From Huck Finn to Columbine:

Understanding Disruptive Behaviors in Children and Adolescents

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Studies

College of Arts & Sciences

Professor

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Course Description:

What makes kids do bad things? Who is accountable for their acts? How can we prevent childhood violence? In this course we will explore these questions and seek to understand the spectrum of "bad" behavior from biological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. We will address broad topics ranging from the nature vs. nurture debate to biased media reporting to medicating disruptive behaviors. We will examine the increase in media violence and its influence on children and adolescents; how the criminal justice system responds to delinquent behavior; and gender differences in disruptive behavior. We will study atrocities perpetrated by children and adolescents, the growing scientific literature detailing neurodevelopment as it relates to behavior, and historical descriptions of disruptive behavior and delinquency. Students will analyze case studies, debate controversial issues (e.g., the influence of violent gaming), and review scientific and media sources in an effort to determine sensible efforts aimed at prevention and treatment.

Course Objectives:
Students will learn key aspects of:

• Historical, scientific, and cultural perspectives on behavioral problems in childhood

• Contemporary biological, psychological, and social perspectives on childhood disruptive behavior

• Current evidence regarding the diagnosis and treatment of disruptive behavior disorders in children

• The impact of disruptive behavior in children and adolescents on the individual, family and society

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

• Review and integrate diverse theoretical perspectives on childhood disruptive behavior

• Apply and discuss concepts of disruptive behavior as directly related to current events and clinical case material

• Discuss controversies and limitations in our current understanding of childhood disruptive behavior

• Describe goals for further study and research

Texts


Readings from these texts will be supplemented by readings posted on the course site at NYU Classes (http://newclasses.nyu.edu) as listed below.

**Grading**

Your class grade will be composed of:

- **10% Participation: Quizzes**
  
  o Most classes will begin with a quiz promptly at 2:00PM, ending by 2:15PM. Though these are ungraded, you will receive credit for handing in a completed quiz by 2:15PM, which we will then review in class. You may drop one quiz without penalty as there are no make-up quizzes and quizzes handed in after 2:15PM will not be accepted for credit.

- **30% Response Papers**
  
  o Five 2-3 page papers or projects in which course themes are applied to problems in sociology, law, clinical psychology, public policy, etc. See writing and grading guidelines below.

- **25% Midterm Examination**
  
  o Online, timed exam applying foundational course themes to clinical case material. A brief review will be conducted during the class prior to the midterm.

- **35% Final Examination**
  
  o Online, timed exam applying foundational and topical course themes to clinical case material. A brief review will be conducted during the class prior to the final.

- **Extra-Credit:** For up to 3 extra-credit points added to your Midterm Examination score, you may keep a Disruptive Behavior Journal during the course. You must submit at least
14 entries (approximately one/week) describing disruptive behaviors you observe (in yourself, friends, family, strangers, the media, or anyone). You must reference themes AND a source(s) from the course or related materials in each entry (see citation rules below). Entries need not be more than 2-3 paragraphs each.

Class Schedule: Readings for each lecture will be posted on NYU Classes by the week prior to class. You will be expected to have completed the readings before class and the main points of the readings will be covered in the quizzes given at the start of each class (see schedule below).

1) Session 1: Introduction to Disruptive Behaviors in Childhood & Adolescence
   a. Quiz
   Pre-Reading:

2) Session 2: Historical Perspectives on Childhood Disruptive Behaviors
   a. Quiz
   Pre-Reading:
      2. DSM descriptions of Disruptive Behavior Disorders from DSMI through DSM5

3) Session 3: Presentation and Course of Juvenile Disruptive Behaviors
   a. Response Paper #1 Due
   b. Quiz
   Pre-Reading:


4. Listen to the segment, “The Psychopath Test,” from NPR, posted on the course sidebar. This is a lighthearted take on the development and use of Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist.

**Optional:**

**4) Session 4: The Biological Basis of Childhood Disruptive Behaviors**

a. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**

1. Please read pages 163-182 and pages 191-196 in Chapter 6 (Psychobiology) and pages 225-244 of Chapter 7 (Neurobiology) in the Connor textbook, *Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents*.


5. Read the NY Times editorial describing the research from Anderson et al. (full citation below under “optional”). Blakeslee, S. “Study Links Antisocial Behavior to Early Brain Injury That Bars Learning.” *NY Times*, October 19, 1999.

**Optional:**

Introduction and Conclusions sections (you do not need to be able to discuss the Methods/Results sections). Editorial discussion of the article included above.

2. Anderson, Steven, Antoine Bechara, Hanna Damasio, Daniel Tranel, and Antonio Damasio. "Impairment of social and moral behavior related to early damage in human prefrontal cortex." Nature Neuroscience 2.11 (1999): 1032-37. Here, focus on the case studies and Discussion from the original article (NY Times editorial describing the research included above).

3. Suomi, S. “Risk, Resilience, and Gene-Environment Interplay in Primates”: This is an overview of important research on epigenetics.

4. Capadoccia et al. “Contextualizing the neurobiology of conduct disorder in an emotion dysregulation framework”: This is a recent general review of biological factors in conduct disorder. The introduction and discussion sections have the most useful information and ideas.

5) Session 5: The Social Ecology of Childhood Disruptive Behavior

a. Response Paper #2 Due

b. Quiz

Pre-Reading:


Optional:

1. Listen to the 3rd NPR segment on the course site sidebar from the episode entitled, "The Cruelty of Children"—the segment to listen to is Act 3: Human Nature, A View from Kindergarten.

2. Watch the movie NEDS (Non-Educated Delinquents) by director Peter Mullan with particular attention to sociologic factors influencing the protagonist’s disruptive behaviors. Available on Amazon, Netflix, etc.
6) **Session 6: The Psychology of Juvenile Disruptive Behaviors**

   a. Quiz
   
   b. In-Class Midterm Examination Review

**Pre-Reading:**


5. NPR segment “Attachment Therapy” only the Prologue (about Harry Harlowe’s experiments, 12 minutes) is required, though the other sections are optional. Found on the course site sidebar.

**Optional:**

1. “Sigmund Freud and the Classical psychoanalytic tradition,” from *Freud and Beyond* by Stephen Mitchell and Margaret Black.


4. Listen to the entire NPR segment included on the course site sidebar labeled “Attachment Therapy.”

7) **Session 7: Midterm Examination (via NYU Classes)**

   a. No readings or quiz

8) **Session 8: Gender and Youthful Disruptive Behavior**

   a. Response Paper #3 **Due**

   b. Quiz
Pre-Reading:


9) Session 9: Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Disruptive Behavior

a. Quiz

Pre-Reading:

1. Textbook (Hill and Maughan, eds.) Chapter 15. Treatment of conduct disorders (pp. 408-448).

2. Textbook (Hill and Maughan, eds.) Chapter 16. The prevention of conduct disorder.


Optional:


2. Connor textbook, Chapters 11 (Psychosocial Interventions) and 12 (Psychopharmacological Treatments)

10) Session 10: Disruptive Behavior in the School Setting

a. Response Paper #4 Due

b. Quiz

Pre-Reading:


3. Listen to the 2-part NPR segment posted on the course site sidebar and labeled School Violence and School Violence II. This describes the effects of gang violence on a Chicago high school.

*Optional:*


3. Fredland, N. *Nurturing hostile environments: the problem of school violence.* Family & Community Health, 3(1S), S32-S41.

11) Session 11: Dramatic Acts of Violence in Youth

a. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**


*Optional:*


4. Brooke, James. *Terror in Littleton: the overview, 2 students in Colorado school said to gun down as many as 23 and kill themselves in a siege.* NY Times, 4/20/99. Gives an overview of the events at Columbine from the day of the shootings.

5. Watch the film *Elephant*, a fictionalized depiction of a school shooting similar to the events at Columbine.

12) **Session 12: Disruptive Behavior and the Law**

a. Response Paper #5 **Due**

b. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**


**Optional:**


13) **Session 13: The Role of Contemporary Media in Juvenile Disruptive Behavior**

a. No quiz

b. In-Class Final Examination Review

c. Disruptive Behavior Journals **Due**

**Pre-Reading:**


Optional:


Focus on the Introduction and Discussion sections.


14) Session 14: Final Examination (via NYU Classes)

a. No quiz, no readings

**Writing Tips for Response Papers:**

1) The paper should have an introductory paragraph and thesis statement to let us know the focus of the paper.

2) The subsequent paragraphs should be clearly related to your thesis statement, offering support for your argument. Every paragraph should be easily connected to the previous one.

3) Every paper should cite at least 2 sources to support/define your argument. Appropriate sources include textbooks, journal articles, or scientific writing from the media. While blogs, opinion pieces, course lectures, and media samples (TV, movies, music, etc.) are excellent to support your arguments, they do not count toward your citations.
a. Citations to materials from the course (textbooks, articles) should be included parenthetically with author and page number, e.g., (Connor, 254). Course lectures may be cited but do not count toward your minimum of 2 references.

b. Citations from non-course materials are encouraged and, when used, should be listed with full citation information in a reference/bibliography list at the end of your paper. Use APA style for these citations. If the reference information is not listed, you will not get credit for the citation.

4) We strongly suggest that you proofread the paper for grammar, spelling, and readability. If that is not your forte, get help from friends, family, the University Learning Center, etc.

**Grading Rubric for Response Papers:**

1) 1 point for clear writing (grammar, punctuation, spelling, clear sentences, no typos)

2) 1 point for organization (clear thesis, supporting arguments linked together, conclusion summarizes)

3) 1 point for incorporation of resources, references, and ideas/sources from the course (at least 2 citations with reference information required for full credit)

4) 1 point for adequately addressing the assignment prompt; credit for creativity/originality included here

Papers that are turned in late will lose 1 point for each day that they are late. Students requesting an exemption from the late submission policy must present a written note from a school Dean, Academic Advisor, or personal physician justifying the late submission, which will then be considered by the instructor.