Naturalistic Person Perception
Psychology 4XXX – Fall 2026
Time: Mondays 2:10-4pm; Location: XXX Uris Hall

Instructor: Prof. Jon Freeman
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Office Hours: TBD

Prerequisites: For undergraduates, course equivalents of at least two of the following courses: PSYC 1001, PSYC 2210, PSYC 2630, PSYC 2435, and/or the instructor's permission.

Course Overview: This course examines the psychological mechanisms that support naturalistic person perception—how people extract meaning from faces, voices, bodies, speech, and behavior to infer any number of characteristics about others, including their personality traits, emotions, mental states, or social group memberships. We will examine not only how these processes are driven by complex social cues but also how these processes are shaped by higher-order cognition—such as stereotypes, motivations, cultural learning, and social context. Moving beyond traditional laboratory tasks, the course will routinely engage with emerging approaches that study person perception in more naturalistic and high-dimensional ways. We will consider how perceptions and inferences about other people unfold over time during ongoing encounters and conversations, how perceivers integrate diverse cues into multidimensional representations of other people, and how these representations are studied using modern tools such as computational modeling, natural language processing, and deep learning models. Across the semester, we will span multiple levels of analysis—from perceptual and neural mechanisms to interpersonal outcomes—considering how person perception shapes phenomena such as interpersonal relationships, social decision-making, stereotyping and bias, and the formation of lasting impressions.

Course Learning Goals and Outcomes:

- Become an expert in what's already known about person perception
- Hone critical thinking skills to develop new, unanswered questions about person perception
- Gain expertise in how scientists secure their livelihood: real-world scientific grant writing

To accomplish these goals, the class is structured like a journal club, and we will be reading cutting-edge scientific publications on person perception. For the final project, each student will write their own grant proposal and present their grant proposal idea to the class. The aim of this assignment is to prepare students for the real-world challenge of being an original thinker and clear, organized communicator—skills that are necessary not only for pursuing a scientific career, but success in virtually every profession.

Assignments and Grading

Readings and Participation (15%)
The goal of this sort of course is to have lively and interesting discussion with potentially divergent perspectives, including a critical engagement with the material. It's therefore important that everyone is up to speed on the readings and actively participating in class discussion.

Weekly Reaction Papers (25%)
Given how important discussion is in this seminar, it's helpful to organize your thoughts on the readings prior to class discussion, including critiques of the work. These critiques are similar to what you will do when you eventually review manuscripts for journals. Weekly reaction papers will be due 8pm the day before class and will be posted on Canvas in a forum that your classmates can view as well, including the discussion leader. These will aid in their discussion leading, and so it is important that they be submitted in a timely fashion. These reaction papers should be succinct, no more than 500-700 words. You have flexibility in what to cover in your reaction papers, but they should generally identify the central question of

the research, describe the main findings, and provide your response/critique. What aspects of the work were compelling or not? Were some claims unwarranted or surprising? How does this work fit in with other work discussed in the course, or how is it inconsistent? They should end with at least one question that plants a seed for conversation in class discussion. Reaction papers are each worth 3 points (1 point for turning it in on time; good papers will get 2 points total and excellent papers will get 3 points total). Students will be provided a grading rubric as a guide for what counts as a good vs. excellent reaction paper.

Discussion Leading (20%)
You will be the discussion leader for one class day. These discussions should unpack the assigned readings and relate them to relevant material from the class. They should integrate your classmates' reaction papers and discussion questions due the day before class. You should expect to briefly present the main findings of the work we read for class, incorporate the discussion questions provided before class from your classmates, and help structure and jumpstart discussion.

Grant Proposal & Presentation (30% proposal, 10% presentation)
You will write a final research proposal on a topic broadly related to the work covered in class, describing one or a set of studies you will hopefully pursue in your own research program. If you're a graduate student, either in graduate school or certainly after (e.g., post-doc or faculty position), you need to be obtaining funds for fellowships or grants. This involves convincing other people that you have a study or set of studies that's worthwhile and merits their funding. The goal here is for you to use your final research proposal in a way that can advance your own career. If you're an undergraduate, this is excellent preparation for If you're an undergraduate, this is excellent preparation for graduate school applications, honors theses, competitive fellowships (e.g., NSF GRFP, Fulbright), and independent research projects. Proposals should be in NIH NRSA format (6 pages single-spaced). More details on this format will be provided. In addition, you will give a 15 min. presentation describing your research proposal in one of the two final classes.

