Early Social Cognition
PSYC 789R / NACS 728G, 3 credits
Spring 2014

Time: Tuesdays, 3:30 to 6:00 pm
Location: BPS 1103

Instructor: Jonathan Beier
jsbeier@umd.edu
Biology-Psychology Building, room 2147E
Office hours: by appointment
Website: http://elms.umd.edu

Course description
This graduate seminar explores the foundations of social cognition, from birth through the first few years of life. There will be two phases of the semester. The first phase of the class will focus on weekly collections of primary empirical and theoretical readings. We will first review infants’ and toddlers’ developing conceptions of people as mental agents, whose behavior is structured by goals and beliefs. Next, we will observe that young children not only understand the experiences of others, but also care about them, as revealed through both their evaluations of characters who act in appropriate versus inappropriate ways and children’s own prosocial behaviors towards others. The class will continue with consideration of the mechanisms by which infants learn from those around them, via both direct instruction and observation. We will conclude with an exploration of how young children recognize, reason about, and relate to the social ties that bind people together: affiliation, dominance, and social group membership.

The second phase of the class will feature a close reading of the new book by Michael Tomasello, “A Natural History of Human Thinking”, a soon-to-be-released grand statement and synthesis of his work on social cognition in evolution and development. Previous versions of this course have featured his work prominently, interspersed through the different weekly reading. We will take advantage of the book by shifting much of this material into the “book club” days, allowing for a deeper exploration during the first class phase of very early appearing social cognitive processes, which have not traditionally been Tomasello’s focus. Because the book does not come out until early February, I have not yet read it, so the structure of discussion and possible additional empirical readings for those days is somewhat less worked out; I’ll read it immediately upon release and fill in those details soon.

Attendance and participation
This course is based around active discussion among its participants. Before each course meeting, students are expected to have read all of the assigned readings. Students will also submit short response papers the night before class, and should be prepared to elaborate on the ideas they raised. As this is a graduate seminar, I encourage you to introduce ways that your own areas of expertise might relate to the course material.
Course requirements and evaluation for enrolled students

Attendance and class participation (10%):
Be prepared and be engaged! Your grade will be based on whether you come prepared to discuss the readings, the relevance of your comments to the ongoing discussion, and your ability to integrate the readings and comments made by other seminar participants.

Response posts (20%):
Each week, students should compose a short response to that week’s readings. Response posts should be posted to the Discussion Board on the ELMS website for the course; each week there will be a new Forum on the board. Papers should be posted by 6 pm the Monday before class. Discussion leaders for a given week should read all response papers and raise their themes as points of discussion. Discussion leaders are exempt from writing responses.
Response papers should be at least 200 words, but content is more important than length. Since everybody will have read the readings there is no need to summarize them. Your paper should be a thoughtful response to the course material; for instance, you may critique the readings, point out interesting contrasts among them, relate them to another body of work, or extend their arguments. Although non-discussion leaders are not required to read the responses, I encourage you to do so. Your response may be a reply to another student’s response, extending her or his ideas.

Discussion leading (30%)
Each week, at least one student will lead discussion of the primary readings for that day. On the first day of class, we will take volunteers for the next class, and then work out the semester’s assignments the following week, once final course enrollment is hopefully determined. I expect each student will lead about once, but we shall see!
Discussion leaders should plan to meet with me briefly, early in the week before their class leading day. Ideally, we would check in for 5-10 minutes after Tuesday’s class, but we can arrange times as fits our schedules. In this meeting, we will review the themes of the upcoming class meeting. I may suggest additional readings or findings that should be brought into the discussion.
The discussion leader should prepare a handout summarizing the day’s material. I strongly encourage you to include figures of results, images of stimuli, and any tables, charts, or other graphical summarization devices that you may generate! This will allow us to have the discussion without constantly flipping through different papers. The discussion leader should bring printouts of the handout to class (double-sided, please!). The handout should also be posted as a pdf to ELMS by shortly after class, so that other students can have it for their records.
To encourage discussion, no Powerpoint-guided presentations will be allowed; however, if there is a video of a experimental task or behavior that would be helpful for the class to view, I’ll be glad to include it.
Secondary topic presentations (10%):
Each week, at least one student will also give a 30-minute primer on a set of secondary readings, as a supplement to the main discussion. Other students are not required to have read these papers, but are of course welcome to do so.
This syllabus lists the general topic areas of secondary presentations, but the ultimate content will be partly determined by the presenter (with my input). The presenter should post a list of relevant papers to ELMS as early in the week as possible, so that other students may look over these in advance if they wish.

