

Psychology 3140 Course Project
An adolescence-focused psychobiographical evaluation of a life

This project will give you multiple opportunities to apply what we are learning about adolescent development and doing so will build your understanding of the subject matter. At the same time, the project will help you understand the life of a person that you find interesting. The heart of the task is to critically evaluate your subject across the three main subject areas of adolescent research (Steinberg, 2017). That is, you will seek to understand the person and his or her life by examining that person's:

1. Unique experiences with the fundamental changes of adolescence (e.g. biological, cognitive, and social transitions)
2. The contexts of his or her adolescence (e.g., family, peers, school experiences),
3. His or her unique psychosocial experiences in adolescence (e.g. experiences with autonomy, independence, intimacy, achievement, sexuality).

Technically, over the course of the semester, what you will be doing is writing a research-based psychobiography. Near the end of class you will present an abbreviated version of the results of your psychobiography to the class in a brief talk. Consequently, the class will give you opportunities to practice your written and verbal communication skills. It will also push you to integrate developmental theory and developmental research in the context of understanding an individual's life. You will read at least one high-quality guide that explains what constitutes a scientifically valid psychobiographical analysis of a life as opposed to a fanciful, non-empirical set of musings about a person's life. You will use that guide to help you develop your project.

Your subject may be an actual person or a fictitious person from literature, however, his or her life must be well-documented in a book (if the character is only displayed in a movie or a play you are unlikely to have enough data to write your paper). The person can come from any historical period, culture, etc. But you have to choose carefully. To do this project well you need to *choose someone whose adolescence* is well-documented. I must approve your subject choice early in the semester (see components of the paper below). Some examples of good characters might be the main character in "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian", Sigmund Freud, Anne Frank, Theodore Roosevelt, Katniss from the Hunger Games, Harry Potter or Hermione Granger...this list could be VERY LONG.

To be sure, this is not a class on psychobiography. Yet psychobiography will be a tool that we use to leverage our understanding of adolescent psychology. I believe that if you *authentically invest in the process* of researching your subject, writing your paper, and presenting your findings to me and your fellow students you will take a great deal away from the project and class.

Components of the project (you will hand these in):

1. Elements of the manuscript
 - a. **Assignment 1 - Understanding Psychobiography (10pts.)**. After you read the Schulz paper you will write a *brief essay* (approximately 3 double spaced paragraphs) answering the questions: What is psychobiography? What makes a good psychobiography? What makes a bad psychobiography? Choose 2 elements

of a “good psychobiography” and discuss (speculate on) how you could use them in your paper.

- b. **Assignment 2 - Who is my subject (5 pts)?** You will identify your subject to me. You will provide a brief justification of why you chose this person (what do you really want to understand about this person?) and why you think his or her life is documented well enough to work as a subject? You should be able to accomplish this in 400 to 500 words
- c. **Assignment 3 - Brief sketch of the major events of adolescence that matter for understanding this person’s life (10 pts).** You will identify 3 to 5 important events that you think shaped this person’s psychological life. These will be the events that you will try to persuade your reader and me really HAVE to be understood in order to understand this person. You will tie each event to one or more of Steinberg’s three main areas of adolescent research (see above), such as physical transitions, cognitive changes, friend or family encounters, identity struggles, decisions, failures, successes, etc. You should do this in approximately 750 words
- d. **Assignment 4 - Outline of your manuscript (20 pts.).** You will create a basic outline of the manuscript that you want to write. You will not have to stick to this manuscript. It is simply a starting point for your project. Once you begin writing and once you revise you may decide that the order needs work. Nevertheless, you must start here. Your outline should include at least the following 4 Major Sections and any subsections within them that make sense to you.
 - i. Introduction – your goal will be to tell your reader who your character is and to provide important supporting information including (but not limited to), when he or she lived, why he or she is fascinating to understand, and other key details that would draw your reader in. You should also lay out what we are going to understand about his or her life by the end of your manuscript. You should tell me what you want to explain in particular about this person. Is it particular choices he or she made? Is it about an identity he or she developed? Is it about moodiness or a dark (or light) worldview? Perhaps you want to explain all of those things. Your introduction should establish the goals of your paper. Next you should provide a brief rundown of the sections that will follow in your paper (provide the reader a “roadmap”).
 - ii. Major Events – List and organize the events and their supporting details that you will include in your paper to accomplish the goals that you introduced in part 1. How will you link them in this section to make a convincing, coherent argument about how they matter for the person’s life?
 - iii. Conclusion – List and organize the major points that you will want to conclude with. Think about what the story sums to. What main ideas do you want your reader to ultimately take away from this reading? For example, your conclusions could entail describing the aspects of the person’s life and experiences that your psychobiography truly explained or the aspects of the person’s life that you are most confident that you have explained in this writing?

- iv. List 3 empirical research papers that you will cite as supportive evidence of important claims that you will make in your paper. For example, if you are going to discuss identity development as a key feature of your character's story, you should be citing at least one study that tells us something about identity development in adolescence. So perhaps you cite Harter, Erikson, Marcia, and/or McLean, or some other researcher who focuses on identity. Your research has to be relevant and supportive of the points that you are making.
- e. **Assignment 5 - Write your paper (50 Pts).** Using all of the information above, you should be able to write your manuscript. The paper should be about 6 double spaced pages. Note, I don't think that you can do a good job in less than 5 pages and some of you may require 7. YOU ARE REQUIRED to take a draft of your paper to the writing center. I will need to have confirmation of your writing center visit. I will not read papers that are not reviewed by someone from the writing center. The paper has to be in APA format with a title page and a references page but you do NOT need to write an abstract, methods, or results section - instead you will organize the paper according to the subheadings in your outline above. Per APA format you need to use Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1 inch margins all around. Your references page needs to have hanging indentations and any work cited has to be in the references page. If you need help with APA format please let me know. There are many easy to follow web resources for APA formatting. For example: <http://www.easybib.com/guides/students/writing-guide/iv-write/a-formatting/apa-paper-formatting/> or <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>
- f. **Assignment 6 - In class presentation of your psychobiography (25 pts.).** Your presentation will be about 5 minutes long. You will use power-point or keynote and any other visual aids that you think will contribute to your creating an engaging, coherent presentation. In this presentation your overall goal is to teach the class about the key aspects of adolescent development that you uncovered by studying your chosen character. Your subsidiary goals include teaching the class about your new understanding of this individual by sharing what you have learned in a clear and coherent presentation.