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Evolution, Culture, and the Origins of Behavior (U1 Course)

IDIS 390 – Fall 2005

This class meets on Monday and Wednesday from 11:25am to 12:35pm.

Description of the course: Evolutionary theory and cultural theories purporting to explain the origins of human behavior are steadily gaining popularity in the social sciences as well as the popular media. By “evolution,” I refer to biological and genetic accounts for behavior, including the heritability of adaptive traits and strategies, individual and collective. In contrast, “culture” entails complex, though often subtle, social forces external to the individual that affect whole societies and are often perpetuated (intentionally or not) by them. Is the dichotomy between these two perspectives false (i.e., “culture overrides biology”), or does behavior result from the interaction of these two (inseparable?) forces? Both evolution and culture have shaped human thought, belief, and behavior—if you will—they have created the human mind. We will explore the implications of these ideas toward understanding the origins of behavior. *This course satisfies the Social Impact of Science rubric within the LinC curriculum.*

Required Readings:

Buss, D. M. (2003). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Freud, S. (1961). *Civilization and its discontents*. New York: Norton.

Mawer, S. (1999). *Mendel's dwarf*. New York: Penguin.

Nisbett, R. E., & Cohen, D. (1996). *Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the south*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Reid, T. R. (1999). *Confucius lives next door: What living in the east teaches us about living in the west*. New York: Vintage.

Other readings (noted herein) are “On Reserve” in Reeves Library.

Course Requirements

Class participation and attendance. This class requires constant attendance, active participation, and critical discussions of the readings. I expect that you will attend each and every class, and that you will come prepared to talk about—and question—what you read. I also assume that you are in this class because you have a serious interest in the topic. As a result, I assume that you are willing to share your opinions with the class and that you are open to the possibility of changing your opinions. *Mere attendance is not the same thing as active and engaged class participation*—you will not receive a high or favorable participation grade for merely coming to class but not asking questions, offering opinions, and sharing your reactions with your peers.

Please note that I **will** be taking role, thus your absence from class will affect your participation grade (i.e., if you are not in class, you cannot contribute to discussion). If you miss a class, you are responsible for any material covered, notes given, announcements, etc. If you are absent, please see one of your classmates regarding that day's assignments.

Classroom decorum and courtesy. Please arrive to class on time, that is, when class is to begin or before—not once the class is well underway. A late arrival is not only rude, it is disruptive to the flow of discussion. I realize that there are all kinds of reasons for late arrivals, many of them entirely legitimate. I also realize that you will do your best to be in class on time. It is not reasonable to arrive late to class because you were finishing writing a paper (work is technically late once class begins and will be down-graded accordingly, even if you submit it 10 mins after class begins—plan ahead and get your work done on time).

Exams. There will be two exams, a mid-term and a final. Each exam will be comprised of essay questions based upon class readings, films, and discussions. We will discuss exam formats in some detail during class. The midterm exam date is noted in the course schedule. The final exam date will be announced once it is determined by the Registrar's Office. A missed exam will be recorded as a zero (0) grade. Make-up exams will be given at my discretion, and valid evidence for the absence will be required (e.g., emergency, documented medical excuse).

Short papers. There are six short paper assignments noted in the course schedules. These are meant to be thought, opinion, or reaction papers—not formal research papers. Each short paper should be somewhere between 3 and 5 pages, typed and double-spaced, as well as spell-checked. The goal is to “do something” with the readings and your opinions about them. Be prepared to share your (written) thoughts in class with your peers.

Late Paper Policy. You have six written assignments for this class. Hard copies of all paper assignments are due at the beginning of class or in advance of the dates listed in the syllabus. Papers submitted later than this time—**for any reason**—will be penalized by

20% (i.e., an paper that would have earned a 95 on time receives a 75) on the first day and 10% each day thereafter (including weekends), up to 50%. Practically speaking, an A paper that is 5 days late receives a grade of 50 once it is turned in—if it is never submitted, then it receives a grade of 0. I will not accept electronic copies of papers sent via email, only hard copies. Plan accordingly by working ahead and consistently on your papers.

Submitting work early. I am happy to accept your papers before they are due.

Final course grade. The final course grade will be based upon the following percentage weights:

Midterm exam	15%
Final exam	15%
Class participation (my evaluation)	15%
Class participation (your evaluation)	5%
Six (6) short papers	50%

Office Hours.

Monday	10:15-11:15am
Wednesday	2-3pm
Friday	8:30-10:30am

When necessary appointments for other times may be scheduled.

Syllabus. I reserve the right to alter the syllabus if I decide change is necessary.

