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# Evolutionary Psychology

## PSY 493-004

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### Overview

Evolutionary psychology describes the cross-disciplinary study of the nature and causes of human social behavior and cognition. Perhaps more than most, this seminar in evolutionary psychology is concerned with the "big questions" regarding the human condition. As such we will discuss the evolution, function, strategic logic, and psychology of topics such as family and friendship, sexuality and romance, aggression and warfare, cooperation and conflict, politics, religion, and moral judgment.

### Goals

*Evolutionary Perspectives.* This seminar is designed to guide undergraduate students through a discussion of evolutionary perspectives on the topics of interest to psychologists. The course will provide students with the tools to explore fundamental themes in psychological science in ways that can be integrated with theory and research in evolutionary biology, economics, anthropology and cognitive science. I use the word "perspectives" and not "paradigm" or "method" because evolutionary psychology is neither; but rather, it refers to a panoply of views that are tied together by a fundamentally integrative approach to thinking about the human condition and of the place of psychology in understanding human nature. An important goal is to give students the opportunity to reflect on how thinking in the core evolutionary terms of *adaptive function* and *strategic logic* of behavior influence why we are the way we are, and how it may be helpful to furthering their own personal or professional goals and interests.

*Analytical Reasoning.* An important thread that unifies these disparate enterprises is the analysis of behavior as it has been shaped by natural selection. This way of viewing the world is informed by the commonalities in analytical reasoning tools developed in theoretical biologists, mathematicians, and economists as exemplified in what is known as *game theory*. This way of addressing intellectual problems is becoming ever more prevalent in the social sciences in recent years, and has the potential to become a key unifying principle bridging the natural and social sciences.

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Fall 2024  
TTh 4:10p-5:30p; Room: Snyder C204

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Office: 247 Psychology Bldg.  
Office Hour: Tue: 2:00p-3:00p

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### Course Materials

Primary source reading materials for this course will be made available for download at no cost. Students are required to have acquired a copy of Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate*, by the first week, available at low-cost at Amazon.com



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### Course Web

D2L

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### Downloadable Reading

Readings are posted at our course Web via MSU D2L

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### Resources

Visit D2L for relevant materials

This powerful analytical tool cuts to the core of the fundamental nature of social interaction and has the potential to synthesize various ways of thinking about the world into a coherent network of concepts, with the potential to be as intellectually satisfying as any explanation of the natural phenomena coming from physics or chemistry.

*What Students Get.* Students will be challenged to reflect on the way they conduct their own research in their specific areas in terms of broader “why” questions, and how the perspectives discussed during seminars can be integrated (or not) with their own working assumptions about why we are the way we are. Practical applications are an important component of the seminar, providing students with practice, development, and evaluation in analytical reasoning, writing, and speaking. These are important skills to have in any professional career. In addition, an important goal is to be as helpful as possible to providing students the exposure to the ideas for building a meta-theoretical framework for framing their own research goals and personal/professional aspirations.

### Evaluation

Grading evaluation is based on homework exercises (30%), a midterm (25%), a final paper (15%), a presentation (~15%), and class participation (~15%). Class participation is assessed in class discussion, and in written feedback on weekly readings.

### Midterm Exam

The midterm is a written "take-home" exam on the 12<sup>th</sup> week. Each item requires written responses. It will be posted in D2L approximately five days before it is due. We will not meet on the day the exam is due.

### Writing Assignment

The writing assignment instructions are in the Writing Assignment Instructions document.

### Class Participation

Meetings are structured such that your instructor provides a lecture for the first half of each meeting, and students participate via clickers and discussion. In the second half of each meeting, students lead discussion of the readings. Each week, approximately three students will lead discussion via Powerpoint presentation or handouts. Students will act as a “defense team” for the theories and evidence in the topic at hand, highlighting the strengths the perspectives provided in the readings. Students may also serve as a “prosecution team,” and raise concerns regarding weaknesses and problems with the readings. Through this dialectic, students critically evaluate the logic, clarity, and evidence for theories and hypotheses within evolutionary psychology, allow for the mutual reinforcement of the learning of principles, and suggest ways in which the readings’ arguments could be made stronger or the arguments and evidence presented can be made more cogent.

In addition, students not serving on the presenters for that week’s readings are required to submit one to two paragraphs of their thoughts or initial impressions on readings at least 24-hours before each class meeting. The purpose of this exercise is to further encourage class discussion and critical thinking about the readings. Student may be asked to elaborate on his or her discussion thoughts/impressions with the class.

Failure to attend class meetings and/or assignments may be cause for an administrative drop.

