

Elizabeth Harris

I have an extensive background in psychology (both in course work and research), which will provide a strong base for my graduate studies. In regards to relevant course work, I have taken social psychology, neuroscience, perception, cognitive psychology, and cognitive science classes. Additionally, my four years of research experience (predominantly in social psychology and cognition) have prepared me for graduate school by allowing me to develop a strong base in statistics and research methods, strong writing skills, and other relevant skills (e.g., how to code in R). I am currently working with Dr. Jim Olson, Dr. Adam Cohen, and Dr. Wil Cunningham. The first of my three current research projects, my thesis, is investigating the effect of prefactual potency on moral judgements. The second project studies how the mind attends to and integrates multiple social cues. My final project explores the relationships between attitude structure and attitude strength variables. In stage two of the final project, we will collect fMRI data, providing me with hands on experience in social neuroscience.

I believe that NYU's social psychology Ph.D. program would be a good fit for me for two reasons. First, I am very interested in the field of social neuroscience; therefore, I am interested in the NYU Social Neuroscience Network. Second, I agree with the importance the department places on collaboration with multiple faculty members, and support their emphasis on open science. In terms of my professional goals, my plan is to complete a post-doctoral fellowship to further prepare for a career as a researcher and professor. I am very excited for all I will learn, both through my peers, as well as through research. I am also excited for those I will teach, once I become a professor, and share ideas with through publications and conferences.

I am interested in moral cognition. Due to this interest, I pursued research opportunities in this area. I am currently collaborating on a meta-analysis paper with Joel Armstrong (Ph.D. candidate) and Dr. Paul Conway on the topic of moral decision-making, and my thesis is in the

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area of moral cognition. Two research questions I am interested in are: “what processes are involved in blame moderation and are they reflexive or deliberative?” and “is there an effect of intergroup bias in moral processes (in addition to third-party punishment)?”. In regards to the latter question, I am curious whether there is an intergroup bias involved in, for example, second-order punishment (i.e., punishing those who do not punish free loaders in an economic game).

I would be interested in working with Dr. Jay Van Bavel, as I am interested in his research in the psychological processes underlying moral judgements, such as punishment decisions (as studied in Reflexive intergroup bias in third party punishment). I would be interested in further exploring these lines of research. For example, I would be interested in investigating the nature of processes underlying public blame judgements. According to Voiklis and Malle, there are multiple factors that could inhibit one’s public moral criticisms (e.g., fear of retaliation; in press). I would first like to find evidence for the existence of such an effect. If this effect does exist, I would then investigate whether this process is deliberative or reflexive. I could investigate this question in a way similar to how Dr. Van Bavel investigated the processes underlying intergroup bias in punishment; I would manipulate cognitive load before moral criticism decisions and record RT. If the fear of retaliation’s inhibition of public moral criticism is a deliberative process, the effect should be reduced when cognitive load is increased.

It is important to me that I become part of a department where I am able to engage in collaborative projects. For example, I would be interested in collaborating with Dr. Jon Freeman, as I find his person perception research interesting. I am also interested in the work by Dr. Jonathan Haidt (especially his work on moral values and the Moral Foundations Theory). I believe that I would be an excellent fit for NYU’s Social Psychology Ph.D. program, both in terms of my research interests and my academic and research background.