**Juvenile Forensics: Kids Who Kill PSYCH 461A01**

**Spring 2023**

**Lecturer:** Dr. Sybil Smith-Gray

**Office:** David King Hall Room 2044

**Office Hours:** Please contact me directly so that I may accommodate you

**Mail:** [ssmithgr@gmu.edu](about:blank) (preferred contact)

**Phone:** 703-993-6712

**Required Textbooks:** None

**Required Readings:** All required readings are embedded in respective modules and can be accessed by clicking on the available links.

**Course Description**: The course takes a retrospective look at clinical and forensic factors in several high-profile cases of children adjudicated for murder in the United States and abroad. The potential developmental pathways and risk factors associated with the emergence of aggression and violence in childhood will be applied to these cases. Students will become familiar with the diagnostic criteria associated with disruptive behavior disorders in childhood. Additionally, risk factors and protective factors across individual, family, school, peer group, and community domains are reviewed and applied to theoretical models of violence. Assessment instruments and processes used to evaluate violence risk in adolescents and treatment interventions are discussed. Utilizing clinical and forensic knowledge acquired in class, students will submit a written case analysis of a child or adolescent who has been adjudicated for murder.

**Learning Objectives**:

1. Compare and contrast diathesis-stress and reciprocal gene models of violence
2. Cite the factors that influence the acquisition of emotional and behavioral self-regulation in childhood
3. Describe the developmental pathways of violence onset in children and adolescents and link those pathways to diagnostic criteria that characterize two disruptive behavior disorders in childhood.
4. Identify primary risk factors and mitigating factors of violence across individual, family, school, peer group and community domains of functioning in childhood.
5. Evaluate the pros and cons of qualitative and quantitative methods of violence risk assessment in children and young adolescents.
6. Cite and explain the three foundational goals and values of the Balanced and Restorative Justice model for juvenile offenders
7. Explore and discuss victim impact beyond that of the deceased
8. Develop and oral presentation and a written analysis of the salient clinical and forensic factors of an assigned case study involving a child adjudicated for murder.

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| **Week 1 – Introduction Syllabus Review**  **January 25th** | | |
| Tasks | Review Active Shooter Safety Plan and Syllabus *prior to* class (both are uploaded to the course platform)  Introductions  Form Forensic Analysis Workgroups (six members each group)  Assign Group Case Analysis  Discuss assignment, expectations, parameters  Q & A | |
| **Week 2– History and Structure of the Juvenile Justice System**  **February 1st** | | |
| Tasks | Pre-lecture Workgroup Discussion (Guided discussion worksheet will be provided. You will be asked to share your knowledge and opinion regarding the juvenile justice system)  Lecture  Post-lecture Workgroup Discussion.  Assign individual cases | |
| **Week 3: Juvenile Homicide Offenders/Typologies**  **February 8th** | | |
| Tasks | Lecture  Workgroup Discussion: Utilizing a written case scenario apply the course content to identify and discuss the juvenile offender typology reflected | |
| **Week 4 – Theories: Diathesis Stress Model/Reciprocal Gene Model of Violence**  **February 15th** | | |
| Tasks | | Review Jon Venable (age 10) and Robert Thompson (age 10) material *prior* to class (material is uploaded to the course platform)  Lecture  Video  Workgroup discussions: Jon and Robert (discuss case typology, apply theoretical perspective) |
| **Week 5 – Behavioral and Emotional Regulation in Childhood and Adolescence/Diagnostic Considerations**  **February 22nd** | | |
| TASKS | Lecture  Video | |
| **Week 6– Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs). Violence Onset in Children and Adolescents: Developmental Pathways** | | |
| March 1st | Review documentation on Anissa Weir (age 11) and Morgan Geiser (age 12) *prior* to class (documentation is located on the course platform)  Lecture  Video | |
| **Week 7- Understanding Violence and mitigating risk factors across multiple developmental domains** | | |
| March 8th | Oral Presentation and Guided Discussion of Case Analysis 1 (your analysis will need to apply the content covered in Week 1 through Week 6) (Approximately 45 minutes)  Lecture | |
| **Week 8 – SPRING BREAK** | | |
| March 15th | SPRING BREAK | |
| **Week 9- Clinical and Forensic Interviewing: An Overview**  **March 22nd** | | |
| Tasks | Lecture  Video  Role Play/Practice | |
| **Week 10- School Shooters**  **March 29th** | | |
| Tasks | Review materials on Mitchell Johnson (age 13) and Andrew Golden (age 11) *prior* to class  Lecture  Video | |
| **Week 11- Assessment of Violence Risk for Youth**  **April 5th** | | |
| Tasks | Lecture: Overview | |
| **Week 12- Structured Assessment of Violence Risk for Youth**  **April 12th** | | |
| Tasks | Lecture: Applied | |
| **Week 13 Balanced and Restorative Justice**  **April 19th** | | |
| Tasks | Lecture: Overview | |
| **Week 14 Balanced and Restorative Justice**  **April 26th** | | |
| Tasks | Lecture: Application | |
| **Week 15 Victim Impact**  **May 3rd** | | |
| Tasks | Written Case Analysis #2 is due. (You will need to include content covered in week 9 through 14. Submit to the course platform)  Lecture  Video  Workgroup Discussion | |
| **Week 16**  **May 10th** | | |
| Tasks | **NO CLASS**  FINAL INDIVIDUAL ANALYSES ARE DUE (Upload to the Course Platform) | |

**Grading Criteria**

**There are NO exams for this course. Your course grade will be determined as follows.**

*Group Forensic Case Analysis*:

Each group will be responsible for presenting an oral and a written analysis of a single case.