### Homework Assignments

There are several homework assignments to help us through basic concepts in game theory and its applications. Assignments also include items relevant to the readings. Assignments are designed not merely for diagnostic purposes,

but for development of analytical reasoning skills relevant to the topics under discussion. No formal mathematical training above the level of elementary algebra is required.

### Extra Credit

There is no extra credit available for this course.

### Course Announcements/Updates

Announcements are made via email sent through MSU's online course content system, D2L. Students should regularly check their email accounts associated with this course. Make sure D2L has your up-to-date contact information.

### Academic Integrity

Every student is held responsible for knowing the academic integrity policy at MSU. Information regarding this policy is available at: <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/dishonestystud.html>

### Open Dialogue and Free Expression

Students should feel free to voice questions and comments relevant to the course material during lectures, via email or during office hours. The professor is committed to the concepts of free expression and the university environment as the marketplace of ideas where ideas compete, and an honest treatment of sensitive topics is sometimes necessary for a meaningful educational experience. More information about you the importance of free speech on universities and colleges is available at: <http://www.thefire.org/about-us/mission/>

### Personal Conduct

Every attempt at open and honest discussion should be civil, and not intentionally hurtful to others. Unnecessary side chatter during lectures or exams is distracting and may not be in the best interests of students and should be avoided. Students may use lecture breaks for private conversations, otherwise, students should expect to share discussions with the whole class. The instructor and teaching staff are committed to respectful dialogue and professional conduct, and expectations are that students also understand the importance of honest and respectful interaction.

SYLLABUS CONTINUES BELOW

## READING SCHEDULE

### **Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology**

- Week 1      The Blank Slate I
- Week 2      The Blank Slate II
- Week 3      Kin Group Cooperation
- Week 4      Reciprocity and Cooperation

### **The Basics: Sex and Money**

- Week 5      Decision-Making and Evolutionary Economics
- Week 6      Sexual Selection and Mate Choice I

### **The Emergence of our Evolved Psychology**

- Week 7      Mate Choice II; Prepared Learning
- Week 8      Personality, Life History and Behavioral Genetics
- Week 9      Evolutionary Developmental Psychology

### **The Human Condition**

- Week 10     Morality I
- Week 12     Intergroup Conflict
- Week 13     Morality II
- Week 14     Consumerism
- Week 15     Consciousness and Free Will

SYLLABUS CONTINUES BELOW

## READINGS:

### Weeks 1 and 2 – The Blank Slate

- Pinker, S. (2002). *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. The Penguin Press: London. Part I.

### Week 3 – Kin group Cooperation

- Hamilton, W.D. (1963). The evolution of altruistic behavior. *The American Naturalist*, 97(896): 354-356.
- Dawkins, R. (1979). Twelve misunderstanding of kin selection. *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie*, 51, 184–200.
- Trivers, R. (1974). Parent-offspring conflict. *American Zoologist*, 14: 249-264.
- Lieberman, D., Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (1997). The architecture of human kin detection. *Nature*, 445, 727-731.
- DeBruine, L. (2005). Trustworthy but not lust-worthy: context-specific effects of facial resemblance. *Proc. R. Soc. B*, 272, 919–922.

### Week 4 – Reciprocity and Cooperation

- Axelrod, R. & Hamilton, W.D. The evolution of cooperation. *Science*, 211(4489):1390-1396.
- Trivers, R. (1971). The evolution of reciprocal altruism. *Quarterly Review of Biology*, 46: 35-57.
- Dugatkin, L. (1997). The Evolution of Cooperation. *BioScience*, 47(6): 355-362.
- Fehr, E., & Gächter, S. Altruistic punishment in humans. *Nature*, 415, 137-140.
- Pinker, 2002; *The Blank Slate*, Ch. 14.

### Week 5 – Behavioral and Evolutionary Economics

- Kenrick, D.T., Griskevicius, V., Sundie, J.M., Li, N.P., Li, Y.J., & Neuberg, S.L. (2009). Deep rationality: The evolutionary economics of decision making. *Social Cognition*, 27, 764-785.  
asu.edu
- Li, Y., Kenrick, D., Griskevicius, V., & Neuberg, S. (2012). Economic Decision Biases and Fundamental Motivations: How Mating and Self-Protection Alter Loss Aversion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(3), 550–56.
- Kahneman, D. (2003). Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics. *American Economic Review*, 93, 5: 1449-47.
- Gigerenzer, G. (2008). Why heuristics work. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(1), 20-29.
- McDermott, R., Fowler, J., & Smirnov, O. (2008). On the evolutionary origin of prospect theory preferences. *Journal of Politics*, 70, 335-350.
- Pinker, S. (2002). *The Blank Slate*. Ch. 8. “Fear of Inequality.”

