Psych 612. Seminar in Advanced Social Psychology:  
Moral, Political, and Religious Conviction  
Spring 2013; Fridays, 9am-12:50pm; SGM807

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Office Hours: by appointment (email me)

Course Description:  
This course covers empirical approaches to people’s deepest convictions – moral, religious, or political – in an attempt to investigate their similarities, differences, and origins. Rather than try to cover the entirety of moral psychology, political psychology, and the psychology of religion, the class will focus on getting to know the current state of the science: ongoing debates and unanswered questions. We will also get to know the people who are at the forefront of this science, focusing each week on a particular person’s line of research and interacting with them in class. The primary goal of the course is for students to develop research programs that bridge their existing interests with the methods and theories of moral psychology, political psychology, and the psychology of religion.

Course Assignments:  
(1) Discussion Questions: Each week students will submit a discussion question or critique on the week’s readings (12 total), to be submitted to session organizer (via Blackboard) by Wednesday at midnight. These should be between 300 and 600 words. These questions, plus class participation, make up 30% of the total grade.

(2) Leading Discussion: Each student in the class will be session organizer for one week. Session organizers will compile the week’s discussion questions, organize the questions to promote class discussion (putting questions to be asked of the guest stars first), and lead off class discussion. A word document with the organized questions should be sent out to the class by 3pm Thursday. This task is worth 10% of the total grade.

(3) Research proposal and presentation: The research proposal should raise a question/problem inspired by the class content and propose an empirical study to address that question or problem. The paper should be presented as an empirical report in APA format, and be 15 pages or less (double-spaced; 1” margins; 11-12 point font). In addition to the introduction and methods, a brief results section should report the expected result (hypothetical data), and a discussion should present the implications of the expected finding. Proposals will be presented in class Weeks 14-16. Each student will give a 15-minute powerpoint presentation of the idea, methods, expected results, and implications, followed by 15 minutes of feedback from the class. Feedback should be incorporated into the paper, which will be due at midnight May 8. The paper will count for 40% of the total grade, and the presentation will count for 20% of the total grade.
Course Schedule:
*Note: Readings not hyperlinked below (or linked with restricted access) will be available on Blackboard. The one exception is the book assigned on Week 11, which is available at your favorite local bookstore.

Week 1 (1/18): NO CLASS (SPSP conference in New Orleans)

Week 2 (1/25): Introduction to course and researchers
Séance Guest Star:  
William James, Harvard

Readings:  
James, W. (1896/1912). The will to believe. In James, W., The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy (pp. 1-32). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. [via Project Gutenberg]


SECTION 1: MORAL CONVICTION

Week 3 (2/1): Moral Behavior Contra Moral Conviction
Skype Guest Star:  
Dan Ariely, Duke

Readings:  


Week 4 (2/8): Social and Political Consequences of Moral Convictions
Skype Guest Star:
Linda Skitka, UIC

Readings:


Week 5 (2/15): Neuroscience of Intention and Moral Judgment
Skype Guest Star:
Liane Young, BC

Readings:


Young, L., & Tsoi, L. (2013). When mental states matter, when they don't, and what that means for morality. Manuscript under review. {Blackboard}

Week 6 (2/22): A He Said, He Said on the Structure of Morality
Skype Guest Star:
Kurt Gray, UNC

Readings:


SECTION 2: POLITICAL CONVICTION

Week 7 (3/1): Political Convictions and Political Ideology
Skype Guest Star:
Jaime Napier, Yale

Readings:


Week 8 (3/8): Political Convictions and Automaticity
Skype Guest Star:
Brian Nosek, UVA

Readings:


Week 9 (3/15): Biological Bases of Political Conviction
Skype Guest Star:
John Hibbing, UNL

Readings:


Hibbing, J.R., Smith, K. B., & Alford, J. R. (2013). Liberals and conservatives have different degrees of negativity bias. Manuscript under review. {Blackboard}

Week 10 (3/22): NO CLASS (Spring Break)
SECTION 3: RELIGIOUS CONVICTION

Week 11 (3/29): Religious Conviction and Theory of Mind
Skype Guest Star:
Jesse Bering

Readings:
{Optional}

Week 12 (4/5): Ara Norenzayan
Skype Guest Star:
Ara Norenzayan, UBC

Readings:

Week 13 (4/12): The Origins of Conviction
Skype Guest Star:
Paul Bloom, Yale

Readings:

**SECTION 4: FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

**Week 14 (4/19): Research Project Presentations**
Guest Stars:
A randomly-selected third of the class.

**Week 15 (4/26): Research Project Presentations**
Guest Stars:
A randomly-selected third of the class.

**Week 16 (5/3): Research Project Presentations**
Guest Stars:
A randomly-selected third of the class.