V55.0680: Violence
A MAP course on Societies and the Social Sciences

Spring, 2003
T,R: 9:30-10:45
Silver (Main) Bldg., Rm 805

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Text: Articles and notes on Blackboard; see below.

Preceptors:
Casey McCulloch (km413@nyu.edu; 212-998-7866), whose recitation sections are held on
T, 3:30-4:45 in 25W4, C-7 (sec. 002); and T 4:55-6:10 in BOBS 836 (sec. 003);
Office Hrs: Meyer Bldg., Rm. 855B; Tue, 5-6 and Thurs. 11-12.

Amanda Roy (alr260@nyu.edu; 212-998-7827), whose recitation sections are held on
W 3:30-4:45 in 48CS, 119 (sec. 004); and W 4:55-6:10 in SILV 505 (sec. 005);
Office Hrs: Meyer Bldg., Rm. 286; Thurs. 11-1, and by appointment.

This course is designed to introduce you to the social sciences, by focusing on a single topic (violence) that has been studied by all of them. It is just as important (perhaps more important) to learn about the assumptions, theories and methods of these sciences as to learn about their specific findings. As in all sciences, findings change as new methods become available or new populations are studied. For you to understand the findings of the future (which will be useful for making decisions in your personal and professional life), you must understand these sciences' assumptions, theories, and current methods. In addition, most of this stuff is just plain interesting.

Because I'm a social psychologist, the course emphasizes psychological research on interpersonal violence. Research from most fields of psychology -- clinical, cognitive, community, developmental, evolutionary, neuro- and physiological, personality and social -- is included. Readings from anthropology, criminology, economics, primatology, and sociology are also included. About the only social sciences I've omitted are linguistics and political science, even though they've done relevant work too.

The best way to learn about any science is to do it. But this is not a lab course. So we'll do the next best thing: read articles from the professional research literature. This requires that you learn some statistical concepts (without learning how to calculate them) and vocabulary. Extensive notes are provided on the readings, to introduce new concepts and clarify major points. I hope you'll learn to think like a social scientist, so you can formulate questions that can be answered empirically, design studies to do so, and critique existing studies. You'll demonstrate this knowledge in your term paper, where you'll formulate a question and propose a research design to answer it. Discussions in lecture and recitation are designed to help you do this, as well as clarify the readings and their implications.

In addition, you'll have the opportunity to be a participant in studies in the psychology department, to get some first-hand exposure to psychology labs. You'll have a chance to choose among the dozens of studies done each semester, and participate in three hours of studies. Alternatively, you may write a 10-page paper on research methodology.

Course grades will be based on a midterm (50 questions = 25% of the course) and a final exam (70
questions = 35% of the course), each consisting of multiple choice and very short answer questions, and four papers that total 12 pages over the semester. Three of these are short papers, due every few weeks; together, they count 20% of your course grade. The last is a six-page research design or proposal (20% of course) due at the last lecture of the semester (May 1), after a preliminary draft has been written and approved. See the end of this syllabus for more details. Late papers are penalized by one grading unit (e.g., the grade would drop from A- to B+) for each day they are late.

Most materials for this class are also available on “Blackboard” through your NYU Home web site. (That’s at <http://home.nyu.edu>). If you haven’t activated your home page, go to <http://start.nyu.edu>.) If you are officially registered for this course, it should show up on your NYU Home page under “Academics,” then “Classes.” Going to the links for this course will give you access on-line to:

1. The class syllabus (i.e., this document), as an MS Word 2000 document, under “Syllabus.”
2. The readings under “Assignments,” presented as pdf files that you can read and/or print with Adobe Acrobat Reader. You can download a free copy of Acrobat Reader at http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html. All of the required readings and some of the optional (* asterisked) readings will be there. There is also a hard copy of the required readings on reserve at Bobst Library.
3. The notes for each lecture, under “Assignments,” presented as MS Word documents. You’ll also need MS Excel 2000 to view the graphics. Both of these are parts of MicroSoft Office 2000.
4. Announcements about the course, as needed.
5. Various “Documents” related to the course.
6. Your grades on papers and exams.
7. Anything else we discover we want to use it for. Blackboard is a commercial product. Generally, “info” available on the web (including through Blackboard) is no more reliable than “information” in The National Enquirer. Please don’t use it for “research” for this course.