### Week 6 – Parental Investment and Sexual Selection

- Trivers, R. L. (1972). Parental investment and sexual selection. In B. Campbell (Ed.) *Sexual selection and the descent of man, 1871-1971* (pp 136–179). Chicago, Aldine.
- Haselton, M.G. & Buss, D.M. (2000). Error management theory: A new perspective on biases in cross-sex mind reading. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(1): 81-91.
- Pillsworth, E. & Haselton, M. (2006). Male sexual attractiveness predicts differential ovulatory shifts in female extra-pair attraction and male mate retention. *Evolution & Human Behavior*, 27, 247-258.
- Buss, D. & Schmitt, D. (1993). Sexual Strategies Theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, 100(2), 204-232.
- Pinker, 2002; *The Blank Slate*, Ch. 18. “Gender.”

### Week 7 – Sexual Selection and Prepared Learning

- Haselton et al. (2007). Ovulatory shift in human female ornamentation: Near ovulation, women dress to impress. *Hormones & Behavior*, 51, 40-45.
- Confer, J. C., Perilloux, C., & Buss, D. M. (2010). More than just a pretty face: Men's priority shifts toward bodily attractiveness in short-term versus long-term mating contexts. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 31(5), 348–353.
- Gangestad, S., Garver-Apgar, C., Simpson, J., & Cousin, A. (2007). Changes in women's mate preferences across the ovulatory cycle. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 92(1): 151-163.
- Ohman, A. & Mineka, S. (2001). Fears, phobias, and preparedness: toward an evolved module of fear and fear learning.

*Psychological Review*, 108(3):483–522.

- Garcia, J. & Koelling, R. (1966). Relation of cue to consequence in avoidance learning. *Psychonomic Science*, 4: 123-124.
- Barrett, C. & Broesch, J. (2012). Prepared social learning about dangerous animals in children. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 3: 499-508.
- Pinker, S. (2002). *The Blank Slate*. Chs. 12-13.

### **Week 8 – Personality and Behavioral Genetics**

- Keller, M., Howrigan, D., & Simonson, M. (2011). *Theory and methods in evolutionary behavioral genetics*. In *The Evolution of Personality and Individual Differences*. Edited by Buss, D. & Hawley, P. Oxford University Press: New York. pp. 280-302.
- Belsky, J., Steinberg, L., Draper, P. (1991). Childhood experience, interpersonal development, and reproductive strategy: An evolutionary theory of socialization. *Child Development*, 62(4): 647-670
- Buss, D. (2009). How can evolutionary psychology explain personality and individual differences? *Perspectives in Psychological Science*, 4: 359-366.
- Gosling, S.D. & John, O.P. (1999). Personality dimensions in non-human animals: A cross-species review. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 69-75.
- Pinker, S. (2002). *The Blank Slate*. Ch. 10. “Fear of Determinism.”

### **Week 9 – Evolutionary Developmental Psychology**

- Hamlin, J.K., Wynn, K., & Bloom, P. (2007). Social evaluation by preverbal infants. *Nature*, 450, 557-559.
- Wynn, K. (2008). Some innate foundations of social and moral cognition. In P. Carruthers, S. Laurence & S. Stich (Eds.), *The Innate Mind: Foundations and the Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hamlin, J.K., Wynn, K., Bloom, P., & Mahajan, N. (2011). How infants and toddlers react to antisocial others. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 108(50), 19931–19936.
- Hamlin, J.K., Mahajan, N., Liberman, Z., Wynn, K. (2013). Not like me = bad: Infants prefer those who harm dissimilar others. 24(4), 589-594
- Wertz, A.E., & German, T.C. (2013). Theory of mind in the wild: Toward tackling the challenges of everyday mental state reasoning. *PLoS ONE*, 8(9), e72835
- Wertz, A.E., & Wynn, K. (2014). Selective social learning of plant edibility in 6 and 18-month old infants. *Psychological Science* 25(4), 874-882.
- Wertz, A.E., & Wynn, K. (2014). Thyme to touch: Infants possess strategies that protect them from dangers posed by plants. *Cognition*, 130, 44-49.
- Pinker, S. (2002). *The Blank Slate*, Ch. 19, “Children”

### **Week 10 – Morality I**

- Pinker, 2011, NYTimes Article: “The Moral Instinct”
- Haidt, J. (2007). The new synthesis in moral psychology. *Science*, 316: 998-1002.
- Greene, J., Sommerville, R.B., Nystrom, L., Darley, J., Cohen, J. (2001). An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment. *Science*, 293: 2105-2108.
- Greene, J., Nystrom, L., Engle, A., & Darling, J. (2004). The neural bases of cognitive conflict and control in moral judgment. *Neuron*, 44, 389-400.
- Cushman, F., Young, L., & Hauser, M. (2006). The role of conscious reasoning and intuition in moral judgment. *Psychological Science*, 1082-1089.
- Hauser, M., Cushman, F., Young, L., Jin, K., Mikhail, J. (2007). A dissociation between moral judgments and justifications. *Mind & Language*, 22: 1-22.
- Pinker, 2002. Ch. 15: “The Sanctimonious Animal.”

