‘Social Perception’ Seminar  (Spring 2015)

What, When, & Where

Course #s : PSYC 425b/625b, CGSC 425b
Distro Group : Social Sciences
When : Spring 2015, Thursday afternoons, 1:30p - 3:20p
Where : SSS 201  (at the corner of College/Prospect Streets & Grove Street)
Webpage : https://webspace.yale.edu/cgsc425_s15

Instructor Info

Professor : Brian Scholl  (Professor, Department of Psychology and Cognitive Science Program)
Office : SSS 304  (at the corner of College/Prospect Streets & Grove Street)
Email : brian.scholl@yale.edu
Web : http://www.yale.edu/perception/
Phone : 432 - 4629 (but I don’t check my voicemail often, and email is strongly preferred)
Office Hours : Just after each class, or by appointment

Course Description

When exploring the structure of the mind, we typically think of visual perception as among the earliest and most fundamental of our cognitive processes, while we think of social cognition as among the most advanced forms of higher-level cognition. In this seminar we will explore how these two aspects of the mind connect. We will explore how social influences do and do not influence what we see, and how visual perception itself traffics in (and may be specialized for) social information. Specific topics will likely include the perception of animacy, agency, and intentionality; biological motion; face perception (including the perception of facial attractiveness); gaze processing and social attention; the perception of race, and ‘perceptual stereotyping’; social color vision; social olfaction; and social and cultural influences on perception (and the lack thereof).

Course Format, Prerequisites, and Selection Process

This course will be run as a reading and discussion seminar. Though there may be occasional mini-lectures or guest presentations, the usual format will involve an extended discussion of a set of weekly readings focused on a particular aspect of social perception. The exact topics that we end up covering will depend on the interests of the seminar attendees and the interest generated about specific research ideas. In almost all cases, however, the majority of the readings will be drawn from the primary research literature in several different areas of psychology — including cognitive psychology, vision science, social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and infant cognition.

The seminar is intended for graduate students and advanced undergraduates. To ensure a relatively intimate forum for in-depth discussion, the seminar will be capped at
approximately 20 students, so instructor permission will be required to attend after the first class. All participants should be prepared to discuss the material for each day of class in detail, and students will frequently be asked for their opinions and analyses.

If there are more interested students than available spots, then I’ll detail a process for making the decisions during the first session (asking everyone to send me some information over the weekend), and I’ll have the decisions made before the second session. So, to be considered, you must show up to (or contact me before) the first session.

**Requirements and Evaluation**

You will be expected to carefully study the background reading for each meeting, and to discuss the material in class. In addition, you’ll submit brief (1-page) weekly reading responses, and will complete a final seminar paper or project on a relevant topic of your own choosing. (Graduate students taking the seminar as a ‘core’ course will also have some additional requirements, to be described in class.) In more detail:

1. **(20%) Participation in Discussions**
   Your major task: just come to class each week prepared to actively and thoughtfully discuss the day’s topic(s)!

2. **(25%) Weekly Reading Responses**
   For each class, the next week’s readings will be distributed along with a question to which you’ll have to respond in a short (~ 1-page) essay. These questions will typically involve your own views on various theoretical issues involved in the readings, and they will often serve as the jumping-off point for the ensuing class discussion. Essay responses will be due no later than **6 pm** on the evening before the class when the relevant readings will be discussed — by email to brian.scholl@yale.edu (with no attachments, please!).