There is also a textbook by Russell Geen, a social psychologist who has devoted his career to studying aggression. I’ve assigned this brief textbook because the course itself is organized around a series of topics and research papers, so there is no unified organized overview. Geen’s book provides a partial overview and integration, and will be helpful to students who want a unified view of the field. But the course covers topics that go beyond this (or any) textbook. You can read the text on your own, or by dipping into topics that are also covered in each lecture. Relevant sections of the text are listed for many lectures, although they are “out of order” in terms of the book’s organization. (The book’s table of contents is much better than it’s inadequate index.) The explanatory notes for each lecture do not include material from this text, because the text is clear.

**Lecture and Reading Schedule**

* = optional readings for those who are interested; “[pdf]” = on Blackboard.

( ) Page counts are shown in parentheses, e.g., (11/2 = 5.5) if original pages are half pages, so that you can plan your reading time more easily.

Date \hspace{2cm} Topic and readings

Jan. 21: \hspace{2cm} Introductions and overview (lecture 1)


Violence by Groups, in Groups, and Resulting from Group Identity

Jan. 23:  Case studies of one kind of group violence (lecture 2)


Green text, pp. 58-59 on alcohol’s effects.

Jan. 28:  Deindividuation as a function of group size (lecture 3)


Jan. 30:  Deindividuation: public and private self-awareness (lecture 4)
Film clip from Birth of a Nation


Feb. 4:  Ingroups, outgroups, and racial/ethnic groups (lecture 5)


Feb. 6:  Ingroups and outgroups: minimal groups and social identity (lecture 6)
Film clip of Zimbardo’s Experimental Prison at Stanford, from the CBS program 20/20.


Feb. 11:  Terrorists and terrorism (lecture 7)

What's Gender Got To Do With It?

Feb. 13: Men and women without their social roles (lecture 8) -- Happy Valentine's Day!


Geen text, pp. 61-67 on sex differences in aggression.


Feb. 18: Rape (lecture 9)
FIlm clip from The Accused, with Jodie Foster.


Geen text, pp. 11-14 on hormones and aggression, and pp. 86-91 on sexual violence.


Spouse Abuse

Feb. 20: An evolutionary approach to spouse abuse (lecture 10)
Film clip from The Color Purple, by Alice Walker & S. Spielberg.


Geen text, pp. 10-11 on ethology and evolutionary biology, and pp. 80-86 on violence in intimate relationships.


Feb. 25: A look at how our closest ancestors behave (lecture 11)
Film -- Jane Goodall's Wild Chimpanzees.


Feb. 27: A cross-cultural analysis of wife beating and other family violence (lecture 12)


How Violent Families Make Children Violent

Mar. 4: Passing violence from generation to generation (lecture 13)


Geen text, pp. 8-10 on behavior genetics, and pp. 91-94 on violence in the family.


Mar 6: How violence is learned in the family (lecture 14)


Mar. 11: MIDTERM EXAM

Mar. 13: Some consequences of becoming an aggressive child (lecture 15)

Film clip from the documentary, Licensed to Kill.


Geen text, pp. 46-57 on cognitive processing, and pp. 67-75 on personality and aggression.

Mar. 18 and Mar. 20: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES

Mar. 25: Therapy for aggressive children, and their parents (lecture 16)


* Geen text, pp. 95-97 on bullying.


The Role of Emotions in Producing Violence

Mar 27: The role of empathy and anger in aggression (lecture 17)


Geen text, pp. 41-46 on anger.


Apr. 1: The interaction of emotion and cognition in aggression (lecture 18)

Film clip from Fargo.


Geen text, pp. 27-30 on attacks, intention, and norms.


* Geen text, pp. 14-16 on brain mechanisms.

**Unconscious Cognitive Mechanisms Producing Violent Behavior**

Apr. 3: Priming and chronic construct accessibility (lecture 19)
Film clip from the documentary, Calling the Ghosts, about atrocities in the former Yugoslavia.


Apr. 8: Spontaneous inferences (lecture 20)


Apr. 10: Effects of Mass Media on Violent Behavior (lecture 21)


Geen text, pp. 100-119 on aggression in entertainment, and pp. 75-76 on national culture.


