

Psychology 492
Section 01 (T,Th 12:00-3:20)
Capstone: Approaches to Psychological Explanation

Spring 2019

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Office Hours: T, Th after class at EC or my office on main campus by appointment only

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]
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] (OPTIONAL)
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]
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 intended to provide a culminating and meaningful experience for seniors in the major. It 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 psychology.

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.

Objectives

1. Identify some of the major concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives and findings in the discipline.
2. Apply these perspectives and findings.
3. Compare and integrate different theoretical perspectives.
4. Recognize sources of bias that affect interpretation of research findings.
5. Explore interdisciplinary approaches in psychology.
6. Recognize and engage professional writing in the discipline.

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. 4 of the syllabus) and be

responsible for an oral presentation of about 30 minutes, followed by a class discussion. If you prefer, you may study a different topic with my approval. Your presentation should reflect a careful and appropriate search of the psychological literature for articles that enhance our understanding of the specific topic you selected by contrasting at least two of the approaches mentioned earlier. More information on this project will be presented in class. **IMPORTANT: You must clear the topic of your presentation/paper by sending me an e-mail by May 14.**

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 11**. 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 10 pages (including title page, references, and any notes, tables, and/or figures; no abstract is necessary). 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, pagination, margins, citations in text, use of quotations, and references and notes.**

There will also be a midterm examination in this class on **May 28**. It will consist of multiple-choice questions that will attempt to gauge your understanding of the assigned readings and lectures in the first half of the term. All slides from class lectures will be available to you on Blackboard in order to prepare for the exam.

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 25% of your final grade, and the paper will count for 50%. Class attendance and participation are, of course, strongly encouraged and may make a difference in your final grade (especially in borderline cases). Class attendance will be recorded during student presentations. Late or e-mailed work (papers, examinations, presentations) will not be accepted unless there exist compelling health or personal reasons. Finally, students are encouraged to become familiar with the problem of plagiarism (see GVSU student handbook and class discussion).

The course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>

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 (you can also select a different topic with approval)

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
12. Social/Resource exchange theories

TOPIC OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

(Dates are tentative)

5/7-5/9	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
5/14	E-mail presentation topic
5/14-5/16	The “mainstream” vs. “cultural” perspectives. Readings #3-7
5/21-5/23	The “cultural” vs. “evolutionary” perspectives. Readings #8-9, #10 (Optional) List of questions for midterm exam preparation posted on Blackboard
5/28	Midterm examination
5/30-6/13	Student presentations. A more detailed outline will be provided when specific topics have been assigned
6/11	Term papers due in class