Instructor: Adam Cohen

Course Description: What enables humans, more than any other species, to cooperate and develop rich cultures? How do infants learn about other people’s minds given that mental states can’t be seen, heard, or felt? Why do children with autism struggle to understand the behavior of people but not the behavior of objects? In this course, we will explore these questions and others by studying the development of social attention and theory of mind and examining various theories and data about the mechanisms underlying these abilities. The course will have a heavy interdisciplinary focus, integrating ideas and evidence from evolutionary theory, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience to study the development of the social brain.

Goals of the course: The purpose of this course is to help students develop a) an ability to think about typical and atypical social cognitive development from multiple perspectives, b) a rigorous foundation in developmental cognitive neuroscience, c) a (bio)logically serious understanding of the nature–nurture relationship, d) critical and original thinking skills, and e) presentation and writing skills.

Evaluation:
Weekly reading summaries: Due 24 hours before lecture 20%
Leading discussion: Date assigned in class 20%
Class participation: Weekly 20%
Oral presentation: Last two weeks 15%
Research proposal: Due one week after last day of class 25%

Weekly reading summaries – Each week, students will pick one of the assigned readings and write a 1 page summary. The summary includes a) a review of the main points of the paper (2-3 sentences), b) two things that you like about the article, c) two things that you didn’t like and wish the authors had done better, d) one quiz question that you might pose to your classmates, and e) one research question to pursue in the future. In addition, to encourage students to prepare for class discussion, on a second page, students will submit three questions about each of the readings. A pre-formatted template will be provided that students will be required to use. Assignments can be turned in by email to me.

Leading discussion – For each class meeting, two students will serve as discussion leaders. Discussion leaders should be prepared to first help the class briefly summarize the main points in the articles so that everyone is on the same page, but the main goal is to raise important questions or topics to facilitate discussion about the readings. The leaders should discuss their plans for class together beforehand so they are prepared to help facilitate discussions. Powerpoint is generally not permitted for discussions. A successful class discussion depends on the leaders getting other students to participate and carry a significant portion of the discussion.

Class participation – Everyone in the class will be expected to have done all the readings and participate in weekly discussions. Good contributions are those that:
• Show you have carefully considered the important issues in the readings and previous discussions in class.
• Provide a new insight that is also relevant to the topic at hand (i.e., long off-track comments are not always the most constructive).
• Build on contributions from others in the class in order to move the discussion forward.
• Offer honest but respectful questions and criticisms of the readings.

**Oral presentation** – During the last two weeks of the semester, students will present a research proposal to the class in a powerpoint presentation (10 minutes), followed by a question and answer period (5 minutes). The goal of the oral presentation is to build formal presentation skills while giving students the opportunity to get feedback from the class before the written research proposal is due. I will review how to give a presentation and provide a set of guidelines to help students prepare.

**Research proposal** – Students will turn in a full research proposal related to social attention or theory of mind. It should be written like a psychology journal article, except that it will have a data analysis plan and anticipated implications and limitations instead of results and discussion section. The paper should include a title page, abstract, introduction, method, data analysis plan, discussion, and references, all in APA style. It should be about 2500 words, not including the title page, abstract, and reference section.

**Sample Topics/Readings:**

**Social attention in infants, children, adults, and non-human primates: cognitive development perspectives**

**Social attention in autism: perspectives from atypical development**

**Theory of mind in infants and children: cognitive development perspectives**
**Theory of mind in children and adults: Developmental cognitive neuroscience perspectives**


**Theory of mind and autism: perspectives from atypical development**