Schedule of Class Meetings

Week 1 – Introduction and Nature or Nurture? (M Aug 29; W Aug 31)

Class 1: Overview of course, requirements, and review of syllabus

Class 2: Read chapter 1 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology*

Week 2 – Opinions: Nature or Nurture? Continued (M Sept. 5; W Sept. 7)

Class 1: No Class – Labor Day – the End of Summer

Class 2: Discuss papers and perspectives (**paper due**)

Short paper 1. For class 1: Bring a 2-3 page paper to class where you present YOUR ideas about the fundamental processes of nature and nurture. In your opinion, are humans more subject to our biology or the whims of culture and the environment? Be specific, citing concrete evidence and examples (preferably from your experience) whenever possible. Be prepared to read or present your ideas to the entire class in one or both class meetings this week—keep a copy of your paper, as you will be submitting the original to me at the start of Wednesday's class

Week 3 – Evolutionary Perspectives on Behavior (M Sept. 12; W Sept. 14)

Class 1: Read chapter 2 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology*

Class 2: Guest Speaker: TBA from the Department of Biology

Week 4 – Culture and Behavior (M Sept. 19; W Sept. 21)

Class 1: Losing civilization – watch *Castaway* in class

Class 2: Finish *Castaway*

Short paper 2. Write an alternative ending to this film, one focused on the possible difficulties of re-adapting to civilization.

Week 5 – Evolution continued (M Sept 26; W Sept 28)

Class 1: Read chapter 3 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology* (**paper due**)

Class 2: Midterm Exam

Week 6 – Culture of Honor (M Oct. 3; W Oct. 5)

Class 1: Read Nisbett & Cohen's *Culture of Honor*

Class 2: Finish Nisbett & Cohen's *Culture of Honor*

Fall Break – Oct. 8 (Sat) to Oct 11 (Tues)

Week 7 – Honor continued and Another Culture: Japan (W. Oct. 12)

Class 1: Begin Reid's *Confucius Lives Next Door*

Class 2: Finish Reid's *Confucius Lives Next Door*

Short paper 3 (write on 1 of these 2 topics): What other evidence would you request from Nisbett and Cohen in order to support their thesis about the culture of honor in the southern US? Or, What did you find most striking about Japanese culture? What do you think the Japanese are struck by when they encounter American culture?

Week 8 – Mating Strategies and Child Rearing (M Oct. 17; W Oct. 19)

Class 1: Read chapters 4 and 5 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology* (**paper due**)

Class 2: Read chapters 6 and 7 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology*

Week 9 – Parenting and Kinship, and Aggression and Dominance (M Oct 24; W Oct 26)

Class 1: Read chapters 8, 9, and 10 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology*

Class 2: Read chapters 11 and 12 in Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology*

Week 10 – Cultural Discontents? (M Oct 31; W Nov. 2)

Class 1: Read Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Class 2: Finish Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Short paper 4: If Freud were still alive and familiar with the current behavioral theories in evolutionary psychology and cultural psychology, respectively, which account (if either) would he endorse?

Week 11 – Economics, Culture, and (Post) Modern Behavior (M Nov. 7; W Nov. 9)

Class 1: Reserve readings (On Reserve) **(paper due)**

Chapters 1 and 2 from Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Class 2: Reserve readings (On Reserve)

Chapter 1 from Schor, J. (1991). *The overworked American*. New York: Basic.
Chapter 9 from Robinson, Godbey, & Jacobson. (1997). *Time for life*. State
College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Chapter 5 from Frey & Stutzer (2002). *Happiness and economics*.
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Short paper 5: Had reading and discussing the problem of materialism changed
your own consumer habits? Do you think your materialism is cultural or
evolved?

Week 12 – In Search for Ourselves (M Nov. 14; W Nov. 16)

Class 1: Watch *In search of Ourselves* **(paper due)**

Class 2: Finish *In Search of Ourselves*.

Week 13 – Conflict and Art on Science (M Nov 21; No class on W Nov 23)

Class 1: Discuss *In Search of Ourselves*; begin discussion of *Mendel's Dwarf*

Short paper 6: In your opinion, what is the relative impact of evolution and
culture on behavior? What else do we need to know? What else do you want to
know?

Thanksgiving Break – Nov. 23 (W) to Nov. 27 (Su)

Week 14 – Art on Science (M Nov. 28; W Nov. 30)

Class 1: Discuss *Mendel's Dwarf* **(paper due)**

Class 2: Finish discussion of *Mendel's Dwarf*

Week 15 – Conclusions (M Dec 5; W Dec 7)

Class 1: Culture and well-being – (On Reserve)

Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. (2000). The pursuit of happiness and the realization of sympathy: Cultural patterns of self, social relations, and well-being. In E. Diener & E. M. Suh (Eds.), *Culture and subjective well-being* (pp. 113-161) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Class 2: (On Reserve)

De Waal, F. B. M. (2002). Evolutionary psychology: The wheat and the chaff. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 6, 187-191.

Week 16 – Last Day of Class (M Dec 12)

Class 1: Conclusions and review

Date of Final to be announced.