

MIT Econ 14.11, Fall 2013

Insights from Game Theory into Social Behavior

Final Project

Your project may take on one of the following formats: a simulation, literature review, experiment or survey design, or analytic proof. Below, we list examples that illustrate each of these formats, and throughout the class, we have highlighted possible project topics, marking these in the slides. We will continue to do so. You may also suggest your own topics—don't feel bound by the ones we list here or in the slides.

You may work on and hand in your project in groups of up to two students.

We would be excited if these projects led to independent study in upcoming quarters, and eventually, to publishable output.

Simulation

In the class, we used computer simulations to justify our use of game theory in social settings where agents are neither rational nor strategic. For example, for Costly Signaling, we showed that with a small number of available signals and actions, the costly signaling equilibrium arises. However, it would be nice to know that a similar result occurs when the signals and/or actions are continuous. A simulation that achieved this would make for a great final project.

Literature Review

In the class, we use existing literature to provide evidence for our theory whenever possible, but sometimes, more evidence could have been proffered. For instance, when we presented evidence for Hawk-Dove as an explanation for human rights, we learned from class participants that the history of human rights, as well as cross-cultural variation in human rights, might provide additional support. Assembling this evidence and connecting it to the theory would make for a great final project.

Experiment or Survey Design

When we discussed fingernails, Moshe presented anecdotal evidence from his personal experience in Northern India. We learned from class participants that long fingernails were also beautiful in other parts of Asia—we didn't know that! Designing a survey or an experiment that shows that long fingernails in any or all of these locations are costly signals would make for a great final project (if possible, make use of variation over time and culture!).

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Analytical Proof

We don't often do analytical proofs in class, but if a topic comes up where there's something you'd like to prove—and you confirm with us that it hasn't already been proven—then this could make for a great final project.

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