Homicide

Apr. 15: Regional differences in U.S. cultures (lecture 22)
Film clip from Easy Rider.


Green text, pp. 32-37 on temperature and noise, and pp. 76-77 on subcultures of violence.


Apr. 17: The effects of poverty (lecture 23)


Apr. 22: The effects of poverty and racism (lecture 24)
Film clip from The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.


Legitimized Violence

Apr. 24: Cross-cultural views of the causes of war (lecture 25)
Film clip from Full Metal Jacket.


Apr. 29: Obedience and war crimes (lecture 26)


May 1: Morally judging those who commit violence (lecture 27)


May 8: possible date for FINAL EXAM, from 8 to 9:50 am, in the lecture room.

Other relevant books that may interest you


Crelinsten, R. D., & Schmid, A. P (Eds.). (1995). The politics of pain: Torturers and their masters. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. – “This book is one of the first to systematically examine the psychological, cultural, and social origins of torture. It provides profiles of torturers and of those who direct them in their brutal activities. The contributors provide case studies from the past and present, including Somoza’s National Guard in Nicaragua and regimes in the Southern Cone of Latin America and in Greece.”

Hardin, R. (1995). One for all: The logic of group conflict. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press (paperback). -- A well-known NYU political scientist’s "effort to understand the sway of groups in our time… the principal groups of interest are ethnic groups of an astonishing variety and complexity, involved in conflicts that dominate the lives of whole societies." (pp. xi-xii) The analysis is qualitative and theoretical, with many interesting historical illustrations and material.

Hall, Inc., Publishers (paperback). -- Covers violence primarily from a sociological perspective, so it includes more on institutional, state, and structural violence than the course covers. Chapters include the cultural roots of violence; interpersonal violence (murder and rape); family violence; religious violence; economic violence; state violence; and structural violence.

Karr-Morse, R., & Wiley, M. S. (1999). Ghosts from the nursery: Tracing the roots of violence. Berkeley, CA: Atlantic Monthly Press (Publishers Group West). -- "gives startling new evidence that violent behavior is fundamentally linked to abuse and neglect in the first two years of life... shows how infancy is the stage during which the foundations for trust, empathy, conscience, and lifelong learning are laid down -- or the predisposition to violent behavior is 'hardwired' into the brain."

Kressel, N. J. (2002). Mass hate: The global rise of genocide and terror (revised and updated). New York: Westview Press. -- "explores why the brutality of humankind has erupted and flowed so expansively in the 20th century and why terrorist violence now threatens the very core of Western civilization... focuses on the horrifying tactics of rape and torture in Bosnia, the large-scale butchery in Rwanda, and the systematic murder of millions during the Holocaust... probes history, psychology, and political science for explanations... includes a comprehensive discussion of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001."

Newman, L. S., & Erber, R. (Eds.) (2002). Understanding genocide: The social psychology of the holocaust. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. -- "When and why do groups target each other for extermination? How do seemingly normal people become participants in genocide? Why do some individuals come to the rescue of members of targeted groups, while others just passively observe their victimization? And how do perpetrators and bystanders later come to terms with the choices they made? Conclusions reached have relevance for attempts to understand any episode of mass killing."

Ortiz, Sister D. (2002). The blindfold's eyes: My journey from torture to truth. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. -- "In 1989, while working as a missionary in Guatemala, Sister Dianna Ortiz was abducted by security forces and brutally tortured. Now her haunting memoir offers an unforgettable portrait of the psychological and spiritual impact of torture... a story of faith, friendship, and the quest to prove that at the core of the human spirit there is a force stronger than violence and fear."


Power, S. (2002). A problem from hell: America and the age of genocide. New York: Basic Books. "From the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians to the Nazi Holocaust to Rwanda, Samantha Power delivers a suspenseful history of Americans who have stood by -- and stood up -- in the face of genocide. She reveals just what was known when, and what might have been done to stop the slaughter of millions."


