

Spring 2005  
Criminal Justice P493: The nature of violence  
Class time: TR 11:15 - 12:30  
Office hours: TR 9:00 - 11:00 and by appointment

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## 1. Focus of the course

The purpose of this course is to *survey the theoretical and empirical literature on interpersonal violence*, focusing mostly on the association between social structure and homicide. We begin with a discussion of (1) a scientific approach to the study of violence, (2) causal inference, and (3) different methodologies employed to study violence. We then examine *measurement* issues (e.g., where can we find information about violence? how do we measure violence?). Following this, we will discuss the major temporal, spatial, and demographic *patterns of violence* in the United States (e.g., how have rates changed over time? where are rates of violence higher/lower? which demographic groups experience higher/lower rates of violence?). The rest of the semester will be spent discussing and *evaluating several explanations of violence* (e.g., are economic conditions related to violence? are there subcultures of violence? is weather related to violence? the media? alcohol? guns? criminal sanctions? is violence “contagious?”). We end the semester with a series of conference-like presentations by students based on their term papers.

## 2. Grading

**Please** do not make your final grade the main objective of this course. I personally believe the grading process is arguably the most unpleasant aspect of teaching. You are expected to **learn** the material, however, and grading is a necessary and imperfect attempt to measure your level of knowledge on the subject. Having said this, **do not** expect an easy A (or for that matter an easy B or C or D). I do not give grades, you earn them.

Your grade for the course will be based on three exams (the first is worth 20%, the second and third are worth 30% each of your overall grade), and a series of brief article summaries that you will turn in each week (20% total). There will be no opportunities for make-up exams or quizzes; if you care about your grade, exercise responsibility by attending class and being prepared. The format of the exams and the article summaries will be discussed in class.

## 3. Reading materials

There is no text for this course. A required reading packet is available for purchase.

## 4. Course design, attendance, and class participation

This is a senior-level seminar. The first 2-3 weeks will consist of lectures. Following this, there will be a mixture of brief lectures and discussions of the readings. The success of this course thus depends on your preparation, attendance, and participation. The schedule below lists the topics we will cover each week. See the reading list at the end of the syllabus for the readings for each section. It is **highly** unlikely that you will pass this course if you do not attend regularly.

## 5. Class schedule and topics

I cannot provide a strict schedule stipulating exactly which topics will be covered on which days. Learning is not about bureaucratic regimes but about going where the materials and ideas lead us...and being critical at each stage. Below, however, is a general guideline of what we will cover. Since this class is heavily discussion-based, you are expected to have the readings completed before each class.

Week 1	The scientific approach, causal inference and types of research on violence
Week 2	Measurement instruments and issues
Week 3	Patterns of violence (temporal, spatial, demographic)
Week 4	<b>Exam 1</b>
Week 5	Economic issues (poverty, inequality, and unemployment)
Week 6	Social cohesion
Week 7	Subcultures
Week 8	Weather, media
Week 9	<b>Exam 2</b>
Week 10	Spring Break
Week 11	Alcohol
Week 12	Guns
Week 13	Sanctions/Public policy
Week 14	Other: Biology/biosociology, abortion, the cycle of violence
Week 15	“Other” continued

### NOTES

1. Science is an inherently communal task and you should feel free to consult with me, other professors, and your fellow students in order to improve upon your work. However, your written work must be completed independently. Quoted material must be identified and you should cite your sources in the style outlined in the most current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Failure to do so is plagiarism and will be treated as a violation of University policy on academic integrity. Scientific integrity is inviolable, and learning to cite correctly and appropriately is an important professional skill to develop.

2. Any student who has a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your other abilities should contact me as soon as possible so that we can discuss any accommodations necessary to ensure your full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities.

4. Religious holidays: It is the policy of the University to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays. It is your responsibility, however, to provide me *advance* notice so that we may work out a reasonable solution.

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providing, either for a fee or for free, notes of this course to any person or commercial firm, without the written permission of the professor teaching this course.

## Reading list

### Interesting websites

Homicide trends in the United States: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm>

FBI's Uniform Crime Reports: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm>

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC): <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/ncipchm.htm>

CDC/NCIPC's site for injury statistics: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/default.htm>

The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics: <http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook>

Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>

U.S. Bureau of the Census: <http://www.census.gov>

Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), National Archive of Criminal Justice Data(NACJD): <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/>

National Criminal Justice Reference Service: <http://www.ncjrs.org>

### Measurement

Rokaw, W. M., Mercy, J. A., & Smith, J. C. (1990). Comparing death certificate data with FBI crime reporting statistics on U. S. homicides. *Public Health Reports*, 105, 447-455.

McDowall, D., & Loftin, C. (2004). What is divergence and what do we know about it? Unpublished draft.

Maxfield, M.G. (1999). The national incident-based reporting system: Research and policy implications. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 15, 119-149.

Annest, J. L., Mercy, J. A., Gibson, D. R., & Ryan, G. W. (1995). Beyond the tip of the iceberg: National estimates of nonfatal firearm-related injuries. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273, 1749-1754.

### Patterns

Brown, S. E., Esbensen, F.-A., & Geis, G. (2001). Chapter 4: Distribution of crime, in *Criminology: Explaining crime and its context*.

Zahn, M. A., & McCall, P. L. (1999). Trends and patterns of homicide in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century United States. In M. D. Smith & M. A. Zahn (eds.), *Homicide: A sourcebook of social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

O'Brien, R. M. (2003). UCR violent crime rates, 1958-2000: Recorded and offender-generated trends. *Social*

*Science Research*, 32, 499-518.