Grading: Grading is as follows: A = 94-100; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89.9; B: 83-86.9; B-: 80-82.9; C+:77- 79.9; C: 73-76.9; C-: 70-72.9; D: 60-69.9, E: 0-59.9. Grades will be rounded up.

Workload: Seminar meets 2 hours per week, and readings, presentations, and writing assignments are expected to take an additional 10 hours of work time per week, on average.

Role in the Psychology Curriculum: This course is designed to give graduate students and advanced undergraduate students in the Psychology Department a deeper understanding of current and emerging topics in the field of person perception.

For graduate students, this course counts as one of the required seminars. For undergraduates pursuing the Psychology major or concentration or the Psychology postbaccalaureate certificate program, the course meets the Group III (Social, Personality, & Abnormal) distribution requirements. For Psychology majors and Psychology Postbac students, it fulfills the seminar requirement.

Accommodations: Students with special needs who may require accommodations should make an appointment to see me as soon as possible, at least by the end of the second week of class. If you have not already done so, stop by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) on the 7th floor of Lerner Hall to register for support services. ODS often requires two weeks to process an application, so please contact them as soon as you can, preferably before the course begins.

Class Schedule

Date	Class Number	Topic
	1	Mechanisms of Person Perception
	2	Accuracy and Error
	3	Trait Impressions
	4	Reading Emotions
	5	Inferring Mental States
	6	Social Groups and Status
	7	Social Vision
	8	Conversations
	9	The Body
	10	Social Attention and Gaze
	11	Attractiveness
	12	People Perception
	13	Grant Pitches
	14	Grant Pitches

Readings in **blue** are optional.

Mechanisms of Person Perception

- Nestler, S., & Back, M. D. (2013). Applications and extensions of the lens model to understand interpersonal judgments at zero acquaintance. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *22*(5), 374-379.
- Freeman, J. B., & Ambady, N. (2011). A dynamic interactive theory of person construal. *Psychological Review*, 118(2), 247–279.
- Tamir, D. I., & Thornton, M. A. (2018). Modeling the predictive social mind. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, *22*(3), 201-212.
- Freeman, J. B., & Lin, C. (2025). A high-dimensional model of social impressions. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*.
- Koch, A., Imhoff, R., Dotsch, R., Unkelbach, C., & Alves, H. (2016). The ABC of stereotypes about groups: Agency/socioeconomic success, conservative–progressive beliefs, and communion. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *110*(5), 675.

Accuracy and Error

- Funder, D. C. (1995). On the accuracy of personality judgment: A realistic approach. Psychological Review, 102(4), 652–670.
- Wang, Y., & Kosinski, M. (2018). Deep neural networks are more accurate than humans at detecting sexual orientation from facial images. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *114*(2), 246.

- Olivola, C. Y., & Todorov, A. (2010). Fooled by first impressions? Reexamining the diagnostic value of appearance-based inferences. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *46*(2), 315-324.
- Hall, J. A., Schmid Mast, M., & West, T. V. (Eds.). (2016). The social psychology of perceiving others accurately. Cambridge University Press.
- Naumann, L. P., Vazire, S., Rentfrow, P. J., & Gosling, S. D. (2009). Personality judgments based on physical appearance. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35(12), 1661–1671.

Trait Impressions

- Todorov, A., Olivola, C. Y., Dotsch, R., & Mende-Siedlecki, P. (2015). Social attributions from faces: Determinants, consequences, accuracy, and functional significance. Annual Review of Psychology, 66, 519–545.
- Lin, C., & Thornton, M. A. (2024). Bottom-up and top-down information determinants of naturalistic trait impression updating. *Preprint at https://doi. org/10.31234/osf. io/jxzca*.
- Stolier, R. M., Hehman, E., & Freeman, J. B. (2020). Trait knowledge forms a common structure across social cognition. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *4*(4), 361-371.
- Peterson, J. C., Uddenberg, S., Griffiths, T. L., Todorov, A., & Suchow, J. W. (2022). Deep models of superficial face judgments. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 119(8), e2115228119.
- Jones, B. C., DeBruine, L. M., Flake, J. K., & others. (2021). To which world regions does the valence-dominance model of social perception apply? Nature Human Behaviour, 5(1), 159–169.

