

Psyc 373: Evolutionary Psychology
Winterim 2026: Monday, January 5 thru Friday, January 23
Online (2263.psyc.373.801)

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Office hours: Beginning January 5, I will be available by phone, text, and email every day during normal hours, approximately 8am to 8pm. You are welcome to call, text, and email; if I am not otherwise occupied, I will pick up or respond immediately. If you would like to Zoom or FaceTime, just send me a text and we will set it up (or FT me then and there)! Please note that I do have many other work tasks and deadlines, sports and activities, and a family and two dogs, so, although I will be available *often*, I will *not* be at your beck and call.

Textbook

Buss, D. M. (2019). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind* (6th ed.). Routledge.

Other readings

There will be a lot of readings besides the textbook; those readings are available in Canvas, and I post the readings for each assignment at the same time that I post the assignment.

Course description and objectives

This is an introductory course for students with little or no experience with evolutionary theory or applications of evolution to understanding human behavior. Evolutionary psychology is a relatively new but solidified and generative subdiscipline of psychology. Its theoretical roots are in Darwin's theory of evolution by selection. Evolutionary psychologists aim to understand human nature by proposing and studying the psychological adaptations that may have evolved as solutions to the survival and reproductive challenges that humans faced over the long expanse of evolutionary history. In this course we will read about the theoretical roots of evolutionary psychology and how the subdiscipline fits in with mainstream psychology; we will also discuss and refute common misconceptions and misunderstandings about evolutionary theory (particularly when applied to humans). We will then discuss a number of areas of active research in evolutionary psychology and evaluate the scientific and theoretical merits of the research we discuss. We will read and discuss research and theory on topics such as human mating strategies and mate preferences, friendship and rivalry, parental investment, anxiety and depression, and sex-differentiated cognitive abilities. We will spend time with several topics that have spurred intense controversy among psychologists and laypersons alike, such as rape and sexual violence, sexual strategies, and sex differences broadly speaking. The primary objective of this course is to familiarize you with the basic logic of the process of evolution by selection, with which you should be able to judge its relative value for shedding light on human motives, desires, and behaviors.

Regardless of your major, interests in psychology, and eventual career goals, my broader goal is to offer you interesting, useful, and thought-provoking course material. Upon successful completion of this course, you should 1) understand well the concept of adaptation and the process of evolution by natural and sexual selection, 2) be able to think critically about some of the major theories, research methods, and empirical findings in evolutionary psychology, and 3) be able to apply your knowledge of evolutionary psychology to your everyday relationships and decision-making.

Intellectual endeavor warnings

1. This course is a LOT of work. I get the feeling that in some circumstances, the "online" version is less work or easier somehow, but that is not the case for us. I taught online well before COVID hit, and I designed my 3-week courses as full-fledged courses. I cover the same content in this online, abbreviated time period as I do in a regular semester. Fourteen weeks of material in fourteen class days is the equivalent of a full-time job, as it should be, so you will be completing and submitting assignments every weekday the course is running (except for our Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday on Jan. 19). Please do NOT proceed with this course unless you are prepared to do the work to really learn and digest the insights an evolutionary perspective has to offer.

2. This course includes detailed readings and assignments about emotionally charged topics such as sexual desire, envy and anger, infidelity, rape, jealousy, dominance, family conflict, mental illness, physical attractiveness, etc. Please try to remember that the more emotionally charged a human behavior is, the more important it is to understand scientifically – especially if we want to improve our society. If you are not comfortable thinking about and analyzing human sex differences, sexuality, and conflict, especially in the context of biology and evolution, this may be a hard-to-stomach course for you.

3. This course may be personally challenging if you have a strong literal belief in the creation stories of the Old Testament, the Koran, the Native American cultures, or other traditions. Evolutionary psychology is based on evolutionary biology, the fossil evidence for human evolution, our behavioral similarities to other primates, and other theories and facts that can be hard to reconcile with Creationism or the ‘Intelligent Design’ movement. **If you have Creationist beliefs, you’ll have to make your own decision about whether this course is right for you.** Regardless of your religious beliefs or views, you will need to master the course material as it is presented. Dawkins and Buss are formidable opponents in this regard.

4. Finally, this course may also be challenging if you have strong post-modernist, critical theorist, social constructionist, deconstructionist, or relativist beliefs about the role of parents, culture, ideology, or gender roles in shaping human behavior. If you’ve taken typical introductory courses in women’s studies, cultural anthropology, literary theory, sociology, or social work, you may face some interesting challenges in trying to reconcile the content of this course with a post-modern narrative that attributes the maladies of society to an oppressive male patriarchy. On the other hand, you may be pleasantly surprised by some of evolutionary psychology’s insights, one of which is that male and female strategies are both relevant for understanding *WHY* patriarchy would develop in the first place.