The first analysis will be a verbal presentation for the class. This will give you time to develop the forensic and clinical skills for conceptualizing, organizing, and discussing your case and answering any questions about it. The oral presentation will comprise 35% of your grade.

The second analysis will be a written product of your case. This means you will have to work very closely with your group to develop one well integrated and synthesized written product that reflects the group’s thinking and communicates its opinions effectively in writing. The written product will comprise 35% of your grade.

(Don’t worry, we will discuss these assignments at length so you will fully comprehend the expectation.)

*Individual Forensic Case Analysis:*

Each student will prepare one individual written case analysis of a justice-involved youth who has been adjudicated for murder. You will synthesize clinical and forensic knowledge acquired in class to prepare your analysis. Your individual case analysis comprises 30% of your grade. ***Late submissions will not be accepted***.

Grading Scale

| A+ | 98-100% |
| --- | --- |
| A | 93-97% |
| A- | 90-92% |
| B+ | 87-89% |
| B | 83-86% |
| B- | 80-82% |
| C+ | 77-79% |
| C | 73-76% |
| C- | 70-72% |
| D | 65-69% |
| F | Less than 65% |

# Course Policies

Enrollment: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made through the published process in the Schedule of Classes (available from the Registrar. Registrar.gmu.edu.) Please contact the Registrar’s Office with any specific questions.

Late work: There are no ongoing assignments, quizzes, or exams in this class. The method for assessing your performance, as outlined above, is not conducive to late work submissions. Late work will not be accepted for this course.

Extra Credit Assignments: There will be no extra credit assignments in this course.

Hate Speech and Threats of Violence: While the Constitutional right to freedom of speech is a foundational expectation in the University setting, *hate speech*, *speech that incites violence*, and *threats of violence* in any form, written or verbal, explicitly or implied, shall not be tolerated. Such actions will be reported immediately to the appropriate authorities for further review, investigation if deemed necessary, and disciplinary action if warranted.

# University Policies and Resources

1. Academic Honesty: GMU seeks to foster a spirit of academic honesty and integrity. This is as important to your professional development as the knowledge you gain in your course work. Violations of academic integrity includes: cheating on exams or homework assignments (e.g. copying the work of others), passing off someone else's ideas as your own (plagiarism), and engaging in dishonesty of any kind with respect to your classroom participation and assignments. Failure to uphold these standards will result in immediate consequences (i.e. not a warning) commensurate with the violation, which may include a failing grade on the assignment and/or referral to the appropriate University resources. You are expected to be familiar with and abide by the University’s Honor Code. The Code can be found [here](about:blank).
2. Plagiarism: Any work submitted by a student must represent original work produced by that student. Any source used by a student must be documented through normal scholarly references and citations. The extent to which any sources have been used must be apparent to the reader. Everything used from other sources - ideas from other's or actual language - must be cited. This policy includes the use of materials from the World Wide Web. With respect to plagiarism, it is always best to err on the side of caution. If you are caught plagiarizing material, the assignment will receive a failing grade and you will not have the opportunity to re-submit the assignment. Additionally, depending on the severity of the violation, you may be referred to the appropriate University resources.
3. Students must follow the university policy for [Responsible Use of Computing](about:blank)
4. Student services: The University provides range of services to help you succeed academically and you should make use of these if you think they could benefit you. I also invite you to speak to me (the earlier the better).
5. Privacy and Communication: Student privacy is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). As a result, students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important information about this class, including any communication with the professor via digital communication. Please allow 24 hours (48 on weekends) for a response to email messages. Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
6. [The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)](about:blank) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance. Counseling Center: Student Union I, Room 364, 703-993-2380.
7. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the [George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS)](about:blank). If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Room 4205; 703-993-2474) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me by the second week of class to discuss your accommodation needs. Accommodation scan only be made in cases in which proper documentation has been provided through the Office of Disability Services.
8. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
9. [The George Mason University Writing Center](about:blank) staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. University Writing Center: Robinson Hall Room A114, 703-993-1200. The writing center includes assistance for students for whom English is a second language.
10. [Diversity](about:blank): An emphasis on diversity and inclusion is essential to achieve our goals as a campus community. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds, and practices have to opportunity to be heard and respected. This commitment to diversity is included in all University settings. GMU promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment with respect to diversity and seeks to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group, and organization to make improvements as needed. If you feel, in any way, that any aspect of your personal characteristics, viewpoints, or perspectives are not being respect, please talk to me. I will listen.