Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0014-2921(17)30046-6
DOI: 10.1016/j.euroecorev.2017.01.010
Reference: EER 2966

To appear in: *European Economic Review*

Received date: 28 December 2015
Accepted date: 24 January 2017

Please cite this article as: Stefan P. Penczynski, The Nature of Social Learning: Experimental Evidence, *European Economic Review* (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.euroecorev.2017.01.010

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The Nature of Social Learning: Experimental Evidence

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June 2016

In the wide economic literature on social learning, many types of behavior – rational and non-rational – have been proposed. I suggest a level-k model that unifies many of them in one framework. This paper analyzes experimental data that is able to distinguish between levels of reasoning at the individual level. It relies on rich, existing data from Çelen and Kariv (2004) as well as new experimental data that includes written accounts of reasoning from incentivized intra-team communication. Three datasets provide consistent evidence that naïve inference in form of the best response to truthful play is the most common approach to social learning. The empirical type distributions feature heterogeneity similar to other level-k applications.

Keywords: Social learning, levels of reasoning, naïve inference

JEL Classification: C91, D82, D83, D84

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