UWEC learning goals

UWEC has established five goals of a liberal education, and they are promoted in this course. We should...

- Communicate effectively
- Demonstrate knowledge of human culture and the natural world
- Think creatively and critically
- Show individual and social responsibility
- Respect diversity

Goals in Psychology

The American Psychological Association has adopted 5 broad goals of the undergraduate major/minor in psychology, and we will attempt to pursue some of those in here, as well. Below, I link your course activities with the goals.

Your assignments (reading guides) will assess your daily understanding of the readings and your ability to apply the principles of evolution to understand human relationships, judgment, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, you will be asked to...

- Understand the breadth of evidence in support of evolution
(Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology);
- Reflect on and describe evolutionary psychologists’ take on how nature and nurture interact (and on the difference between *influence* and *determine*)
(Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology);
- Use the logic of selection to explain psychological phenomena
(Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology);
- Articulate strengths and limitations of various research designs and evaluate the validity of conclusions inferred from data
(Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry & Critical Thinking);
- Interpret visual displays of research findings (in tables and figures)
(Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry & Critical Thinking);
- Distinguish between assumptions and evidence
(Goal 2: Scientific Inquiry & Critical Thinking);

- Identify applications of an evolutionary perspective to the origins of problems, such as interpersonal conflict, as well as their amelioration
(Goal 3: Ethical & Social Responsibility in a Diverse World);
- Recognize the ethical dangers of misunderstandings of selection or misuse of evolutionary principles
(Goal 3: Ethical & Social Responsibility in a Diverse World);
- Recognize the universal commonalities of all humans as well as the commonalities between humans and all other living organisms
(Goal 3: Ethical & Social Responsibility in a Diverse World)

Course Requirements

- Most of your grade for this course will be determined by your performance on formal reading assignments (reading guides and article analyses). There are 26 formal assignments in total, followed by a final review assignment in which I will ask you to, you guessed it, *review* some key ideas! Some assignments are longer than others (see Schedule-At-A-Glance below).
Note: I will either provide feedback directly with your assignment, or I will post a key to each assignment when I have graded it, so you can review the correct answers.
- A small portion of your grade will come from completing 1 syllabus quiz and 4 video assignments as they come along over the course (5-10 points each x 5 assignments).

Below are some key things to keep in mind about your reading assignments:

- The questions I ask you will pertain to (1) the textbook and (2) the articles that I would be telling you about if we were in a live classroom. So, there is a lot of reading.
- To make grading possible and *objective*, there will be a lot of closed-ended questions. However, closed-ended does not mean mindless! I take pride in developing questions that force you to think and to look carefully at a table or graph. Some of the questions will require *careful reading*, *critical thinking*, and a *willingness to apply the course content* to new situations.
- I like a lot of assignments rather than just a few. There are no exams. I ask you to complete many, focused assignments rather than a couple of big exams to acquire a more accurate and reliable assessment of how well you really understand the concepts and research you are reading about. With two big exams, if you happen to break up with a boyfriend/girlfriend the night before the midterm, and get the flu right before the final exam, you might do poorly (and for good reason). With lots of assignments, you might feel rotten for a couple of them, but all the other students will, too, so it all evens out more fairly.
- On the first day, we will work on getting acquainted with each other and with the course, with just one formal reading assignment; every day after that, there will be two formal assignments per day (see Schedule-At-A-Glance below).
- **YOUR ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE BY 11:59 PM EACH DAY. Late assignments put a major wrench in my ability to keep up with this class alongside my other job commitments, and hence late assignments will be penalized heavily at 30% per day (any time within 1 min to 24 hours of deadline), and I will not accept assignments more than 48 hours late (the assignment submission option in Canvas will close). On the last couple of days, you won't have any late submission options because all submission boxes will close on January 23 at 11:59 pm.** (I hope you can understand why this is: I have to complete the grading for this course and prep my spring semester courses in a very limited amount of time!)

Grading

I will post scores on Canvas. I encourage you, however, to keep track of your own scores so that you can always have an estimate of how well you are performing in the course, and so that you can inquire about any discrepancies between your records and mine. If you think I made an entry error, please write me a note with your name and a brief explanation of the problem; I will check it out and get back to you as soon as possible.

Final grades will be based on total points *earned* out of total points *possible*. I will use the values below for final grade calculations.

		B+	89.00-91.99%	C+	80.00-82.99%	D+	71.00-73.99%		
A	95.00-100%	B	86.00-88.99%	C	77.00-79.99%	D	68.00-70.99%		
A-	92.00-94.99%	B-	83.00-85.99%	C-	74.00-76.99%	D-	65.00-67.99%	F	<65.00

Students requiring special accommodations

If you are a student with a disability that will require some form of accommodation, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Old Library 2136 (836-4542), for requisite documentation. I will try to make accommodations for you as necessary.

