

SOCIOLOGY 386H1S
SOCIOLOGY OF MURDER
Winter 2015
M12-2 in WI524
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Introduction

In his first TV interview, serial killer Richard “Night Stalker” Ramirez was asked if he was evil. He replied, “We are all evil, in some way or another. Are we not?” Ramirez became a pop cultural celebrity after this interview aired. News reporters competed to get face time with a man convicted of raping and killing 14 women in Los Angeles. Crime writers and biographers rushed to get his life history on page. And thousands of women sent him fan mail, offering to have his children.

On first glance, Ramirez’s story seems like something out of a strange horror movie. How does a convicted rapist and serial killer become a star? But, in many ways, Ramirez's story is all too familiar. Like Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Karla Homolka, Ramirez and other serial killers become overnight celebrities in a culture simultaneously horrified and fascinated by extreme violence and sexuality.

Although there is much written about Ramirez and other murderers, there are still core questions that confound social scientists and law enforcement. This course zooms in on three interrelated questions:

- 1) How do people become serial killers?
- 2) Why do they kill?
- 3) How do serial killings shape collective notions of good and evil?

In addition to reading about serial killers, you will also read about mass murderers. Although these individuals also achieve similar kinds of celebrity, the nature of their violence is much different than that of serial killers. We will discuss this and other key comparisons in the course. Ultimately, it’s my hope that we can use this knowledge to understand how we might prevent such tragedies from happening again.

*****ONE NOTE*****

Please think carefully about taking this course. Since this class is about murder, most of the course materials contain graphic and disturbing content. If you are especially sensitive to this, you may want to consider other course options.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Bonn, Scott. 2014. *Why We Love Serial Killers: The Curious Appeal of the World's Most Savage Killers*. New York: Skyhorse.

Capote, Truman. 1994. *In Cold Blood*. New York: Vintage.

Zimbardo, Philip. 2008. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. New York: Random House.

NOTE: The prerequisite for SOC 386H1S is successful completion of a SOC 200+ level course. Students without this prerequisite will be removed at any time they are discovered.

Course Expectations

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory.

You are responsible for all material presented in class. Students who are unable to attend class are responsible for obtaining information about any announcements that may have been made in class as well as notes on the material covered from their classmates.

Proper documentation from a University of Toronto Student Medical Certificate or college registrar is required to justify an absence.

Course Webpage

We will have a course website hosted on Blackboard. This website will contain the course syllabus, links to all the readings that are in journal article form, handouts, and course announcements. You are responsible for all the course materials and for all announcements. Please make sure to check your official utoronto.ca email addresses regularly.

Live Tweets

I encourage you to post ideas from lectures and readings to the course Twitter. These can be observations, questions, random ideas, or links to additional readings and media that relate to course material. Please post using the hashtag: **#SOC386Murder**. Not only will it encourage critical dialogue with your colleagues, it will also provide me with a sense of what you find interesting, puzzling, and provocative. Each week, I will choose the “top 3” tweets and announce these in lecture. There might be prizes for the most creative and interesting tweets.

Assignments

You will have 4 major grades for this course, which add up to 100% of your final grade (the research paper will be discussed in class):

- 1) An in-class midterm (25%);
- 2) A short research paper (30%);
- 3) An in-class final (25%)
- 4) 2 in-class pop quizzes (20%)

The pop quizzes will be short, in-class assignments. During the quiz, I will play you a video clip or music. You will then write a short response piece on how the multimedia might connect with one of the themes that we have covered in class. Make-ups for these impromptu assignments will **NOT** be accepted. I will only make exceptions for students who provide me with email and medical documentation *before* class meetings.

Plagiarism: Avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the “Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters”). If you are using somebody else’s ideas, do not present them as your own, whether you are quoting exact words, paraphrasing or summarizing. Give proper references if you are using somebody else’s ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference--you are not going to be penalized for that.

Go to **Turnitin.com** to submit your research paper online. Please note: "Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to **Turnitin.com** for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the **Turnitin.com** reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the **Turnitin.com** service are described on the **Turnitin.com** web site."

For more on these matters, see:

<http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity/turnitin/conditions-use.htm>

Deadlines: Late work without appropriate medical documentation will **NOT** be accepted. I will only make exceptions for students who provide me and the TA with email and medical documentation of an emergency **24 hours before** the test dates and deadlines. **Also, the essay must be turned in by YOU; I will not accept papers from friends in or out of the class. Similarly, these papers will not be due at the beginning or end of class. Instead, I will announce sometime in the course of my lecture when I will collect these essays. I will not accept papers from students who arrive early just to drop off their papers and leave. Similarly, if you are not present when I collect these essays, your paper will be counted as LATE. There are no exceptions to this rule.**

DOCUMENTATION FROM YOUR PHYSICIAN OR COLLEGE REGISTRAR

If you miss a test or a paper deadline, **do not** contact the instructor or a TA unless you have followed the steps described here. Telling the professor or TA why you missed a deadline or a test will not be considered.

- In case of **illness**, you must supply a duly completed **Verification of Student Illness or Injury** form (available at www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca). A doctor’s note is not acceptable. **The form must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** at class or to your TA during their office hours.
- If a **personal or family crisis** prevents you from meeting a deadline, you must get a letter from your college registrar (it is a good idea anyway to advise your college registrar if a crisis is interfering with your studies). **The letter must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the**

instructor, and submitted with your work at class or to your TA during their office hours.

Late assignments will be penalized 5% for every day after the original date.

Accessibility Services: If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Who is Evil?

Zimbardo, Philip. *The Lucifer Effect*

Week 3: Institutionalizing Evil

Zimbardo, Philip. *The Lucifer Effect*

Arendt, Hannah. 1963. "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil." *New Yorker*. Part 1

Week 4: Evil Thrills

Zimbardo, Philip. *The Lucifer Effect*

Baumeister, Roy and W. Keith Campbell. 1999. "The Intrinsic Appeal of Evil: Sadism, Sensational Thrills, and Threatened Egotism." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.

Week 5: Midterm

Week 6: The Social Construction of serial killers

Bartels, Ross and Ceri Parsons. 2009. "The Social Construction of a Serial Killer." *Feminism & Psychology*.

Skrapec, Candice. 2001. "Phenomenology and Serial Murder." *Homicide Studies*.

Week 7: Why are we intrigued by serial killers?

Bonn, Scott. *Why We Love Serial Killers*
Part 1

Week 8: Why are we intrigued by serial killers?

Bonn, Scott. *Why We Love Serial Killers*
Parts 2 & 3

Week 9: What is mass murder?

Fox, James Alan and Jack Levin. 1998. "Multiple Homicide: Patterns of Serial and Mass Murder." *Crime and Justice*.

Atchison, Andrew and Kathleen Heide. 2010. "Charles Manson and the Family: The Application of Sociological Theories to Multiple Murder." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*.

Week 10: In Cold Blood

In Cold Blood

Parts 1 & 2

Week 11: In Cold Blood

In Cold Blood

Parts 3 & 4

Week 12: in-class final