

# CRIMINOLOGY AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Sociology 347

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T,Th 1pm-2:15pm  
Sturges 223  
Office Hours:  
M 11:30am-12:30pm  
T/Th 2:30-3:30pm

## **Required Text:**

Messner, Steven F. and Richard Rosenfeld. 2012. *Crime and the American Dream*. 5th Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

All other course materials are available on the myCourses page.

Additional resources that may assist you in this course, in researching and writing your research paper, and in your academic career, include the Sociology Department's website (<http://www.geneseo.edu/~soc/>), which includes writing and career resources, as well as links to sociology-related websites, and the college's on-line writing guide (available at: <http://writingguide.geneseo.edu>).

## **Course Description:**

There are three essential issues in the study of crime and juvenile delinquency: explaining the criminalization of behavior (why is a behavior defined as a crime?), explaining the behavior labeled criminal (why did s/he do that?), and explaining the official and unofficial responses to criminal behavior (why did the police arrest him/her?; what impact does arrest have on offenders?). Criminology has traditionally focused on explaining why people commit criminal and delinquent acts. Though we will focus considerable attention on this issue, we will also examine the other two issues. Indeed, because the occurrence of crime presupposes the existence and enforcement of the criminal law, we will begin with critical examinations of the origins and enforcement of criminal law.

This course also examines the full range of theories of crime and juvenile delinquency. Rather than doing so in the traditional survey format, however, examination of these theories is organized around several different questions: (1) how are theories related to the social, historical, and intellectual contexts in which they developed? (2) how are theories similar to and different from one another? (3) how do these theories help us to understand why US violent crime rates are higher than in other industrialized nations; and (4) how do these theories help us to understand the significant decreases in rates of violent crime and juvenile delinquency over the past fifteen years? Addressing these questions is essential to understanding crime. Doing so also allows us to examine and compare the social conditions of contemporary Western societies.

## **Assignments and Expectations:**

This class seeks to engage you actively in thinking about crime and juvenile delinquency as a means to expand your critical thinking skills and your understandings of crime, the history of ideas, and contemporary American society. These goals are best reached through your active participation (via critical reading, critical writing, and class discussion) in the course. To encourage your active participation, I have tried to choose interesting and relevant materials, and will try to present them in a provocative and challenging manner.

## Guns Mini-Paper

Recent mass shootings have raised the issue of gun control to levels of prominence not seen in decades. At the same time, recent Supreme Court decisions have more fully established and protected an individual right to firearms ownership than at any point in US history. This creates an obvious tension between public and political interests in limiting gun availability and individual rights of gun ownership.

We have identified excess mortality as a significantly higher rate of mortality than would be expected for particular groups of people during a particular time or in a particular place. The sociological significance of this concept is that there are social (as opposed to or in addition to) natural explanations for the patterning of mortality.

In this essay, briefly review:

- the concept of excess mortality;
- the relationship between gun availability and excess mortality (accident, suicide, and homicide);
- the Supreme Court's recent *Heller* and *McDonald* decisions;
- the range of policy responses that are available to address this excess mortality.

What policy responses would you recommend and why?

This essay is intended as a means of becoming more familiar with the sociological concepts associated with identifying and explaining excess mortality, and with the current gun control debate.

Strict 4 page limit, double-spaced (not including data and references). Due to the page limit, concision is essential.

## Movie Paper:

Over the course of the semester, we will view four films from four decades that address crime and criminological theory: *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *West Side Story* (1961), *Boyz 'N the Hood* (1991) and *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). While *Boyz 'N the Hood* surveys criminological theory, the other three films are each quite clearly associated with a particular theoretical perspective. We will watch excerpts of and discuss each movie in class. However, full participation in class discussion of the movies and completion of your movie paper will require that you view the movies outside of class. They are available in Milne Library, on-line, and on Netflix.