Academic dishonesty

I do not tolerate scholastic dishonesty of any kind, and I will act immediately on my own suspicions if they are strong. Specifically, I will score the relevant assignment a zero and then ask you to meet with me online to answer new questions from me on the spot to display your learning. If you want to learn in this course, then DO NOT use AI, and DO NOT use other students' homework, papers, or ideas from other students or from previous semesters! Not only do these activities offload your thinking to others, they are also unethical and dishonest. Other dishonest actions include asking for or giving information about the content of my assignments, or representing work done by someone else – either a **fellow student** or a published researcher -- as your own (i.e., plagiarism). If you are concerned that an activity you are considering might fall into the dishonest category, please ask me about it.

A Note on Inclusivity and Language

One of the coolest things about psychology as a discipline, in general, is that it recognizes that (1) all humans have a lot in common and, at the same time, (2) humans vary from one another on every dimension imaginable. I take that diversity seriously. In other words, you are welcome in my course and classroom no matter what: whatever your ancestry and racial identity; whatever your sex, gender identity, and gender expression; whatever your sexual orientation; whether you are poor or rich, shy or gregarious, single or married, parent or non-parent, smoker or non-smoker, student-athlete or exercise-averse, veteran/military serviceperson or civilian, native English speaker or not, old or young, conservative or libertarian or liberal or woke, born-again Christian or atheist, mentally healthy or ill, Vikings fan or Packers fan, etc. I trust that we will respect one another and respect one another's freedom of thought and viewpoint, freedom of speech, and freedom to associate with whom we please.

That said, I hold us all to the firm expectation that we will complete all the course requirements to the best of our ability, no matter our differences.

Some of the topics in this course get into *group* differences. For example, we will discuss sex differences on many occasions. As a scientist trained in evolutionary theory, I will use words in class that coincide with the following definitions (see also Hooven, 2021 *T: The Story of Testosterone*; Geary, 2020 *Male, Female*; Kimura, 1999 *Sex and Cognition*; Soh, 2020 *The End of Gender*):

- **Biological Sex:** male or female; defined by gametes, which are mature reproductive cells. There are two types: sperm (male) and eggs/ova (female). There is no intermediate type; in many species, including humans, and for nearly 2 billion years, sperm and eggs (ova) are the two types of cells required for sexual reproduction and the conception of a new organism. An individual's biological sex corresponds to one of two distinct types of evolved reproductive anatomy (i.e., ovaries or testes) that develop for the production of sperm or ova, regardless of their past, present, or future functionality. In humans, including transgender and non-binary individuals, this reproductive anatomy is unambiguously male or female over 99.98 percent of the time (explained in Sax, 2002: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12476264/>). Note: there are a variety of *intersex* conditions by which, due to genetic abnormality or atypical hormone exposure, an individual possesses reproductive or sexual anatomy that is atypical given their chromosomal combination; for example, an individual may have XX chromosomal makeup [i.e., female], but due to testosterone exposure in utero the individual may develop ambiguous genitalia; importantly, that testosterone exposure influences the individual's psychological development, as well. Intersex individuals are either (a) infertile or (b) produce either sperm or ova but not both or something else (because there isn't something else). The bottom line is that for intersex individuals, gametes are not clearly aligned with what is observable [anatomy] or felt [psychology].
- **Gender Identity:** how we feel in relation to our biological sex. In most cases (99%), *but not all*, males identify as boys/men and females identify as girls/women. As of 2014, 6 in 1,000 (.6%) American adults identified as transgender (Arboleda et al., 2014); that number has changed very quickly over the past decade and particularly among young people. For example, in 2022, 3% of 18-24-year olds identified as transgender (<https://pewrsr.ch/3Qi2Ejd>). There is plenty of debate about why such radical change has occurred as of late (see Twenge, 2023, for a discussion of various explanations.)

- *Gender Expression*: Neither biological sex nor gender identity imposes requirements on gender *expression*, that is, the external manifestation of our gender identity, or how we express our gender, such as through clothing choices, activity choices, toy preferences, etc. For example, I am a female, I identify as a woman, and I have for my entire life been a bit of a tomboy – expressing my gender in a more “masculine” style than “feminine” style.

The majority (albeit not all!) of individuals self-identify as either boy or girl, man or woman. Thus, when I discuss research on *adults* who have self-identified their biological sex or gender identity, I will often refer to these as sex differences and comparisons of “men” and “women.” In scientific studies of the individual differences dimensions we are going to discuss (such as sexual strategies), there were probably individuals who did not report a gender or who reported an alternative gender identity, but the subsamples would not have been large enough to be included in the analyses.

