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Costly Signaling, Group Identity, and Perceptions of Trust

Abstract: Trust is a critical aspect of social interactions that can be difficult yet especially important to cultivate in intergroup contexts. I will draw on insights from evolutionary biology and psychology to better understand how trust can be facilitated between social groups with seemingly divergent worldviews. Specifically, I will discuss religious costly signaling and the somewhat counterintuitive finding that behaviors that communicate a deep and genuine commitment to one's religious ingroup can promote perceptions of trust across religious group lines. I will also discuss ideas for moving beyond experimental methods to explore (1) how people communicate strong group identities, and (2) how different signaling strategies may facilitate or undermine trust in pluralistic societies.