## **Economic issues**

### *Poverty*

Centerwall, B. S. (1995). Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Domestic homicide. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273, 1755-1758.

McDowall, D. (1986). Poverty and homicide in Detroit, 1926-1978. *Violence and Victims*, 1, 23-34.

### *Inequality*

Blau, J. R., & Blau, P. M. (1982). The cost of inequality: Metropolitan structure and violent crime. *American Sociological Review*, 47, 114-129.

Thacher, D. (2004). The rich get richer and the poor get robbed: Inequality in U.S. criminal victimization, 1974-2000. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 20, 89-116.

### *Employment*

Crutchfield, R. D. (1989). Labor stratification and violent crime. *Social Forces*, 68, 489-512.

Shihadeh, E. S., & Ousey, G. C. (1998). Industrial restructuring and violence: The link between entry-level jobs, economic deprivation, and black and white homicide. *Social Forces*, 77, 185-206.

## **Social cohesion**

Sampson, R. J., & Groves, W. B. (1989). Community structure and crime: Testing social-disorganization theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, 774-802.

Rosenfeld, R., Messner, S. F., & Baumer, E. P. (2001). Social capital and homicide. *Social Forces*, 80, 283-309.

Shihadeh, E. S., & Flynn, N. (1996). Segregation and crime: The effect of black social isolation on the rates of black urban violence. *Social Forces*, 74, 1325-1352.

Osgood, D. W., & Chambers, J. M. (2000). Social disorganization outside the metropolis: An analysis of rural violence. *Criminology*, 38, 81-115.

## **Subcultures**

Anderson, E. (1994, May). The code of the streets. *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Gastil, R. (1971). Homicide and a regional subculture of violence. *American Sociological Review*, 36, 412-427.

Nisbett, R. E. (1993). Violence and U.S. regional culture. *American Psychologist*, 48, 441-449.

## **Weather**

Landau S.F., & Friedman D. (1993). The seasonality of violent crime: The case of robbery and homicide in Israel. *Journal of Research in Crime Delinquency*, 30, 163-192.

Cheatwood, D. (1995). The effects of weather on homicide. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 11, 51-70.

## **Media**

Johnson, J. G., Cohen, P., Smailes, E. M., Kasen, S., & Brook, J. S. (2002). Television viewing and aggressive behavior during adolescence and adulthood. *Science*, 295, 2468-2471.

Huesmann, L. R., Moise, J., Podolski, C. P., & Eron, L. D. (2003). Longitudinal relations between childhood exposure to media violence and adult aggression and violence: 1977-1992. *Developmental Psychology*, 39, 201-221.

Jensen, G. F. (2001). The invention of television as a cause of homicide: Reification of a spurious relationship. *Homicide Studies*, 5, 114-130.

Stack, S., & Gundlach, J. (1992). The effect of country music on suicide. *Social Forces*, 71, 211-218.

## **Alcohol**

Wells, S., & Graham, K. (2003). Aggression involving alcohol: Relationship to drinking patterns and social context. *Addiction*, 98, 33-42.

Greenfield, T. K., & Weisner, C. (1995). Drinking problems and self-reported criminal behavior, arrests and convictions: 1990 US alcohol and 1989 county surveys. *Addiction*, 90, 361-373.

Norström, T. (1998). Effects on criminal violence of different beverage types and private and public drinking. *Addiction*, 93, 689-699.

Carcach, C., & Conroy, R. (2001). Alcohol and homicide: A routine activities analysis. In P. Williams (ed.), *Alcohol, young persons, and violence* (pp. 183-201). Canberra, Australia: Australian Institute of Criminology.

## **Guns**

Hepburn, L. M., & Hemenway, D. (2003). Firearm availability and homicide: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9, 417-440.

Loftin, C., McDowall, D., Wiersema, B., & Cottey, T. J. (1991). Effects of restrictive licensing of handguns on homicide and suicide in the District of Columbia. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 325, 1615-1620.

Koper, C. S., & Roth, J. A. (2002). The impact of the 1994 federal assault weapons ban on gun markets: An assessment of short-term primary and secondary market effects. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 18, 239-266.

## **Sanctions/Public Policy**

McDowall, D., Loftin, C., & Wiersema, B. (2000). The impact of youth curfew laws on juvenile crime rates. *Crime and Delinquency*, 46, 76-91.

White, M. D., Fyfe, J. J., Campbell, S. P., & Goldcamp, J. S. (2003). The police role in preventing homicide:

Considering the impact of problem-oriented policing on the prevalence of murder. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40, 194-225.

Bailey, W. C. (1990). Murder, capital punishment, and television: Execution publicity and homicide rates. *American Sociological Review*, 55, 628-633.

### **Other**

*Biology/Biosociology*: (1) Caspi, A., McClay, J., Moffitt, T. E., Mill, J., Martin, J., Craig, I. W., Taylor, A., & Poulton, R. (2002). Role of genotype in the cycle of violence in maltreated children. *Science*, 297, 851-854.

(2) Stretesky, P. B., & Lynch, M.J. (2004). The relationship between lead and crime. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 45, 214-229.

*Social policy*: (1) Donohue III, J. J., & Levitt, S. D. (2001). The impact of legalized abortion on crime. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116, 379-420.

*Cycle of violence*: (1) Widom, C. S. (1989). The cycle of violence. *Science*, 244, 160-166.

(2) Dodge, K. A., Bates, J. E., & Pettit, G. S. (1990). Mechanisms in the cycle of violence. *Science*, 250, 1678-1683.