As popular culture, these films depict the dominant or at least available ideas about crime, criminals, and criminal justice of their respective eras. As examples of "popular theorizing," these films provide an excellent opportunity to consider how and why ideas about crime have changed over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Your assignment is to write an analysis of these four films in which you:

- identify and explain the particular theoretical perspective(s) illustrated by each film;
- consider the social history of each film and why it took the perspective(s) that it did;
- provide multiple examples from the film to support your analysis;
- develop an analysis of how these films parallel the development of 20<sup>th</sup> century criminological theory.

Be sure not to focus your analysis only on scenes that were the focus of class discussion and analysis.

In addition to relying on course materials and class discussions, your papers may draw on independent research on the films, their writers, and producers.

Strict 12 page limit. Due by May 2.

## **Exams and Grading:**

There will be two non-cumulative essay exams. Each exam will count for 30% of your final grade. The remaining 40% of your grade will be made up by your guns paper (10%) and movie paper (30%). Grading will be based on the

following scale: A: 93+; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D: 60-69; E<60. I expect that your papers will be original works, meaning that they were written by you for this class. Any non-original work will result in an E for the assignment and may result in an E for the class.

## CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1/22-1/29      **Understanding Crime Socially: The Social and Legal Constructions of Crime and Murder**  
Klinenberg, “Denaturalizing Disaster: A Social Autopsy of the 1995 Chicago Heat Wave”  
McCord and Freeman, “Excess Mortality in Harlem”  
Durkheim, “The Normal and the Pathological”  
Chambliss, “A Sociological Analysis of the Law of Vagrancy”

### CRIMINOLOGY: MAJOR THEORETICAL TRADITIONS

1/31-2/7      **Theorizing Violent Crime: Independent Variables and Levels of Analysis**  
Discussion of *Boyz N the Hood*  
View excerpts of *Boyz N the Hood*  
  
**Hiding in Plain Sight: Masculinity and Guns**  
Blumstein, “Youth, Guns, and Violent Crime”  
Kalish and Kimmel, “Suicide by Mass Murder”  
Miller, Azrael, and Hemenway, “Rates of Household Firearm and Homicide Across US Regions and States, 1988-1997.”  
Hemenway and Miller, “Firearm Availability and Homicide Rates Across 26 High Income Countries”  
Slate, "[How Many People Have Been Killed By Guns Since Newtown?](#)"

2/12-2/19      **Classical School: Theory and Evidence**  
Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned"  
Beccaria, "Of Crimes and Punishments" Chapters 2, 3, 6, 12, 44, 45  
available at: [http://www.constitution.org/cb/crim\\_pun.htm](http://www.constitution.org/cb/crim_pun.htm)  
Bentham, “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation”  
Lynch, “Beating a Dead Horse – Is There Any Evidence for the Deterrent Effect of Imprisonment?”  
Blackmore and Welsh, “Selective Incapacitation: Sentencing According to Risk”  
Bailey and Peterson, “Murder, Capital Punishment, and Deterrence”

2/21-2/28      **Biological Positivism: Theory and Evidence**  
Lombroso-Ferrero, "The Born Criminal"  
Goddard, “The Case of Jean Gianini”  
Holmes, “*Buck v. Bell*”  
Rafter, “Born Criminals, Eugenics, and Biological Theories of Crime”  
Eugenics video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aH0Ws8RtSc>  
Everson, “Thousands Sterilized, A State Weighs Restitution”  
For additional information on North Carolina’s sterilization program, see [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/12/10/us/20111210\\_eugenics\\_docs.html?ref=us](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/12/10/us/20111210_eugenics_docs.html?ref=us)  
Fishbein, “Biological Perspectives in Criminology”  
Hirschi and Hindelang, "Intelligence and Delinquency: A Revisionist Review"  
Duncan et al., “Economic Deprivation and Early Childhood Development”  
Steele, “A Threat in the Air”  
Bilger, “The Height Gap”

Drum, "[America's Real Criminal Element: Lead](#)"

Hagan, "[The Marshmallow Study Revisited](#)"

**Guns papers due February 21**

3/5-3/12

**Chicago School: Theory and Evidence**

View *Angels With Dirty Faces* for 2/28

Shaw and McKay, "Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas"

