

# SOCI 307 Moral Panics (Wednesdays 4:30-7:20pm)

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## Moral panic



### Course Description

It really happened: In 1907, the City of Chicago passed the first municipal censorship ordinance in America, empowering police to censor and ban movies that they thought posed a threat to public safety. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was the first to go.

It really happened: In 1937, the City of New York dumped more than one thousand slot and pinball machines into the Long Island Sound to discourage young men from congregating in arcades. Pinball was banned in the city from 1942 to 1976.

It really happened: In 1983, daycare workers in California were falsely accused of practicing Satanism and ritualistically abusing children. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, reports of satanic child abductions, ritual torture, and cannibalism proliferated across the US and Canada.

It really happened: In March 2020, North American retailers limited the number of toilet paper packages customers were permitted to buy to discourage 'panic buying' as the novel coronavirus made its way across the continent.

Each of these examples are commonly understood as moral panics. This course investigates moral panics by exploring historical and contemporary social reactions to perceived threats. Topics might include social reactions to youth masturbation, drug use, sex education, rave dance parties, school shootings, clothing styles, child murderers, racially-motivated police violence, Satanism, climate change, reconciliation politics, and infectious diseases.

The course will be presented in three modules or units:

1. Conventional (or traditional/classical) moral panic studies (1960s-1980s);

2. Efforts to rethink moral panic studies (in light of changing media and politics in the 1990s and early 2000s);
3. The expansion of moral panic studies after 2008 (to new and unconventional areas of research like 'good' or progressive moral panics).

### Instructor/Contact Details



Professor Sean Hier  
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### Readings

There is no textbook for this course. There are several academic papers assigned for weekly reading. All papers are available online (through Brightspace).

### Tentative Evaluation

**Three In-Class Exams**      55%

Students will complete 3 non-cumulative examinations (20%, 20%, 15%). Each exam will assess one module or unit (3 weeks of material). All three exams will be written at the beginning of class (approximately 1 hour). Class will resume after the first two exams.

**Two-Part Term Paper**      45%

Students will write a term paper in two parts.

Term Paper Outline (15%)

The Final Paper (30%)

\*Students may work in groups of two.

\*\*An unessay option will be provided. Unessays entail creative projects that apply course material in an unconventional way (something other than a standard essay—e.g., a documentary, video investigation, or some creative/artistic work). You may work alone or in a group. Groups of three may be approved for some unessays.

All unessay projects must be approved.