

SOCI 434 A01¹

Topics in Law, Crime, Deviance, and/or Control

Instructor: Dr. Tamara Humphrey

Course Description and Objectives

Paul's story: Born with fetal alcohol syndrome, Paul's early deficits were compounded by spinal meningitis in infancy, a head injury as a toddler, and a car accident that resulted in a permanent brain injury. He has a grade 5 level of education. As a child, he was sexually abused by multiple family members and foster parents. He began drinking at the age of 8, was addicted to marijuana at the age of 15, and later became addicted to crack cocaine.



Paul has 20 offenses on record over a 28 year period. His official criminal history began at the age of 19 when he was first charged and convicted of theft, assault, and sexual assault. He has since been charged with seven additional sexual assaults against both strangers and victims known to him.

Through his contact with the justice system, it has become clear that Paul requires a structured living environment and a court-appointed guardian who closely watches his behavior and provides him with a weekly allowance. It is only with this constant monitoring that Paul's risk to the community is deemed manageable. Of note, he has not offended since residing within this structured environment.

This individual is one who appears to have been set on a path toward antisocial behaviour at a young age and who continued to engage in various types of offending behavior for forty years yet has, under supervision, stopped offending. Is this a typical scenario for people who engage in crime? Can we predict with any certainty who will start offending and when? Is disadvantage in childhood the norm? Do patriarchal systems and systems of racism impact individual offending pathways? What role does the criminal justice system play in offending? Can we distinguish between offenders who commit violent offenses and those who commit non-violent

¹ This online outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students on the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.

crimes? Do individuals ever stop committing crimes? Why might lifelong “criminals” stop offending? These questions will be explored by examining major theoretical perspectives in life-course and critical criminology and applying them to case studies of individuals who have committed serious and violent offenses.

By the end of the course, you will gain an understanding of the development of crime over the life span and will be able to critically discuss the systemic and structural factors implicated in these pathways. You will also be able to assess theoretical arguments and illustrate whether empirical research and real life examples support key claims that have been made within the field of criminology.

Given this class is in seminar format, consistent participation through in-class discussions and/or discussion boards is expected. In groups of 3-4, you will also be responsible for presenting class material and facilitating discussion during at least one session over the term. You will also be expected to complete a course project in the form of an ‘unessay’. This involves picking a topic related to course content and producing a project in the form of almost anything – except a traditional paper (examples will be provided)! Our last class will be a showcase devoted to your hard work over the term. You can expect snacks and coffee/tea to accompany this!

While there are no formal pre-requisites for this class, having completed at least one criminology-related course is an asset.

Required Textbook

There is no assigned textbook for this class. Readings will be comprised primarily of peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and possible e-books.