Early Social Cognition
aka Special Research Problems: Special Topics in Developmental Psychology
PSYC 789R / NACS 728G, 3 credits
Spring 2012

Time: Tuesdays, 3:30 to 6:00 pm
Location: BPS 1112

Instructor: Jonathan Beier
jsbeier@umd.edu
Biology-Psychology Building, room 2147A
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. In this course, we will first review infants’ and toddlers’ conceptual development in the social domain. Topics will include the detection of social partners in one’s environment, representations of intentional agents and their actions, and understanding of others' perceptual and belief states. We will then consider the ways that this early knowledge guides young children’s own social behaviors and evaluations of others. On what grounds do infants and toddlers form preferences for some individuals over others? What social motivations might underlie their imitative behaviors? What is their grasp of other people’s communicative intentions? Why do children act in helpful ways towards others? Throughout the course, we will discuss different theories concerning the origins of these basic cognitive abilities and dispositions, in both ontogeny and phylogeny.

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 for enrolled students

Class participation (10%): Be prepared and be engaged!

Response papers (20%):
Each week, students should compose a short response to that week’s readings. Response papers 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 7 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 the discussion. We will work out the number of times each student will lead after final course enrollment is determined. I expect it will be about twice.

Discussion leaders should plan to meet with me early in the week before class – ideally on Wednesday. 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 findings that should be brought into the discussion.

**Final paper presentation (10%)**:  
On April 24, students will give short presentations outlining their plan for the final paper. Each presentation should take about 10 minutes, with another 5 minutes set aside for discussion and comments. This is meant as a way for students to get early feedback on their paper topics. One week prior to the presentation, students should email me with a short description of their proposed topic.

**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.

**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. Auditors will be required to lead discussion once.
Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td>Intro and organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 7</td>
<td>Innateness and learning devices: the case of faces</td>
<td>Bonnie &amp; Jonathan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 14</td>
<td>Goal-directed action and intentional agency</td>
<td>Megan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 21</td>
<td>Gaze-following and joint attention</td>
<td>Bonnie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 28</td>
<td>Perception, knowledge, and belief</td>
<td>Kate</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 6</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Kate</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>No class – SPRING BREAK</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>Social evaluations and moral intuitions</td>
<td>Anna</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>Prosocial and antisocial behavior</td>
<td>Jason &amp; Maddy</td>
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<td>April 10</td>
<td>Relationships and doing things together</td>
<td>Jason</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 17</td>
<td>Social groups</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>Paper presentation day (no reading)</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>Imitation and learning from others</td>
<td>Leslie</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>Evolutionary stories and wrap-up discussion</td>
<td>Megan</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 12</td>
<td>Final papers due</td>
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**Class Readings:** Readings may change as the course proceeds!

**January 31: Introduction and organization**

**February 7: Innateness and learning devices: the case of faces**


**February 14: Goal-directed action and intentional agency**


February 21: Gaze-following and joint attention


Optional:


February 28: Perception, knowledge, and belief


Optional:

T.B.D. integration of infant and preschooler FB results
March 6: Communication


March 13: Emotion


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. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.44.2.561

March 20: no class -- SPRING BREAK

March 27: Social evaluations and moral intuitions


April 3: Prosocial and antisocial behavior


April 10: Relationships and doing things together


April 17: Social groups


Plus: perhaps another paper t.b.d. (There are some interesting ones under review, so we’ll wait to see what comes out!)

April 24: no reading -- Paper presentation day!

May 1: Imitation and learning from others


**May 8: Evolutionary stories and wrap-up discussion**

