# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND ONLINE DISCUSSION

OSUN Connected Learning Contest Winner

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**Course: Advanced Topics in Psychology—Narrative,**
**Identity and Transformation**

This was the fourth and final assessment component for the course "PSY402 Advanced Topics in Psychology: Narrative, Identity and Transformation". The assignment consisted of (1) displaying in a **Powerpoint presentation** a comparative analysis of different biographic cases, where the student had to compare the life of the person they targeted as individual case for the course with other cases presented by other students in the course, or in a correspondent Globally Connected Course given at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito in Ecuador (REL3402 Writing for Human Rights); and (2) participating in an open **online asynchronous discussion** about these analyses on a Canvas platform. This assignment counted for 25% of the assessment in a 4-credit Writing Intensive Course.

**Advanced Topics in Psychology: Narrative, Identity and Transformation (PSY402)**

This course focuses on narrative, identity, and life transitions, relying on social theory, qualitative research and oral history. It involves students in applied research, including fieldwork, interviewing, transcription, case analysis and comparative analysis. It is a Globally Connected Course taught in synchronous coordination with the course REL3402 Writing for Human Rights, given at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito (Ecuador). The course activities include selecting an interviewee, interviewing them, transcribing and analysing the interview. The assessment system is based on practical, applied and research tasks, including peer interaction in class and across the two connected courses.

**The assignment**

The comparative analysis was the fourth and final task in a sequence of graded assignments designed to ensure that every student would apply the contents of the course to an individual case. This is the sequence of assignments in the course, with their deadlines and relative load:

1. Literature review, March 16
   max. 3,000 words                                                20 %
2. Interview, transcription, and editing, April 8,
   max. 6,000 words                                                25 %
3. Paper presenting and analyzing the interview, May 8
   max. 3,000 words                                                20 %
4. **Comparative analysis and online discussion**, May 8          25 %

- Participation in class and online peer collaboration            10 %

Early in the course, every student selected a core thematic field and interviewee to build their case analysis. These case studies were the focus of exchange and discussion during the course, both with the PSY402 class and with the globally connected class at USFQ. The comparative analysis assignment involved answering similar questions to those addressed in assignment 3, but this time with a comparative, contrastive, and trans-national focus. For this purpose, students had to apply similar questions they had considered for their own case in assignment 3 to cases developed by other students.

Although this assignment was given and assessed independently at AUBG, the presentations had to include information and discussion of cases from both globally connected courses. For this purpose and for its own value, regular collaboration on the cases across the two courses was encouraged. Particularly, through the month of April, all students at both courses shared transcripts of their interviews in a shared Slack space, so that they could sort and choose to match different cases together.

The comparative analyses were submitted to the instructor by May 1, in the form of Powerpoint slideshows. The instructor reviewed these documents for correct grammar and uploaded the revised files to the Canvas space for an online asynchronous discussion, with the participation of all students at the PSY402 course. This online discussion went on until May 8. For this assignment, students were assessed on the basis of the files submitted and their contribution to online discussion (see the rubric in the table below).

As a whole, the construction of comparative analyses allowed for students to critically apply social and psychological theory to a series of cases by starting from a particular case and then putting it in relation to different cases developed by other students, in communication

with peers from their class and the globally connected class. The online asynchronous discussion was an opportunity to put these comparative analyses to the test and rehearse their public defense in a secure and friendly argumentative environment.

**Practical and pedagogical value**

- I find it valuable that the **comparative analysis** (assignment 4) **overlapped** in time **with** the original **case analyses** (assignment 3), so that reflections emerging from comparative analysis and discussion could feedback into the individual case analysis.

- Still, in this assignment students had to proceed **from an individual case** to extending their observations **to other cases**, or correcting them or adapting them for that matter, which is a habitual sequence in qualitative social science.

- I gave very open-ended instructions on what to cover in the comparative analysis and how to structure it. Students produced systematic, simple and concise graphs in their **Powerpoint presentations**, including illustrative transcript excerpts. They took this assignment as an opportunity to practice concise, clear and persuasive communication while applying with parsimony the social science theories covered in the course.

- I introduced this online assignment as an adaptation of an original assignment which would have consisted of a class presentation and discussion (when Covid-19 caught us and sent us all online). I have found that defending an analysis in **online asynchronous discussion, as opposed to face-to-face,** is better protected from anxiety, allows for more thoughtful design of messages, and, by and large, results in more and better-structured student participation.

- I hardly participated in the **online discussion**, only very discreetly, contributing with my own opinion on collateral aspects of my own interest. Having the discussion by the end of the course, when students already mastered course content and knew what they were talking about, made it unnecessary for me to direct them. This was also possible because the group was small (7 students). I still find that **minimal intervention by the instructor** brings a great opportunity for advanced students to put in practice their co-participation skills.

**RUBRIC USED TO ASSESS THIS ASSIGNMENT**

| ASPECT | Fail (0-15) | D (16-17) | C Range (18-20) | B Range (21-23) | A Range (24-25) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Content and form of presentation** | Unintelligible, absurd, incomplete in its basic requirements | Frequent grammatical mistakes, imprecise or wrong information | Basically intelligible, enough information | Original, interesting, adequate analysis | Persuasive; adequate grasp of nuances, polemic and complex aspects |
| **Communication skills** | Unintelligible, inexpressive, uninteresting | Important blank areas or confusions due to failure to express or understand content | Basically accessible and intelligible | Enticing, assertive, managing to engage peers with the problematic | Correct management of academic discourse and argument, both in the submitted file and when answering questions |
| **Understanding the core problematic** | Serious mis-understandings of key concepts | Failure to understand some notions and processes involved | Basic understanding of the main notions and processes involved | In-depth understanding of the problematic, as demonstrated in detailed comparative analysis | Full understanding of the core problematic and especially detailed understanding of specific issues involved |
| **Critical management of argument** | Lack of coherence, failure to understand the notions involved in the problematic | Failure to understand the perspective and forms of life of the interviewees | Adequate grasp of the perspective and forms of life of interviewees | Close understanding of the experiences related to the problematic in historical and social context | Deep and critical grasp of the problematic in context; coherent defense of a stance in relation to it |