Ursano, R. J., McCaughhey, B. G., & Fullerton, C. S. (Eds.). (1994). Individual and community responses to trauma and disaster: The structure of human chaos. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. -- "The aims of this book are twofold -- to improve understanding of the human experience of trauma at the individual and community levels, and to help the victims of trauma... [Contributors] present observational reports and empirical
studies which range from responses to individual acts of violence to the effects of well-known disasters affecting hundreds or thousands of people. Distinctions are drawn between responses to manmade and natural disasters, and the particular needs of rescue and disaster workers are considered."

Waal, F. B. M. de (1996). Good natured: The origins of right and wrong in humans and other animals. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press. -- The latest popularization by this highly respected primatologist. Describes observational and some experimental studies of primates, particularly our nearest relatives (chimpanzees and bonobos), focused on understanding these creatures' sense and practice of morality.

Papers in the course

Students will be divided alphabetically into three groups on the basis of last names: Groups 1, 2, and 3. (If you'd rather be in a different group, let your preceptor know which group you want to be in before Jan. 31.) All students will follow the same outlines in writing first three short papers, but those in different groups will base their papers on different readings and turn them in at different times. (For some dates, there are two readings, so I've noted which one the paper should be about.) Here is the schedule:

First paper due
- Group 1: Jan. 30
- Group 2: Feb. 6
- Group 3: Feb. 13

Last name begins with the letter
- A - G
- H - O
- P - Z

Second paper due
- Group 2: Feb. 20
- Group 3: Feb. 27
- Group 1: Mar. 25

Note that the groups are in different orders for the next papers.

Third paper due
- Group 3: Apr. 1
- Group 1: Apr. 8
- Group 2: Apr. 15

Draft of 4th paper due Apr. 3

Midterm on Mar. 11

A draft of the fourth, six-page paper is due Apr. 3 for everyone, and the final draft of this paper is due at the last lecture, May 1.

All papers must be typed, double-spaced with 1" margins, and using at least a 10-point font. Or they must be no more than 250 words per page.

First paper (1 page maximum length; 5% of course grade)

Use the research article on the reading list for the date this paper is due. In your own words, integrate answers to the following questions into an essay that summarizes the article.
1. What is the central question(s) behind this research?
2. What are the variables? How are they measured or manipulated?
3. What relationships between these variables were discussed by the authors, as possibilities? How might these relationships shed light on the central question(s)?
4. What are the empirical results?
5. How are these results interpreted?
6. What important questions remain, in the authors' view?
Second paper (2 pages maximum length; 5% of course grade)

Use the chapter on the reading list for the date this paper is due. In your own words, integrate answers to the following questions into an essay that summarizes the chapter.
1. What is the central thesis or argument developed in this chapter?
2. What kinds of evidence are cited in developing this thesis?
3. How does that evidence support the thesis? How does it contradict it? How does it complicate it?
4. What important evidence or theoretical issues do you think the authors may have omitted?

Third paper (3 pages maximum length; 10% of course grade)

Use the research article on the reading list for the day the paper is due. Review it critically. After summarizing it very briefly, describe any weaknesses you see in presenting what is known (the introduction), in the method (measures, manipulations, controls), in the results (statistical analyses, size of effects, etc.), and in the discussion (interpretation of the results, especially concerning what they tell us that we didn’t know before, and about the hypotheses). Be sure to note the strengths of the article as well as the weaknesses in your review. Be as specific as you can.

Fourth paper (6 pages maximum length; 20% of course grade)

In this six-page paper, propose a study to answer a question that’s of interest to you, and that falls within the subject matter of this course. Use the research articles that you’ve read as models, particularly the Introduction, Method, and Discussion sections. State the question or hypothesis as clearly as possible, putting it in the context of what is known so that its importance is clear. Re-state the question in terms of the variables you’ve chosen and their possible relations to each other. Describe how you would measure or manipulate these variables. (Assume that appropriate measuring instruments, research assistants, archival data bases, means to carry out manipulations, etc. are available.) Be sensitive to ethical concerns in your design. Describe what relations between variables you’d expect, and how you would interpret them if you found them. (Don’t describe the statistical analyses in any detail; that’s beyond the scope of this course. But do say whether you expect a positive or negative correlation between which variables, or expect one group to score higher than another on some variable, etc.) Describe how some unexpected results might also be informative, about either your research question or the method you used to study it.