PSYC 3815 -- THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CRIME

Fall 2008
Mondays, 18:00 – 20:50
Library building L-1050

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http://webct.uleth.ca

Course Description

This course is an overview of recent scientific findings in the psychological study of antisocial behaviour, aggression, and criminal violence. In the first part of the course we will identify individual and social factors that seem to increase people's likelihood of engaging in antisocial and criminal behaviour. We will pay particular attention to developmental continuity, examining factors that lead to persistence or desistence. In the second part of the course we will examine such special topics as psychopathy, the assessment of risk to reoffend, and psychological treatment. The main goals of the course are to identify the outline of a general theory of crime and to think critically and scientifically about the causes of crime.

Recommended background: PSYC 2030 & 2800.
Prerequisite: Any two 2000-level psychology courses.

Required Reading

These readings were selected because they provide interesting and helpful information on the topics covered in the lectures. Some are conceptually challenging. Some provide good examples of scientific research on the causes of crime. The book *In Cold Blood* is available for purchase at the university bookstore. Most of the articles and book chapters are available at the library.

Baker, L. A., Jacobson, K. C., Raine, A., Isabel Lozano, D., & Bezdjian, S. (2007). Genetic and environmental bases of childhood antisocial behavior: A multi-informant twin study. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 116,* 219-235.

Capote, T. (1965). *In cold blood*. New York: Random House.

French, D. C., & Dishion, T. J. (2003). Predictors of early initiation of sexual intercourse among high-risk adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 23,* 295-315.

Hilton, N. Z., & Simmons, J. L. (2001). The influence of actuarial risk assessment in clinical judgments and tribunal decisions about mentally disordered offenders in maximum security. *Law and Human Behavior, 25,* 393-408.

Lipsey, M. W. (1995). What do we learn from 400 research studies on the effectiveness of treatment with juvenile delinquents? In J. McGuire (Ed.), *What works: Reducing reoffending: Guidelines from research and practice* (pp. 63-77). London: Wiley & Sons.

Martino, S. C., Ellickson, P. L., Klein, D. J., McCaffrey, D. & Orlando Edelen, M. (2008). Multiple trajectories of physical aggression among adolescent boys and girls. *Aggressive Behavior, 34,* 61-75.

Maughan, B., Taylor, C., Taylor, A., Butler, N., & Bynner, A. (2001). Pregnancy smoking and childhood conduct problems: A causal association? *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry & Allied Disciplines, 42,* 1021-1028.

Moffitt, T. E., & Caspi, A. (2001). Childhood predictors differentiate life-course persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial pathways among males and females. *Development and Psychopathology, 13,* 355-375.

Quinsey, V. L., Skilling, T. A., Lalumière, M. L., & Craig, W. M. (2004). *Juvenile delinquency: Understanding the origins of individual differences* (chapter 3). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Rutter, M., Giller, H., & Hagell, A. (1997). *Antisocial behavior by young people* (chapter 7). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Seto, M. C., & Barbaree, H. E. (1999). Psychopathy, treatment behavior and sex offender recidivism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 14,* 1235-1248.

Tiihonen, J., Isohanni, M., Räsänen, P., Koiranen, M., & Moring, J. (1997). Specific major mental disorders and criminality: A 26-year prospective study of the 1966 Northern Finland Birth Cohort. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 154,* 840-845.

Wrangham, R., & Peterson, D. (1996). *Demonic males: Apes and the origins of human violence* (chapters 1 and 7). New York: Mariner Books.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be based on a mid-term exam (25%), an end-of-term exam (35%), a book review (25%), and a group presentation (15%).

The exams will consist of definitions, short-answer questions, and long-answer questions. They will encompass all material covered in prior weeks, with a focus on the more recent material (i.e., cumulative).[1]

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[1] If you cannot be present for an exam you must contact the instructor as soon as possible before the exam date. Medical reasons must be supported by a statement that test performance would be affected, with the physician's name, address, and phone number included in the statement. Non-medical reasons must also be supported by appropriate documentation. Failure to notify the instructor prior to the exam will result in a mark of zero.