Mills, "The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists"

Stark, "Deviant Places: A Theory of the Ecology of Crime"

Sampson, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy"

Carey, "[Diagnosis: Battered But Vibrant](#)"

View *West Side Story* for 3/5

3/14

**MIDTERM EXAM**

3/26-3/28

**Introduction to Conflict Theories**

Discussion of *Bowling for Columbine*

Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy"

Mendelberg, "Executing Hortons: Racial Crime in the 1988 Presidential Campaign"

GI Bill: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mB7Z2D-Wx8>

4/2-4/4

**Labeling Theory: Theory and Evidence**

Becker, "Outsiders: Defining Deviance"

Lemert, "Primary and Secondary Deviance"

Chambliss, "The Saints and the Roughnecks"

Liazos, "The Poverty of the Sociology of Deviance: Nuts, Sluts, and Preverts"

4/9-4/11

**Marxian Conflict Theory: Theory and Evidence**

Spitzer, "Toward a Marxian Theory of Deviance"

Tony, "Racial Politics, Racial Disparities, and the War on Crime"

Blau and Blau "The Cost of Inequality: Metropolitan Structure and Violent Crime"

4/16

GREAT Day

4/18

**Feminist Criminology: Theory and Evidence**

Adler, "Sisters in Crime: Changing Patterns"

Simpson, "Feminist Theory, Crime, and Justice"

Steffensmeier, "Gender and Crime: Toward a Gendered Theory of Female Offending"

**Routine Activities Theory**

Cohen and Felson, "A Routine Activities Approach"

4/23-5/7

**Strain Theory: Theory and Evidence**

Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie"

Messner and Rosenfeld, *Crime and the American Dream*

George Carlin, "[The American Dream](#)"

Black, "Crime as Social Control"

Messner and Golden, "Racial Inequality and Racially Disaggregated Homicide Rates"

Messner & Rosenfeld, "Political Restraint of the Market and Levels of Criminal Homicide"

5/9

**FINAL EXAM 12-3pm**

Grading Criteria:

**The grade "A" represents an outstanding paper that:**

- develops and presents creative, perceptive, thoughtful and well-organized ideas;
- develops and presents well-chosen and sociologically appropriate concepts, explanations, and supporting evidence for the ideas and theme(s) of the paper;
- creates an essay that contains no mechanical errors, is written in clear, smooth language and is free of colloquial phrases, slang and incomplete sentences.

**The grade "B" represents a very good paper that:**

- develops and presents a perceptive, thoughtful, and well organized set of ideas;
- has clear, smooth writing which is mostly free of colloquial slang, incomplete sentences and mechanical/punctuation errors;
- is developed with better-than-average choice and development of sociologically relevant/applicable concepts, themes and supporting ideas.

**The grade "C" represents an adequate paper that:**

- responds to a topic in a routine way; does the minimum requirements;
- shows some evidence of thought and planning;
- is developed with adequate supporting material, sociologically relevant concepts and organization of thought;
- has average writing with few colloquial phrases or slang;
- contains few distracting errors in usage, logic or mechanics (complete sentences, etc.).

**The grade "D" represents a less than adequate paper that:**

- responds to a topic in a routine, superficial way;
- shows some evidence of thought and planning;
- is developed with less than adequate supporting material, choice of concepts and application/organization of thought;
- has writing which is not vigorous and contains colloquial phrases or slang and, incomplete, poorly punctuated sentences;
- contains several distracting errors in usage or mechanics.

**The grade of "E" represents an inferior and weak paper that:**

- responds to a topic in a routine, superficial way;
- can only be followed and understood with some difficulty;
- may contain platitudes or mistakes in word choice, application of concepts and organization of thought;
- contains major distracting errors
- does not state a topic or main idea or show evidence of thought, organization or planning;
- has enough errors in mechanics and choice/application of concepts to seriously distract the reader;
- contains vague, ambiguous diction and phrasing;
- contains incomplete sentences that make it difficult to understand the content.