Reading Emotions

- Barrett, L. F., Adolphs, R., Marsella, S., Martinez, A. M., & Pollak, S. D. (2019). Emotional expressions reconsidered: Challenges to inferring emotion from human facial movements. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 20(1), 1–68.
- Jack, R. E., Garrod, O. G., Yu, H., Caldara, R., & Schyns, P. G. (2012). Facial expressions of emotion are not culturally universal. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *109*(19), 7241-7244.
- Brooks, J. A., Chikazoe, J., Sadato, N., & Freeman, J. B. (2019). The neural representation of facial-emotion categories reflects conceptual structure. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 116(32), 15861–15870.
- Cowen, A. S., & Keltner, D. (2020). What the face displays: Mapping 28 emotions conveyed by naturalistic expression. *American Psychologist*, *75*(3), 349.
- Ponsot, E., Burred, J. J., Belin, P., & Aucouturier, J.-J. (2018). Cracking the social code of speech prosody using reverse correlation. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 115(15), 3972–3977.

Inferring Mental States

- Thornton, M. A., Weaverdyck, M. E., & Tamir, D. I. (2019). The brain represents people as the mental states they habitually experience. *Nature communications*, *10*(1), 2291.4
- Barrett, H. C., Todd, P. M., Miller, G. F., & Blythe, P. W. (2005). Accurate judgments of intention from motion cues alone: A cross-cultural study. Evolution and Human Behavior, 26(4), 313–331.
- Ji, M., Ward, E. J., & Green, C. S. (2023). Realistic and complex visual chasing behaviors trigger the perception of intentionality. PLOS ONE, 18(4), e0284485.
- Thornton, M. A., & Tamir, D. I. (2017). Mental models accurately predict emotion transitions. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114(23), 5982–5987.

- Lee, D. H., & Anderson, A. K. (2017). Reading what the mind thinks from how the eye sees. *Psychological science*, *28*(4), 494-503.

Social Groups and Status

- Freeman, J. B., & Chwe, J. A. (2024). Social categorization: Looking toward the future. *The Oxford handbook of social cognition*, 198-221.
- Xie, S. Y., Flake, J. K., Stolier, R. M., Freeman, J. B., & Hehman, E. (2021). Facial impressions are predicted by the structure of group stereotypes. Psychological Science, 32(12), 1979–1993.
- Bjornsdottir, R. T., & Rule, N. O. (2017). The visibility of social class from facial cues. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113(4), 530–546.
- Fiske, S. T. (2018). Stereotype content: Warmth and competence endure. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 27(2), 67–73.
- Hughes, B. T., Jacobson, R., Rule, N. O., & Srivastava, S. (2025). Stereotypes and social decisions: The interpersonal consequences of socioeconomic status. *Journal of personality and social psychology*.

Social Vision

- Balcetis, E., & Dunning, D. (2010). Wishful seeing: More desired objects are seen as closer. *Psychological science*, *21*(1), 147-152.
- Stolier, R. M., & Freeman, J. B. (2016). The neuroscience of social vision. In *Neuroimaging personality, social cognition, and character* (pp. 139-157). Academic Press.
- Oh, D., Vartiainen, H. I., & Freeman, J. B. (2025). Racial stereotypes bias the neural representation of objects towards perceived weapons. *Nature Communications*, *16*(1), 8218.
- Firestone, C., & Scholl, B. J. (2016). Cognition does not affect perception: Evaluating the evidence for 'top-down' effects. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 39, e229.