If I discuss research on sex differences in *non-human animals*, I will use the terms “males” and “females.”

Likewise, if I am discussing research on *people of varying ages*, I will use a catch-all term of “males” and “females” rather than list out all the age-specific terms (for example, “boys” and “girls” and “male-identifying teens” and “female-identifying teens” and “male elderly” and “female elderly,” etc.).

Psyc 373 Schedule At-A-Glance: Winterim 2026

Topic	Reading	Assignment Due	Due by 11:59 pm on...	Plan for about...
Introductions to the course	Syllabus	Intro Video and Syllabus Quiz	Mon 1/5	1-2 hours
Textbook overview: Evolutionary theory and psychology	Buss text Ch. 1	1	Mon 1/5	3 hours
A primer on evolutionary psych and adaptationist thinking	Cosmides & Tooby EP primer	2	Tues 1/6	2-3 hours
Misunderstandings and misconceptions	Buss text Ch. 1 (pp. 17-19); Notes from April	3 and Video	Tues 1/6	2-3 hours
Textbook overview: Doing evolutionary research on humans	Buss Text Ch. 2	4	Wed 1/7	2-3 hours
Textbook overview: Problems of survival	Buss Text Ch. 3	5	Wed 1/7	2-3 hours
Protecting ourselves (and our fetuses) from toxins	Flaxman & Sherman, 2000; Fessler, 2002; Navarrete et al., 2007 Navarrete et al., 2009	6	Thurs 1/8	3 hours
Navigation and foraging abilities	Silverman et al., 2007; Saucier et al., 2002; New et al., 2007	7	Thurs 1/8	2-3 hours
Detecting predators	LoBue & DeLoache, 2008; Barrett & Broesch, 2012	8	Fri 1/9	2-3 hours
Evolutionary roots of anxiety and depression	Nesse & Wilson, 1994; Keller & Nesse, 2006; Hahn-Holbrook & Haselton, 2014	9	Fri 1/9	3-4 hours
Textbook overview: Problems of parenting	Buss Text Ch. 7	10	Mon 1/12	2-3 hours
Selecting and promoting paternal investment	Bleske-Rechek et al., 2006; McLain et al., 2000; Platak et al., 2002	11 and Video	Mon 1/12	3 hours
Textbook overview: Problems of kinship	Buss Text Ch. 8	12	Tues 1/13	2 hours
Kin detection	Porter & Moore, 1981; Oates & Wilson, 2001; DeBruine, 2002; Park & Schaller, 2005; Lieberman et al., 2007	13	Tues 1/13	2-3 hours
Textbook overview: Women's long-term mating strategies	Buss Text Ch. 4	14	Wed 1/14	2-3 hours
Textbook overview: Men's long-term mating strategies	Buss Text Ch. 5	15	Wed 1/14	2-3 hours
Textbook overview: Men's and women's short-term sexual strategies	Buss Text Ch. 6	16	Thurs 1/15	2-3 hours
Sex differences in opportunistic sex	Schmitt, 2003; Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Gueguen, 2011; Galperin et al., 2013	17	Thurs 1/15	3-4 hours

Topic	Reading	Assignment Due	Due by 11:59 pm on...	Plan for about...
Good genes indicators	Thornhill & Gangestad, 1994; Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997; Jones et al., 2001; Perrett et al., 1998; Penton-Voak et al., 2003	18	Fri 1/16	3 hours
Ovulation and the menstrual cycle	Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999; Haselton & Gildersleeve, 2011; Durante et al., 2012	19	Fri 1/16	3 hours
Textbook overview: Conflict between the sexes	Buss Text Ch. 11	20	Tues 1/20	2-3 hours
Sexual conflict	Buss: When Men Behave Badly https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymzhPF9OQNg	21 and Video	Tues 1/20	3-4 hours
Textbook overview: Status, prestige, and dominance	Buss Text Ch. 12	22	Wed 1/21	1-2 hours
Dominance and prestige	Snyder et al., 2008	23	Wed 1/21	2-3 hours
Textbook overview: Cooperative alliances	Buss Text Ch. 9	24	Thurs 1/22	2-3 hours
Friendship I	Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012	25	Thurs 1/22	1-2 hours
Friendship II	Bleske-Rechek et al., 2014 (or watch and listen: https://newpaltz.webex.com/recording/service/sites/newpaltz/recording/0b4f27359ea4103bb3af005056818b09/playback)	26	Fri 1/23	2-3 hours
Course wrap-up and review		27	Fri 1/23	2-3 hours