### **Week 11 – Intergroup Conflict**

- Thornhill, R. & Fincher, C. (2011). Parasite stress promotes homicide and child maltreatment. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B*, 366, 3466-3477.
- Schaller, M., & Park, J. (2011). The behavioral immune system (and why it matters). *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(2), 99-103.

- Navarrete, C.D., McDonald, M., Molina, L., & Sidanius, J. (2010). Prejudice at the nexus of race and gender: An out-group male target hypothesis. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 98(6): 933-45.
- McDonald, M., Navarrete, C.D., & van Vugt, M. (2012). Evolution and the psychology of intergroup conflict: The “warrior male” hypothesis. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 367(1589): 670-679.
- Pinker, S. (2002): Chapter 17: “Violence.”

### **Week 11 – Midterm Exam**

- Midterm Exam Due Thurs. 1-Apr, 8:00p

### **Week 13 – Morality II**

- Boyer, P. (2008). Religion: Bound to believe? *Nature*, 455: 1038-1039.
- DeScioli, P., & Kurzban, R. (2013). A solution to the mysteries of morality. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139, 477-496.
- Kurzban, R., DeScioli, P., & Fein, D. (2012). Hamilton vs. Kant: Pitting adaptations for altruism against adaptations for moral judgment. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 33, 323-333.
- Delton, A, Nemirow, J., Robertson, T., Cimino, A., & Cosmides, L. (2013). Merely Opting Out of a Public Good Is Moralized: An Error Management Approach to Cooperation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
- Henrich, J., Ensimger, J., McElreath, R., Barr, A., Barrett, C., Bolyanatz, A., Cardenas, J. C., Gurven, M., Gwako, E., Henrich, N., Lesorogol, C., Marlowe, F., Tracer, D., & J. Ziker (2010) Markets, Religion, Community Size, and the Evolution of Fairness and Punishment. *Science* 327: 1480-1484.
- Pinker, 2002. *The Blank Slate*, Ch. 16: “Politics.”

### **Week 14 – Evolutionary Psychology of Consumer Behavior**

- Durante, K. M., Griskevicius, V., Hill, S. E., Perilloux, C., and Li, N. P. (2011) Ovulation, female competition, and product choice: Hormonal influences on consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37, 921-934.
- Sundie, J. M., Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius, V., Tybur J. M., Vohs, K. D., & Beal, D. J. (2011). Peacocks, Porsches, and Thorstein Veblen: Conspicuous consumption as a sexual signaling system. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, 100, 664-680.
- Saad, G. (2006). Applying evolutionary psychology in understanding the Darwinian roots of consumption phenomena. *Managerial and Decision Economics*, 27, 189-201.
- Saad, G., & Gill, T. (2003). An evolutionary psychology perspective on gift giving among young adults. *Psychology & Marketing*, 20, 765-784

### **Week 15 – Consciousness and Free Will**

- Dennett, D. (1998). *The evolution of consciousness*. In *The Reality Club*, Prentice Hall. Pp-3-99.
- Dennett, D. (1984). *Elbow room: The varieties of free will worth wanting*. MIT Press. Chs. 6-7.
- Harris, S. (2012). *Free will*. Simon & Schuster: New York.
- Pinker, 2002. *The Blank Slate*, Ch. 11: “Fear of Nihilism.”

SYLLABUS CONTINUES BELOW

## Grading Rubric

### Grade Scale

Percent	Min. Pts.	Grade
90%	450	4.0
85%	425	3.5
80%	400	3.0
75%	375	2.5
70%	350	2.0
65%	325	1.5
60%	300	1.0

NOTE: Min. Pts. = Minimum points needed for grade.

### Point Breakdown

Type	Pts. Each	Number	Pts. Total	% Total
Assignments	15-40	6	150	30%
Midterm	100	1	100	20%
Paper	100	1	100	20%
Participation	4	13	50	10%
Presentation	75	1	75	15%
Feedback	2	12	25	5%
Total			<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>