

Psychology 492
Sections 01 (T,Th) & 02 (M,W)
Capstone: Approaches to Psychological Explanation

Spring 2017

Instructor: John Adamopoulos

Office: ASH 2204 **Office Phone:** 331-2388 **E-mail:** adamopoj@gvsu.edu

Office Hours: T, W 3:30-4:30 and by appointment

Readings:

1. Adamopoulos, J. & Lonner, W. J. (1994). Absolutism, relativism, and universalism in the study of human behavior. In W. J. Lonner & R. Malpass (Eds.). *Psychology and culture* (pp. 129-134). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]
2. Lonner, W. J., & Adamopoulos, J. (1997). Culture as antecedent to behavior. In J. W. Berry, Y. H. Poortinga, & J. Pandey (Eds.). *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology, Vol. 1: Theory and method* (2nd ed.) (pp. 43-83). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]
3. Triandis, H. C. (2001). Individualism and collectivism: Past, present, and future. In D. Matsumoto (Ed.), *The handbook of culture and psychology* (pp. 35-50). New York: Oxford University Press. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]
4. Adamopoulos, J. (2004). Interpersonal behavior and culture. In C. Spielberger (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of applied psychology* (vol. 2) (pp. 387-395). San Diego, CA: Academic Press. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]
5. Unit 2, Subunit 2.1 (G. Hofstede). In *Online readings in psychology and culture* (<http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/>)
6. Fiske, A. P. (1992). The four elementary forms of sociality: Framework for a unified theory of social relations. *Psychological Review*, 99, 689-723. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]

(OPTIONAL)

7. Adamopoulos, J. (2008). On the entanglement of culture and individual behavior. In F. J. R. van de Vijver, D. A. van Hermet, & Y. H. Poortinga (Eds.), *Multilevel analysis of individuals and cultures* (pp. 27-62). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]
8. Badcock, C. (2000). *Evolutionary psychology: A critical introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Polity press. [Chapter 1 only] [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]

9. Confer, J. C., Easton, J. A., Fleischman, D. S., Goetz, C. D., Lewis, D. M. G., Perilloux, C., & Buss, D. M. (2010). Evolutionary psychology: Controversies, questions, prospects, and limitations. *American Psychologist*, *65*, 110-126. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]

(OPTIONAL)

10. Caporael, L. R. (2007). Evolutionary theory for social and cultural psychology. In A. W. Kruglanski & E. Tory Higgins (Eds.). *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 3-18). New York: The Guilford Press. [in “Course Documents” on Blackboard]

Course Description

This course, taken near the end of your undergraduate experience, is designed to expose you to different perspectives in modern psychology, the relationships among these perspectives, and their implications for the discipline of psychology.

This semester the course will focus on basic approaches that psychologists use to explore and explain human thought and behavior. Specifically, we will explore how understanding the cultural context of behavior can help us investigate the manner in which people around the world construct and give meaning to their social environment. We will contrast this approach with other perspectives that seek to explain a variety of psychological phenomena using the ideas of (a) “mainstream” psychology that has traditionally focused on intrapsychic explanations, and (b) evolutionary biology.

Throughout the semester we will emphasize these contrasting theoretical perspectives. The first, which we may call the “cultural” perspective, seeks to establish explanations of psychological phenomena that are embedded in people’s sociocultural experiences and are often sensitive to particular cultural contexts. The others, which we may call the “(20th century) mainstream” and the “evolutionary” perspectives, generate explanations of psychological phenomena that are informed either by reliance on cognitive and intrapsychic processes or by the common evolutionary history of all human beings. We will try to compare these various perspectives and see how they can be useful in psychology by examining their application to the study of social behavior and related topics.

Classes during the second half of the term will be taken up by student presentations. Each student will select one out of a designated group of topics (see p. 3 of the syllabus) and be responsible for an oral presentation of about 20-30 minutes, followed by a class discussion of at least 10 minutes. Your presentation should reflect a careful but selective search of the psychological literature for articles that enhance our understanding of the specific topic you selected by either taking one of the approaches or by contrasting some of them. More information on this project will be presented in class.

Each student will have to write a term paper on a topic related to her/his presentation. This assignment will be due in class on **June 6 (Section 01) and June 7 (Section 02)**. The paper should be integrative in nature and well documented with **at least 10 peer-reviewed** references

to the psychological literature. This means that the paper should exhibit an understanding of the selected topic, rather than a mere description of it. **It must be typed (double-spaced) and must follow the style of the American Psychological Association (see the most recent APA Publication Manual). Minimum required length is 12 pages (including title page, abstract, references, and any notes, tables, and/or figures). If the paper does not include at least 10 peer-reviewed references or does not follow APA style, 25 points (out of 100) will be automatically deducted from the paper grade. The important points to consider with regard to APA style include title page with running head, abstract, pagination, margins, citations in text, use of quotations, and references and notes.**

There will also be a midterm examination in this class. It will consist of essay questions that will attempt to gauge your understanding of the assigned readings and lectures in the first half of the term. **This will be a take-home examination.** The essay questions will be handed out in class on 5/24 (Section 02) and 5/25 (Section 01) and your answers will be due in class on 5/31 (Section 02) and 6/1 (Section 01) . They should be typed (double-spaced). Late exams will not be accepted unless there are compelling medical or personal reasons.

Your final grade will be based on the three activities mentioned above: the midterm examination, the oral presentation, and the term paper. Each of the first two activities will count for 30% of your final grade, and the paper will count for 40%. Class attendance and participation are, of course, strongly encouraged and may make a difference in your final grade (especially in borderline cases). **Please keep in mind that the capstone was designed as a seminar. This means that you will be expected to do the reading on time and to participate in class discussion.**

A note on the use of the internet

The internet can be a useful search tool and you are encouraged to use it appropriately. However, your primary reference material should not come from various web sites, but, rather, from psychological and other scientific journals and books that have been subjected to rigorous professional review.

Suggested General Topics for Presentations

1. Language acquisition and use
2. Mate selection
3. Intelligence
4. Personality (the Big Five)
5. Human development
6. Altruism/Helping behavior
7. Aggression
8. Dominance Hierarchies
9. Cooperation
10. Parental Investment
11. Expression of emotions

TOPIC OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

(Dates are tentative)

- 5/8-5/11 Introduction to the course and basic debate: (1) Theoretical orientations in psychological explanation; (2) The importance of context and evolutionary history in the interpretation of psychological phenomena. Readings #1 and #2
- 5/15-5/18 The “mainstream” vs. “cultural” perspectives. Readings #3-6, #7 (Optional)
- 5/22-5/30 The “cultural” vs. “evolutionary” perspectives. Readings #8-9, #10 (Optional)
- 5/24-5/25 Midterm examination questions handed out in class (take-home)**
- 5/31-6/1 Midterm examination essays due in class by 12:30 (typed); the rest of this class period is available for students to work on their projects**
- 5/30-6/14 Student presentations. A more detailed outline will be provided when specific topics have been assigned.
- 6/6-6/7 Papers are due in class**