

SOCI 307 Moral Panics

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 likely 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).

Evaluation

Three Midterm Exams 45%

Students will complete 3 non-cumulative midterm examinations worth 15% each. Each midterm will assess one module or unit. The format will likely be mixed for each exam.

Three-Part Term Paper 55%

Students will write a term paper in three parts. The range of topics students are able to write on is wide. A full list will be provided.

Proposal (10%)

Draft Introduction (10%)

The Final Paper (35%)

Who Can Take This Course?

Students from outside Sociology and/or the Faculty of Social Science regularly ask if they can handle this course. The answer is yes! Some of my favourite students come from

the engineering and the natural sciences. It's not a bad idea to take SOCI 202 before enrolling in SOCI 307. SOCI 202 is not, however, required.

What Student Have Said About This Course (or the older version of SOCI 307—Regulation and Control)

Comments

Dr. Hier is a hidden gem of the sociology department! This was my second course with him and I find him to be a great lecturer and incredibly knowledgeable in his field. He is really passionate about the material and knows every concept inside out, so his lectures are great and informative. I really have to commend his dedication to helping his students achieve success – every time I emailed him asking for help with my paper he responded quickly and provided amazing feedback. I really, really appreciated that and it really helped me improve my work. He's also hilarious, particularly his stories about his kids. It was also really nice of him to curve the midterm grade! Great course/prof – thank you!

Very knowledgeable and an articulate lecturer, if only somewhat repetitive. However, that did help to reinforce the material if you attend lectures.

Very supportive in all respects.

Dr. Hier is obviously knowledgeable about the subject and clearly cares about this branch of sociology. Unlike other professors in the sociology department I actually enjoyed having Dr. Hier assign his own readings because he is obviously a key player in the field and was not egotistical about their assignment. Though I am sad our class was cut short because I would have liked to finish the course material, I really enjoyed the lectures we had. Wish a four year seminar on this subject was offered.

Dr. Hier was very educated in the scope of this course. he provided great feedback and opportunities for students to ask questions in regard to course content

Knowledgeable, engaging instructor, I liked the case studies used, the videos we watched and the way you explained concepts

He was very passionate about the materials and everything ended up linking to each other in some way. It is funny because I had him as a prof last semester and I found his teaching to be boring but I also mentioned how this might be because the material being taught was boring. Turns out I was write because since the materials for this class were very interesting, he seemed to have put more effort into it. He became a different prof!!

Passionate about content

He was very well prepared for lectures

Fun and interesting lectures overall.

He is a very receptive professor and kept a late, long lecture slot interesting!

Hier knew a lot about the subject and invoked references to both historic and current examples, this made me generally more interested to come to class and learn about the general topic of moral panics, regulation and social control.

