Personality Psychology (PSY 420)  
fall, 2015  
Prof. Lakey

10:00 am - 10:50 am, Lake Huron Hall 142  
Office: 2315 Au Sable Hall  
Office hours: 11am – 11:50pm (MW) and by appointment  
Email: lakeyb@gvsu.edu (recommended)  
Phone: 331-2868 (not recommended)

Required reading:


Course overview:

Lecture will provide a broad overview of empirical research in personality. Many personality courses focus on grand personality theories (e.g., Freud, Sullivan) that attempt to explain everything. Although such theories are important historically, modern personality psychology is a strongly empirically oriented field. For decades now, the field has abandoned attempts to formulate or test grand theories of personality that are intended to explain most aspects of human behavior. Instead, the field focuses on documenting facts about personality. In this regard, personality psychology is now much more similar to experimental psychology than to Freud’s personality theory. Theory is still important, but now personality psychologists develop limited theories, designed to explain particular empirically observed phenomena. This course will review this modern tradition of research in personality.
**Journal article readings** will follow the organization of lecture. Reading journal articles is designed to give the student a better sense of the nature of research in personality psychology.

**Textbook readings** are designed to provide the student with a broad background in personality. Note that lecture does not explain the textbook.

**Blackboard:** The syllabus, lecture notes and grades will be available on blackboard. Lecture notes will be posted before lectures are given.

**Course goals:** To provide opportunities for detailed, introductory study of...

1. ...the scientific approach to personality.
2. ...key scientific findings in personality.
3. ...and how quantitative analysis advances our understanding of personality.

**Grading:**

*Exams:* There will be three, multiple choice exams, consisting of approximately 50 questions each. About 30 questions will be from lecture and 15 from the textbook and 5 from the journal articles. Exams are not cumulative.

Quizzes: There will be 20 quizzes that will occur on a semi-random basis, at the end of selected class sections, on that day’s lecture. Quiz days are randomly selected with the restrictions that 1) at least one quiz occurs every week, 2) no more than two quizzes occur in a given week, 3) quizzes do not occur on exam days or on exam review days. Students’ two lowest quiz scores will be dropped. Scores on quizzes will be averaged and students’ averaged quiz scores will be worth an amount equal to an exam. There will be no make-up quizzes. Instead, the two dropped quizzes are intended to cover illness, emergencies, and trips.

*Curving Exams and Quizzes:* Final corrected scores for each exam and averaged quiz scores will be computed by 1) correcting scores for measurement error (i.e., error corrected scores) and then 2) dividing each student’s error-corrected score by the highest error-corrected score obtained in the class. This procedure corrects for exam difficulty and measurement error. By using this method, even if the highest score was half of the questions on the exam, it would be possible for the entire class to get As. For example, a student might obtain an error-corrected score of 23 out of 50 questions (.46). However, if the highest error-corrected score in the class were 25, the student’s final corrected score, as entered in the grade book, would be .92 (23/25). The lowest final corrected score that a student can get for an exam or the average of all quizzes is .40. This policy is designed to minimize the effect of extremely low scores on the final score for the course.
Your letter grade in the class will be based on your final corrected score, which will be the average of your three exam scores, and your final quiz score. Each of these will count 20% toward your final grade in the class. The final proportion scores will be converted to letter grades according to the traditional scheme in which As = \geq .90, Bs = .80 – .89, Cs = .70 – .79 andDs = .60 – .69. Fs will be assigned to scores lower than .5945 after rounding. The upper two points within the range of a letter grade are assigned “+” and the lower two points within the range of a letter grade are assigned “−”. For example, a .88 would be assigned a B+ and a .81 would be assigned a B−.

Make-up exams: Make-up exams will be given under the following circumstances: official university activities (e.g., participating in sporting events), illnesses, and major life events (e.g., romantic breakup). You must email the professor before the exam to be confident that you will be permitted to sit for a make-up exam.

**Exam Dates:**

Exam 1: Wednesday, October 5  
Exam 2: Friday, November 6  
Exam 3 (Final): Tuesday, December 15, 12:00 pm – 1:50 pm.

**Lecture Topics and Approximate Schedule**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Overview of the course. Personality and the nature of hypothetical constructs. <strong>Picture day on Wednesday.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td><strong>Basic facts about personality:</strong> How are personality characteristics organized in nature? What are the basic building blocks of personality? If you know that a person has characteristic X, can you predict that they will also have characteristic Y?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td><strong>Basic facts about personality:</strong> Organization of personality traits continued.</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td><strong>Basic facts:</strong> Using the five factor model to explain personality disorders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td><strong>Basic facts:</strong> To what extent does personality reflect objective reality? What else could it reflect?</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td><strong>Basic facts:</strong> To what extent are people consistent across situations? If a person acts in a certain way in one situation, how likely is it that he/she will act the same way in another situation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td><strong>Basic facts:</strong> To what extent is personality reflected in each person’s unique pattern of responding to different situations? (i.e., PxS interactions).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td><strong>Research Approaches:</strong> PxS interactions when important personal relationships are the situations.</td>
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| Week 9     | **Biological and environmental mechanisms:** To what extent is personality
inherited? To what extent is personality determined by environmental factors?

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<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Biological and environmental mechanisms: To what extent do genetic influences on personality depend on the environment? To what extent do environmental influences on personality depend on genetic predisposition?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Cognitive Theory: How are personality characteristics translated into specific thoughts, emotions and actions?</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Cognitive Mechanisms: Attentional and memory biases in depression and anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Cognitive Mechanisms: What do you get when psychodynamic thought is translated into cognitive theory?</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Cognitive Mechanisms: Are there thoughts about the self that occur outside of awareness (i.e., the unconscious)?</td>
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<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Applying what we have learned to a new topic: Adult romantic attachment.</td>
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**Readings covered by each exam:**

- **Exam 1:** McCrae & Costa (1987). Funder’s chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, & 7.
- **Exam 2:** Borkenau et al., (2001). Funder chapters: 8, 9, 15, 16, & 17.