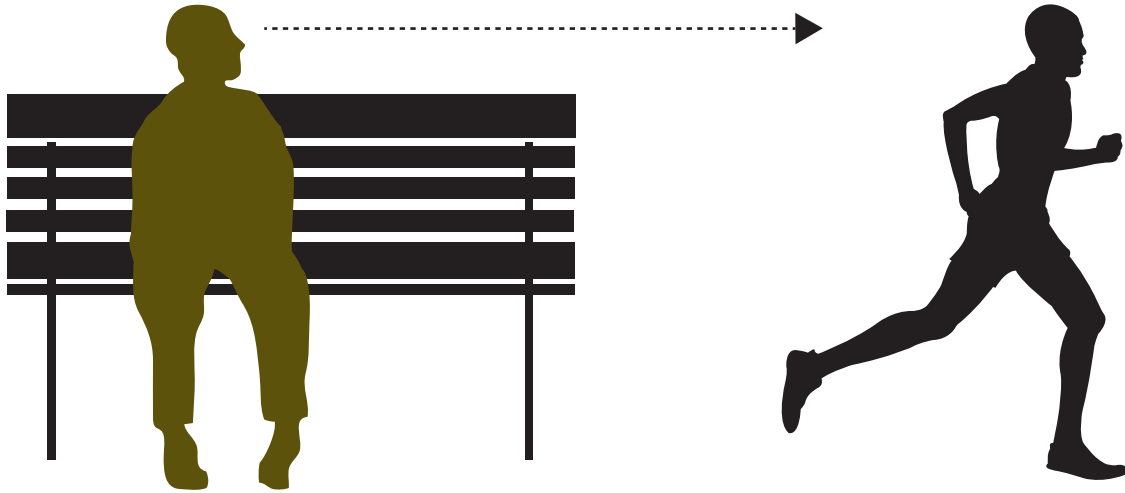


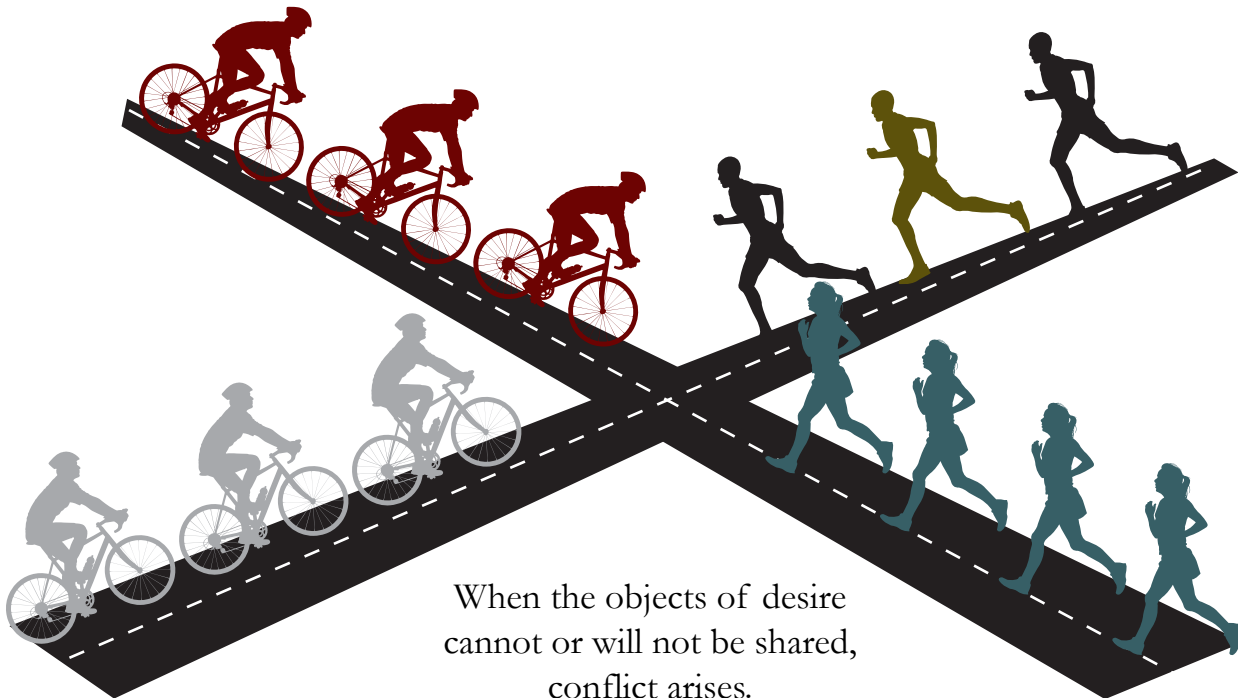
# MIMETIC DESIRE



Human beings learn everything, including our desires, through imitation. Our individual and cultural identities are formed in relationship to others.



Imitated desires lead to bonds of friendship and love...



When the objects of desire cannot or will not be shared, conflict arises.



## MIMETIC DESIRE

The role of imitation in human learning has been recognized since Aristotle. The mimetic insight is twofold: that desires are learned through imitation and that shared desire leads to conflict. This can be observed in everyday examples.

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## THE PLAYROOM

Imagine a small child in a room full of toys. He is only casually engaged with a toy nearby. Another child enters the room and surveys the toys. Which one will she choose? It will most likely be the toy the first child seems interested in, because even that casual interest makes that toy more desirable than all the others. As she reaches for the toy, the first child's interest is suddenly enflamed. He may shout, "I had it first!" and tussle with her for possession of an object he hardly desired until she seemed to want it. They may come to blows over something neither of them wanted all that badly until the other one wanted it, too.

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## THE SALE TABLE

You pass by a sale table with a number of things you have no interest in, including a stack of blue sweaters much like the one you are wearing. As you linger nearby, someone stops and picks up one of the sweaters, which piques your interest. You begin to think that your blue sweater is a bit shabby and that the one he's holding seems so much better than yours. In fact, it now seems much better than the others on the table. You instinctively realize that if you were to show interest in the sweaters, the other shopper might realize what a great bargain he has in his hands and hang on to it. So you feign disinterest so as not to fuel his desire. Your tactic works, he drops the sweater and leaves, which is a lucky thing since you had begun to hate him just a little bit and who knows where that might have led!

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## LOVE TRIANGLES

Why do two friends often fall in love with the same person? Because friends are used to sharing and enflaming each other's desires. Friends enjoy introducing each other to new things and "falling in love" with them together. Whether it's a book, movie, entertainer or fashion designer, if one friend has a lukewarm reaction, the other friend's interest will wane, too. So when it comes to lovers, if Jake is head over heels in love, it's very natural for his friend Bob to feel the same way. Often Jake might actually want Bob to be a bit gaga for his significant other because he is used to having his desires reinforced and encouraged by Bob. Unfortunately, both friends are usually ignorant of this dynamic. If Bob believes his love is "true" and authentic, the friendship may turn to rivalry. Or if Bob feels so-so, Jake's love may quickly fade.