Conversations

- Levitan, C. A., Ban, Y.-H. A., Stiles-Shields, C., & others. (2023). Nonverbal synchrony and rapport in conversation: A systematic review. Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 47(2), 131–163.
- Speer, S. P., Mwilambwe-Tshilobo, L., Tsoi, L., Burns, S. M., Falk, E. B., & Tamir, D. I. (2024). Hyperscanning shows friends explore and strangers converge in conversation. *Nature Communications*, *15*(1), 7781.
- Wheatley, T., Thornton, M. A., Stolk, A., & Chang, L. J. (2024). The emerging science of interacting minds. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *19*(2), 355-373.
- Templeton, E. M., Chang, L. J., Reynolds, E. A., Cone LeBeaumont, M. D., & Wheatley, T. (2022). Fast response times signal social connection in conversation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *119*(4), e2116915119.
- Aucouturier, J.-J., & Canonne, C. (2017). Musical friends and foes: The social cognition of affiliation and control in improvised interactions. Cognition, 161, 94–108.

The Body

- Bjornsdottir, R. T., Connor, P., & Rule, N. O. (2024). Social judgments from faces and bodies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *127*(3), 455.
- Nummenmaa, L., Glerean, E., Hari, R., & Hietanen, J. K. (2014). Bodily maps of emotions. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(2), 646–651.

- Erdogan, M., Bi, W., Yildirim, I., & Scholl, B. J. (2025). Dynamic point-light cloths generate rich percepts beyond biology. Current Biology, 35(12), 2967–2973.
- Steel, K. A., Ellem, E., & Baxter, D. (2015). The application of biological motion research: Biometrics, sport, and the military. Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 22(1), 78–87.
- Hester, N., & Hehman, E. (2023). Dress is a fundamental component of person perception. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 27(4), 414–433.

Social Attention and Gaze

- Colombatto, C., Chen, Y.-C., & Scholl, B. J. (2020). Gaze deflection reveals how gaze cueing is tuned to extract the mind behind the eyes. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 117(32), 19825–19829.
- Colombatto, C., & Scholl, B. J. (2022). Unconscious pupillometry: An effect of 'attentional contagion' in the absence of visual awareness. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 151(2), 302–308.
- Guterstam, A., Kean, H. H., Webb, T. W., Kean, F. S., & Graziano, M. S. A. (2019). Implicit model of other people's visual attention as an invisible, force-carrying beam projecting from the eyes. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 116(1), 328–333.
- Wohltjen, S., & Wheatley, T. (2021). Eye contact marks the rise and fall of shared attention in conversation. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 118(37), e2106099118.
- Stephenson, L. J., Edwards, S. G., & Bayliss, A. P. (2021). From gaze perception to social cognition: The shared-attention system. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 16(3), 553–573.

Attractiveness

- Batres, C. et al. (2022). Examining the 'attractiveness halo effect' across cultures. Current Psychology, 43, 2824–2832.
- Rhodes, G., Jeffery, L., Watson, T. L., Clifford, C. W., & Nakayama, K. (2003). Fitting the mind to the world: Face adaptation and attractiveness aftereffects. *Psychological science*, *14*(6), 558-566.
- Walker, D., & Vul, E. (2014). Hierarchical encoding makes individuals in a group seem more attractive. Psychological Science, 25(1), 230–235.
- DeBruine, L. M. (2004). Facial resemblance increases the attractiveness of same-sex faces more than other-sex faces. Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, Series B, 271(1552), 2085–2090.
- Tatarunaite, E., Playle, R., Hood, K., Shaw, W., & Richmond, S. (2005). Facial attractiveness: a longitudinal study. *American Journal of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics*, *127*(6), 676-682.

People Perception

- Elias, E., Dyer, M., & Sweeny, T. D. (2017). Ensemble perception of dynamic emotional groups. *Psychological science*, *28*(2), 193-203.
- Goldenberg, A., Weisz, E., Sweeny, T. D., Cikara, M., & Gross, J. J. (2021). The crowd-emotion-amplification effect. *Psychological science*, *32*(3), 437-450.
- J. H. Chwe, & Freeman, J. B. (2024). Trustworthiness of crowds is gleaned in half a second. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *15*(3), 351-359.
- Alt, N. P., & Phillips, L. T. (2022). Person perception, meet people perception: Exploring the social vision of groups. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *17*(3), 768-787.
- Phillips, L. T., Slepian, M. L., & Hughes, B. L. (2018). Perceiving groups: The people perception of diversity and hierarchy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *114*(5), 766.