From Huck Finn to Columbine:

Understanding Disruptive Behaviors and Psychopathy

in Children and Adolescents

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Studies

College of Arts & Sciences

Autumn 2015

Thursdays, 2:00pm to 4:45pm

BOBS LL 150

Professor

Blake Phillips, MD

Email: phillb06@nyu.edu

Phone: 646-501-4164

Teaching Assistant

Patricia Acosta

Email: pa707@nyu.edu

Phone: 347-257-8458

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:

- **20% Participation: Weekly Quizzes**
  - In-class quizzes will be given based on the main themes from the pre-readings for that week’s session. The weekly “Learning Objectives and Terms to Know” guide your preparation for these quizzes. Most classes will begin with a quiz promptly at 2:00PM, lasting ~10 minutes.
  - 5%: You will receive full credit for 5% of your total quiz grade for handing in a completed quiz by the end of each ~10 minute quiz period. You may drop one quiz without penalty as there are no make-up quizzes and quizzes handed in after the ~10 minute quiz period will not be accepted for credit.
  - 10%: After taking the quiz individually, you will then retake the same quiz in assigned Teams in class as part of a Team-Based Learning format. You will receive a Team quiz grade based on how many correct answers your Team gets; this will make up 10% of your total quiz grade.
  - 5%: You will provide anonymous peer feedback about each of your Team members midway through the course. This will be collected by the TA via email and de-identified so the feedback from the group can then be provided to individual Team members anonymously. This is formative feedback to help you improve your group performance; you will receive full credit (2.5%) simply for providing feedback. At the end of the course, you will again rate each of your Team members anonymously and this final peer feedback only (not midterm feedback) will be averaged to contribute the remaining 2.5% of each person’s total quiz grade.

- **20% Response Papers**
  - 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. Papers will be submitted to TurnItIn services via the NYU Classes Course Site in order to insure Academic Integrity.

- **25% Midterm Examination**
  - Online, timed, open-book 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**
  - Online, timed, open-book 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 turn in a Disruptive Behavior Journal at the end of the course. You must submit at least 14 entries 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 in order to receive the extra credit (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. **Week 1: Introduction to Disruptive Behaviors in Childhood & Adolescence**
   a. Quiz

   **Pre-Reading:**

   **Optional:**

2. **Week 2: Historical Perspectives on Childhood Disruptive Behaviors**
   a. Quiz

   **Pre-Reading:**
   2. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) descriptions of Disruptive Behavior Disorders from DSMI through DSM5.
5. Watch *The Bad Seed*. 1956. Dir. by Mervyn LeRoy. Available on Amazon, Netflix, iTunes. Note in this historical period how the protagonist's disruptive behavior is portrayed: what is normal vs. pathological? What are the implied origins of bad behavior? What perpetuates bad behavior? Who is responsible for children’s bad behavior? What treatments are suggested?

Optional:


3. **Week 3: Presentation and Course of Juvenile Disruptive Behaviors**

a. Response Paper #1 Due: Please submit your paper to TurnItIn via the NYU Classes Course Site (under Assignments) by 2:00PM.

b. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**


Optional:

1. **Recommended:** 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. [http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/436/the-psychopath-test](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/436/the-psychopath-test)
4. From *The Mask of Sanity* (Hervey Cleckley), the cases of "Roberta" (pp. 46-54), "Milt" (pp. 159-167) and "Gregory" (pp. 167-174).

4. **Week 3: The Biological Basis of Childhood Disruptive Behaviors**

a. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**

Optional:

3. Anderson, Steven; Bechara, Antoine; Damasio, Hanna; Tranel, Daniel; and Damasio, Antonio. "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).
4. Suomi, S. “Risk, Resilience, and Gene-Environment Interplay in Primates”: This is an overview of important research on epigenetics.
5. In the Connor textbook, Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents, read chapter 6 (Psychobiology), only these pages: 163-168 (neuroanatomy, IQ), 171-182 (frontal lobes, electrodermal activity, heart rate) and pages 191-196 (pain sensitivity, brain imaging, minor physical anomalies).
6. Also in Connor, read chapter 7 (Neurobiology), only these pages 197-206 (cortisol, androgens) and 225-244 (biobehavioral systems model, traumatic stress, brain injury, epilepsy).
7. 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. Week 4: The Social Ecology of Childhood Disruptive Behavior
   a. Response Paper #2 Due: Please submit your paper to TurnItIn via the NYU Classes Course Site (under Assignments) by 2:00PM.
   b. Quiz

Pre-Reading:

2. Keisner, J. et al. Chapter 10. A reinforcement model of conduct problems in children and adolescents: advances in theory and intervention. In Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds.). Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence (Read only pp 264-271 and 273-277; the rest of the chapter is optional though recommended.)

3. 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.


Optional:


6. Week 5: The Psychology of Juvenile Disruptive Behaviors
   a. Quiz
   b. In-Class Midterm Examination Review and Feedback

   Pre-Reading:


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

   Optional:


   5. “Sigmund Freud and the classical psychoanalytic tradition,” from Freud and Beyond by Stephen Mitchell and Margaret Black.


7. **Week 6: Midterm Examination (via NYU Classes)**
   a. No readings or quiz

8. **Week 7: Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Disruptive Behavior**
   a. Response Paper #3 Due: Please submit your paper to TurnItIn via the NYU Classes Course Site (under Assignments) by 2:00PM.
   b. Quiz

   **Pre-Reading:**

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

9. **Week 8: The Role of Contemporary Media in Juvenile Disruptive Behavior**
   a. Quiz

   **Pre-Reading:**

   **Optional:**


**10. Week 9: Gender and Youthful Disruptive Behavior**

a. Response Paper #4 Due: Please submit your paper to TurnItIn via the NYU Classes Course Site (under Assignments) by 2:00PM.

b. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**


**Optional:**

1. **Recommended:** Watch the films *Heathers* (1988) and/or *Mean Girls* (2004), noting examples of stereotypic girl aggression.