The book to be reviewed is *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote. It is the first well-known true-crime story. Apart from its literary qualities, the book provides a good illustration of some of the concepts covered in the lectures. The review should be no longer than 1,500 words (excluding title page, reference list, and appendices) and should be submitted to the instructor in class on or before November 17, 2008. The word count should be stated at the end of the text portion of the review. An electronic copy must also be submitted to the instructor on or before November 17, 2008; 18:00—please use a Word readable format and attach the file to the email message rather than placing the review directly into the message, and in the subject line write *Book Review*. Reviews submitted after the deadline or containing more than 1,500 words will receive a failing mark. The review should reflect what you learned in this course, and not your personal feelings about the story or about crime. There is no need to attempt to include all that you learned in class in the review, only what you think is the most relevant information. Quality of exposition will be taken into account in grading the book review.

The in-class presentation will be 10 minutes long, plus 2 minutes for questions. The goal is to give you a chance to learn about a particular topic through library research and to teach other students a synthesis of what you learned. A scientific (empirical) paper will be the focus of your presentation. The topics should be approved by the instructor at least two weeks prior to the presentations. Students should select team members as soon as possible. Assuming there are 60 students, we will organize into groups of 5 students each, for a total of 12 presentations. There can be only one presentation per topic. The instructor will provide examples of topics if necessary. The end-of-term exam will cover material presented by the students.

Evaluation Timeline:

October 20	Mid-term exam (25%)
November 17	Book review (25%)
December 1 & 3	Student conference (15%)
December 8	End-of-term exam (35%)

The following ranges will be used to convert percentage marks to a letter grade:

A+	90-100	A	85-89	A-	80-84
B+	77-79	B	74-76	B-	71-73
C+	68-70	C	65-67	C-	61-64
D+	56-60	D	50-55	F (fail)	0-49

Class Discussion

I encourage questions and discussion in class. Because of the large size of the class, this might not always be feasible. Therefore I also encourage using WebCT Discussion Board to ask questions and continue class discussions. The teaching assistant and the instructor will answer questions asked on the WebCT Discussion Board. All questions addressed to the instructor must be asked in class or through WebCT (with the exceptions of questions having to do with personal issues).

Course Content

The topics for the lectures are listed below (not necessarily in order), along with the required readings in parenthesis. I strongly recommend students read the required readings before the lectures. Some lectures slides will be posted on the website in the form of handouts before the lectures. The instructor will post upcoming lecture topics on the WebCT Calendar. We may not cover all of the topics listed.

Introduction and a Brief History.

The Fundamental Data. What a general theory of crime must explain. Age, sex, the 5% rule, varying rates over time and places, desistence and persistence, specialization, adolescence-limited versus life-course persistence (Moffitt & Caspi, 2001).

Animal Behaviour. Many crimes have behavioural equivalents in the animal world (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996).

Behavioural Genetics. Are people more or less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour because they have different genes, or because they have been exposed to different environments (Baker, Jacobson, Raine, Isabel Lozano, & Bezdjian, 2007)?

Early Development. Events that occur very early in life can have long-term impacts (Maughan, Taylor, Taylor, Butler, & Bynner, 2001; Quinsey, Skilling, Lalumière, & Craig, 2004).

Social Environment. The family may promote or hinder antisocial tendencies. Are there characteristics of neighbourhoods that affect crime? How do peers influence antisocial behaviour? How does one know whether a social factor is a cause of antisocial behaviour (Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1997; Quinsey et al., 2004)?

Psychopathy. Who are psychopaths? What accounts for their unique characteristics (Seto & Barbaree, 1999)?

Sex and Delinquency. What is the link between sexual behaviours and crime? What explains it (French & Dishion, 2003)?

<u>Female Delinquency</u>. Do we need a special theory for female delinquency (Martino, Ellickson, Klein, McCaffrey, & Orlando Edelen, 2008)?

<u>Mental illness and crime</u>. Does having a mental disorder increase the chance of committing a violent criminal (Tiihonen, Isohanni, Räsänen, Koiranen, & Moring, 1997)?

<u>Assessing Risk to Reoffend</u>. Can clinicians accurately predict future violence (Hilton & Simmons, 2001)?

<u>Psychological Treatment</u>. What are the features of the most effective treatments for antisocial behaviour (Lipsey, 1995)?