

# **On December 3, 2012, PED Seminar Series Presents**

## **Fairness: What it isn't, what it is, and what it might be for**

by [Alex Shaw](#)

Fairness is an important concern in human society that guides the way both children and adults share; individuals want themselves and others to be rewarded equally for doing equal work. Here I demonstrate that children are so concerned with fairness that they will even discard resources in the trash to uphold fairness. I then explore some reasons why children might be fair, and present experiments that suggest part of the motivation behind children's fair behavior is a desire to socially signal to others that they are fair. I then present work which suggests that the desire to appear fair is really a desire to appear impartial; children will pay others unequally for equal work as long as they can use an impartial procedure to assign resources to others. I show similar effects in adults and argue that people develop a sense of fairness to avoid condemnation from others who might be upset about the favoritism evidenced by inequality.