**11. Week 10: Disruptive Behavior in the School Setting**

a. Quiz

**Pre-Reading:**


2. 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. 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.
4. Check out these sites on bullying prevention and education:
   b. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9d1_ZK1LR98](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9d1_ZK1LR98) (further details the story of Alex Libby from the film *Bully*).
5. Fredland, N. *Nurturing hostile environments: the problem of school violence*. Family & Community Health, 3(1S), S32-S41.

12. **Week 11: Disruptive Behavior and the Law**
   a. Response Paper #5 Due: Please submit your paper to TurnItIn via the NYU Classes Course Site (under Assignments) by 2:00PM.
   b. Quiz

   Pre-Reading:


Optional:


13. **Week 12: Thanksgiving! (No Class)**
14. **Week 13: Dramatic Acts of Violence in Youth**

a. In-Class Final Examination Review

b. Disruptive Behavior Journals **Due.** Please submit your journal to TurnItIn via the NYU Classes Course Site (under Assignments) by 2:00PM.

**Pre-Reading:**


5. Choose one of the following films to watch depicting a Dramatic Act of Violence perpetrated by youths: *Elephant* (Gus Van Sant, 2003, a fictionalized depiction of a school shooting similar to the events at Columbine), *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Lynne Ramsay, 2011, based on the novel by Lionel Shriver), or *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, 1994, a dramatized version of an actual parricidal event). Focus on the biopsychosocial factors depicted as contributing to each act of violence with consideration of who would have been best positioned to intervene.

**Optional:**

1. *A Clockwork Orange.* Available on Netflix, Amazon, iTunes. Watch Stanley Kubrick’s 1971 film, focusing on how the intervention to correct Alex’s disruptive behavior is designed and implemented. What principles are involved and where does it succeed and fail?


   a. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/greg-ousley-is-sorry-for-killing-his-parents-is-that-enough.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/greg-ousley-is-sorry-for-killing-his-parents-is-that-enough.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss)


7. 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.
15. **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) or otherwise should be included parenthetically with author and page number within your paper, e.g., (Connor, 254). Course lectures may be cited but do *not* count toward your minimum of 2 references.
   b. Citations from course and non-course materials should *also* be listed with full citation information in a reference/bibliography list at the end of your paper. Use APA or MLA style for these citations. *If the reference information is not listed, you will not get credit for the citation.*
4. The paper should be 2-3 pages with 1” margins and double-spacing. If you list your references/bibliography on a separate page, it does not count as part of the 2-3 pages.
5. 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.
6. Some of the assignments offer less traditional options (rather than a written paper) for addressing the prompt. Nonetheless, be sure to clearly reference course themes and resources in your work and *include at least 2 citations* in order to receive full credit. If you have created a media or creative project and are unsure whether references to course themes and citations are evident, please also submit a brief (1-3 paragraphs) description of your project on NYU Classes with citations and explanation of how it relates directly to course materials. As NYU Classes will only allow one upload, you can send your creative project by the assignment deadline over email if you are uploading a description.

**Grading Rubric for Response Papers:**

1. 2 points for clear writing (e.g., grammar, punctuation, spelling, clear sentences, no typos) and/or communication of themes
2. 2 points for organization (e.g., clear thesis, supporting arguments linked together, conclusion summarizes); credit for creativity/originality included here
3. 2 points for incorporation of resources, references, and ideas/sources from the course (at least 2 citations with reference information required for full credit)
4. 2 points for adequately and clearly addressing the assignment prompt in 2-3 pages or in a creative format
5. Papers that are turned in late will lose 2 points 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.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

All students at NYU follow an honor code and rules of conduct and policies of academic integrity (http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity). Students violate academic integrity when they: (1) cheat on exams; (2) submit work that is not their original work; (3) submit the same work from two different courses without permission from their professors; (4) receive help on a take-home exam without the knowledge of their professor; or (5) plagiarize. Plagiarism occurs when students do not properly give credit when reporting information or ideas from papers, documents, presentations, musical scores, the internet or other materials, and thus attribute others’ work and ideas as their own. Examples of plagiarism include: (1) copying verbatim from a book, article, presentation, or other documents, without providing a proper attribution, citation or quotation; (2) paraphrasing an article, chapter, presentation or other materials without giving attribution or citation, or providing quotation marks; (3) copying from a classmate or allowing a classmate to copy from you, or submitting another student’s work with your name on it; (4) collaborating between two or more students without the professor’s permission, and then submitting the paper individually; (5) purchasing an assignment or paper, and submitting it as original work.

Students are expected to submit original work and ideas for all assignments, and to follow the rules of conduct and policies of the honor code and academic integrity. Students can avoid plagiarism by: (1) providing citations and attributions for information and ideas drawn from outside sources and (2) submitting original work. Details on how to cite articles and others’ work are provided on the Course Site (see tips on the American Psychological Association’s referencing guidelines under “Assignments”). If you have any questions regarding academic integrity and proper attribution of others’ work, please set up an appointment with your professor. In the event that a student violates academic integrity or plagiarizes, the professor will follow the rules and policies set forth by NYU and the College of Arts and Sciences. If any violations occur, as per the University’s policies, this may result in a lower grade or failure in the course. For more information on Academic Integrity and the Honor Code, please see: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity.