

TABOOS AND MORAL FOUNDATIONS

An examination of the forbidden, the disgusting, and how our moral framework intersects with taboos

COURSE #:

22F-TMF

FORMAT:

Seminar

MODERATOR:

Rachel Borson

DATE & TIME:

Tues - 1:30 - 3:30 PM

10 Weeks

Starting 9/27/2022

LOCATION:

Zoom

Online Only

MAX NO. OF PARTICIPANTS:

16

AUDITORS

ACCEPTED:

No

MAX NO. OF AUDITORS:

0

PURPOSE:

Taboos are grounded in our moral codes. Participants will seek to understand how taboos arise, how they may change in response to different cultures and moral priorities, and how the emotion of disgust plays a pivotal role in taboos.

DESCRIPTION:

Is it wrong to have sex with your sister? If your dog dies, why not eat it? Taboos are an implicit ban on something based on a cultural sense that it is excessively repulsive, or perhaps, too sacred for just anyone.

Taboos may exist to protect the individual, to reflect medical or ecological assumptions, to increase cohesion in a group, to protect (or damage) a subset of the population, and to define moral boundaries.

Studies have repeatedly found that moral hypocrisy—behaving badly while simultaneously hectoring the rest of us to do good—evokes a level of anger that either lying nor wrongdoing brings out on its own.

Taboos intersect with both our cultural references and our moral foundations (care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority, and sanctity). These values in turn differ by politics and nationality.

We'll discuss a provocative essay about disgust, review a framework for moral foundations theory, and describe and discuss various universal and specific taboos.

ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS:

All participants will read and discuss an essay about disgust, and review some writings about Western moral foundations (links provided).

Presentations by participants will be focused on specific taboos such as those around food, hygiene, incest, pregnancy, childbirth, etc. There will also be presentations on cross-cultural taboos.

RESOURCES:

Molly Young, "How Disgust Explains Everything," *The New York Times Magazine* (12/27/2021).

Chapter 7 from *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt (Pantheon Books, 2012) describing a framework for moral foundations.

Links to both will be provided to participants.

ABOUT THE MODERATOR:

Rachel is a retired physician who has been a member of 5CLIR for five years. Topics of greatest interest include those amenable to a multidisciplinary approach. This will be her fourth experience as a moderator.