COURSE DESCRIPTION

Psychopathy is a syndrome characterized by pathological lying, manipulativeness, grandiosity, shallow emotions, lack of empathy and remorse, impulsivity, and irresponsibility. Psychopaths are not a distinct type of person; rather, psychopathic traits are continuously distributed in the general population. People with high levels of psychopathic traits are found in all walks of life, and some are quite successful in politics, business, academia, the arts, etc. These findings about psychopathy raise interesting questions about its place in the evolved psychology of Homo sapiens: Is psychopathy found cross-culturally? Did psychopathic traits sometimes increase reproductive success of ancestral humans? If so, under what circumstances? What were the reproductive costs of psychopathic traits? Is extreme (i.e., clinical) psychopathy an evolutionary by-product of selection for subclinical psychopathy? How can we reconcile the persistence of psychopathy with the generally highly prosocial character of human social life?

To explore these issues, we will first (Weeks 2-6) read and discuss a non-technical account of psychopathy as a trait continuum, including how it differs from other psychological traits and how it manifests itself in different social contexts. In Week 7, we will shift away from discussing psychopathy and focus on how the theory of evolution by natural selection can inform the study of the human mind generally. In Weeks 8-10, we will consider how an evolutionary approach to the human mind may help us understand psychopathy.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and participation in seminar meetings. For a passing grade, you must attend at least 7 of the 9 class meetings during Weeks 2-10.

2. Discussion questions. By 8:00 PM on the day before each class meeting, please email to me one question that you have regarding the readings assigned for that day. I will compile these questions (with your names removed) into a list that I will distribute at the beginning at each class meeting. These questions will form the basis of our discussions.
READINGS

1. Schouten, Ronald & Silver, James. 2012. *Almost a Psychopath: Do I (or Does Someone I Know) Have a Problem with Manipulation and Lack of Empathy?* Center City, MN: Hazelden. Purchase from Amazon or another online retailer.


SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Week 1 (Oct. 1): No readings.
Week 2 (Oct. 8): *Almost a Psychopath* Chapters 1-2.
Week 3 (Oct. 15): *Almost a Psychopath* Chapter 3.
Week 5 (Oct. 29): *Almost a Psychopath* Chapter 5.
Week 6 (Nov. 5): *Almost a Psychopath* Chapters 6-7.
Week 7 (Nov. 12): “Evolutionary psychology: a primer.”
Week 8 (Nov. 19): “Evolutionary theory and psychopathy” (article by Glenn, Kurzban & Raine).
Week 9 (Nov. 26): no new reading – more discussion of “Evolutionary theory and psychopathy.”
Week 10 (Dec. 3): “The strategy of psychopathy” (article by Gervais et al.).