

Project Summary

Amory Schlender

Reed College

Mentors: TBD

In order to persist, a complex society must have methods of managing conflict. One such method is third party policing, in which impartial individuals intervene to defuse their neighbors' disputes. A largely altruistic behavior (the policer risks personal retaliation and derives little direct benefit from his action) policing is rarely observed in nature. Jessica Flack (Flack et al. 2005, Am. Nat.) found policing behavior in a group of pigtailed macaques, in which a small group of disproportionately powerful individuals were able to engage in effective policing with little risk to themselves. To examine the policing individuals' special role in their society, a further study (Flack et al. 2006, Nature) mapped the macaque community's social structure with these policing members present and removed. This 'knockout' study found that social structures decay into smaller, less diverse, less integrated components in the absence of policing. Working with Michelle Girvan and Jessica Flack, Schlender intends to develop a mechanistic model of how a social network (in particular that observed by Flack et al.) contracts in the absence of stabilizing influences like third-party policing.