Final paper (30%):
Final papers should be about 15 pages double-spaced. I am open to a range of topics, but they should engage the material of the course. We will discuss possible topics as the course proceeds. Before settling on a topic, you should discuss it with me – in person or by email. Your papers will likely take the form of either 1) a grant or project proposal or 2) a theoretical review that offers more than just summary (i.e., includes a new synthesis or positive account), but you are welcome to propose an alternative format if it would be useful to you in your own work.
Final papers are due by midnight on the night of Tuesday, May 20.

Course requirements for auditors
Auditors are expected to be active participants in the class. They should do all the readings and come to all class meetings. Based on final enrollment, auditors may be required to lead discussion or offer secondary topic presentations.

Policies
Everyone is expected to come prepared to discuss the readings for the week. Class attendance is essential and if you cannot attend a particular session please let me know as soon as possible.

- Students with disabilities or special needs: If you have special needs with regards to this class, please contact me so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged.
- Academic honesty: All students are expected to adhere to campus policy on academic integrity. Cheating on academic work will not be tolerated in any form and will be subject to strong penalties in this class and the university system. If you cheat on a paper or assignment, you risk failing the class, as well as suspension or expulsion from the University as a whole. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, misrepresenting someone else’s work as your own, falsifying any information in a citation or academic exercise, using unauthorized materials in any academic exercise, or helping another to commit academic dishonesty. You are expected to work independently on your papers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>2nd Presenter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 28</td>
<td>Intro and organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 4</td>
<td><strong>Innateness and learning devices: the case of faces</strong></td>
<td>Sara Haas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bodies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brandon T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 11</td>
<td><strong>Goal-directed action and intentional agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agents cause things to happen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 18</td>
<td><strong>Beliefs and ToM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-human ToM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 25</td>
<td><strong>Emotion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>[secondary tbd]</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 4</td>
<td><strong>Prosocial behavior</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antisocial behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11</td>
<td><strong>Social evaluation and Morality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource distribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18</td>
<td><em>No class – SPRING BREAK</em>**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 25</td>
<td><strong>Teaching and Selective Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blind Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td><strong>Imitation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 8</td>
<td><em>No class – JSB travelling</em>**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 15</td>
<td><strong>Interpersonal relations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attachment and working models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22</td>
<td><strong>Social Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language and Accent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 29</td>
<td><strong>Tomasello, part 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual and Joint Intentionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 6</td>
<td><strong>Tomasello, part 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective intentionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>[secondary tbd]</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13</td>
<td><strong>Tomasello, part 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Human Thinking as Cooperation”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>Final papers due</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Class Readings: Readings may change as the course proceeds!

January 28: Introduction and organization

February 4: Innateness and learning devices: the case of faces

Primary readings:


Secondary presentation: TBD, likely on the development of body representations

February 11: Goal-directed action and intentional agency

Primary readings:


*Secondary presentation: Agents and causality*

**February 18: Beliefs and Theory of Mind**

*Primary readings:*


*All students pick at least one of the following, to be decided in prior class:*


*Secondary presentation: Non-human ToM*
February 25: Emotion

Primary readings:


Repacholi, B. M., Meltzoff, A. N., & Olsen, B. (2008). Infants' understanding of the link between visual perception and emotion: "If she can't see me doing it, she won't get angry.". *Developmental Psychology, 44*(2), 561-74.


Secondary presentation: TBD

April 3: Prosocial behavior

Primary readings:


Secondary presentation: Antisocial behavior and psychopathy
March 11: Social evaluations and moral intuitions

Primary readings:


Killen, M. – to be determined – Mike, recommend!

Secondary presentation: Developments in children’s own resource distribution

March 18: no class – SPRING BREAK

March 25: Teaching and Trust

Primary readings:


**Secondary presentation: Blind trust**

**April 1: Imitation**

**Primary readings:**


**Secondary presentation: Conformity**

**April 8: no class – JSB is travelling**

**April 15: Interpersonal relationships**

**Primary readings:**


**Secondary presentation:** Attachment and working models

**April 22: Social groups**

**Primary readings:**


**Secondary presentation:** Language and accent

**April 29: Tomasello, part 1**

**Primary readings:**

Chapter 1: The Shared Intentionality hypothesis  
Chapter 2: Individual Intentionality  
Chapter 3: Joint Intentionality
May 6: Tomasello, part 2

*Primary readings:*

   Chapter 4: Collective Intentionality
   →*Plus, further readings TBD*

*Secondary presentation: TBD*

May 13: Tomasello, part 3

*Primary readings:*

   Chapter 5: Human Thinking as Cooperation.
   Chapter 6: Conclusions
   →*Plus, further readings TBD as wrap-ups, and as complimentary stories to Tomasello’s account.*