3. **(55%) Final Paper or Project**
   The only other requirement for the seminar will be a final paper or project, due at the very end of the semester (a week before the final grades are due — a date that may differ for different classes of students). This requirement is flexible: it can be met by a standard research paper (roughly 15 double-spaced pages), by a proposal for some experiments you would like to run (also roughly 15 pages), or by actually constructing and running a pilot experiment (with a very brief write-up and/or class presentation). (For senior Psychology majors taking the seminar to fulfill part of their senior requirement, the minimum limits will be 20 pages.) We will discuss the nature of this paper/project more fully in class, and I will frequently highlight potential topics as we encounter them. At some point near the end of the semester, I will also ask you to submit a brief list of brainstormed ideas for the paper. I invite you to view this paper/project not as an irritating class-specific requirement, but rather as an opportunity to integrate the seminar with your own more general research goals, by actually proposing (and then perhaps running) an experiment of your own design. Indeed, my hope is that this requirement may contribute to your own research goals even beyond this seminar (e.g. forming the foundation of a senior undergraduate thesis or even a published paper, as has happened in previous seminars).


**Tentative Schedule**

The schedule below is likely to change, since the topics we cover (and how much time we spend on them) will depend on your interests — especially toward the end of the seminar. But this may serve as a useful starting point, and as a rough guide to the kinds of topics we’ll discuss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Introduction to social perception (the topic and the seminar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Can social factors change how we see?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 29&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Can culture change how we see?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Feb 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Seeing you: Looking at and attending to others</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Feb 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Romantic red?: Social color vision</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Feb 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Seeing minds in motion: Visual processing of animacy and intentionality</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Feb 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>I like the way you move: Perceiving biological motion</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mar 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>About face: Perceiving and recognizing faces</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Mar 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>[No class; spring break; go crazy; wait, I mean read more]</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Mar 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>[No class; try to recover from the previous week]</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mar 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>I’d vote for her: Perceiving social information in faces</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Apr 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Ooh la la: Facial attractiveness</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Apr 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Seeing race: Perceptual stereotyping</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Apr 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Social vision in action</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Apr 23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Sniff, sniff: Social olfaction</td>
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**Readings**

A finalized reading list for the seminar as a whole is not possible, for the reasons noted above. The exact list of readings for each meeting will typically be distributed two weeks (and always at least one week) in advance (e.g. announced during the previous class), and will typically involve several research papers, with a total of perhaps 30-60 pages per week.

The readings themselves will be drawn from several sources, including leading science journals (e.g. *Nature, Science*), leading psychology journals (e.g. *PsychScience, BBS*), perception journals (e.g. *Perception, Vision Research*), social psychology journals (e.g. *JPSP, JESP, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, Social Cognition*) and perhaps some journals with which you are less familiar (e.g. *Proceedings of the IEEE, Archives of Sexual Behavior, American Journal of Political Science, Experimental Economics, Psychoneuroendocrinology*).

Occasionally different students may be asked to complete different auxiliary readings, so that we can cover more ground. Other times — quite often, actually — you may be asked to read an additional paper of your choosing, based on citations and discussions in the main assigned papers (or, better, based on your own literature search). In either case, you should be prepared to summarize the auxiliary readings for the class as a whole during our meeting, and I may ask you to send me the extra readings of your own choosing, along with a 1-paragraph summary of what piqued your interest about each one.

There will be no reading packet. All of the readings will be available electronically, and will be posted on our class webpage, where you can print them out at your leisure, or read them on your iPad.
Sample Readings

Though the specific topics that we cover (and how much we cover them) are subject to change, here are some of the sorts of readings we may explore together — with five sample papers listed per topic:

**Discussion #1: Can social factors change how we see?**


**Discussion #2: Can culture change how we see?**


**Discussion #3: Seeing you: Looking at and attending to others**


**Discussion #4: Romantic red?: Social color vision**


Discussion #5: Seeing minds in motion: Visual processing of animacy and intentionality


Discussion #6: I like the way you move: Perceiving biological motion


Discussion #7: About face: Perceiving and recognizing faces


Discussion #8: I’d vote for her: Perceiving social information in faces


Discussion #9: Ooh la la: Facial attractiveness


**Discussion #10: Seeing race: Perceptual stereotyping**


**Discussion #11: Social vision in action**


**Discussion #12: Sniff, sniff: Social olfaction**


