

Disruptive Behavior and Sociopathy in Children and Adolescents

*Course Number: V05.0133

*Instructors: Matthew Hopperstad, MD, Clinical Instructor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Lukshmi Puttannah, MD, Clinical Instructor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

*This course is offered every spring semester and carries 4 points.

*There are no prerequisites to this class.

Course Description:

How do we conceptualize “bad behavior” in children? This course examines the spectrum of childhood disruptive behaviors, ranging from the defiance of the fictional literary character Huck Finn to the sociopathy of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. We will explore both historical and contemporary perspectives, from the age-old idea of the “bad seed” to current biological, psychological and sociological theories. During the first half of the course, we will survey central ideas in the study of childhood disruptive behaviors. In the second half of the course, we will apply these ideas to better understand challenges in diagnosis and treatment, as well as gender, racial, and cultural differences in the manifestation of these behaviors. The course will use scientific and theoretical sources, clinical case material, and fictional and real media depictions to explore this topic and its tremendous impact on the individual, family and society.

Course Aims:

Knowledge

Students will learn key aspects of:

- i. Historical scientific and cultural perspectives on behavioral problems in childhood.
- ii. Contemporary biological, psychological, and social perspectives on childhood disruptive behavior.
- iii. Current evidence regarding the diagnosis and treatment of disruptive behavior disorders in children.
- iv. The impact of disruptive behavior in children and adolescents on the individual, family and society.

Skills

Student will be able to:

- v. Review and integrate diverse theoretical perspectives on childhood disruptive behavior.
- vi. Apply and discuss concepts of disruptive behavior as directly related to current events and clinical case material.
- vii. Discuss controversies and limitations in our current understanding of childhood disruptive behavior.
- viii. Describe goals for further study and research.

Course Syllabus:

Session #	Topic
1	<p>Introduction: Disruptive Behavior in Childhood and Adolescence Disruptive behavior in children and adolescents, ranging from mild oppositional behavior to severe conduct disorder, has a significant impact on individuals, families and society. In this session we will explore historical, literary, and contemporary examples of childhood disruptive behavior, including a sample reading from Mark Twain's <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> and a review of one of the most dramatic acts of violence by adolescents in recent U.S. history, the massacre at Columbine. We will also define terms and concepts related to disruptive behavior, including oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, aggression, antisocial behavior, sociopathy, psychopathy and criminality. The objective of this session is to define disruptive behavior in children and to outline the overall objectives of the course.</p>
2	<p>Historical Perspectives on Childhood Disruptive Behavior In this session we will explore historical theories of moral and ethical development in childhood from Plato and Darwin to Freud, as well as the history of clinical and nosological classification of disruptive behavior. The objective of this session is to elucidate the shift from the religious and magical to the psychological, scientific, behavioral, and evidence-based perspectives on disruptive behavior. In the session, a case study from the non-contemporary literature will be used to illustrate how childhood disruptive behavior was previously viewed and classified.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Costello, E.J. & Angold, A (2001) Bad behavior: an historical perspective on disorders of conduct. In Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds.). <i>Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence</i> (pp 1-32). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.2. Richters, J.E. & Cicchetti D. (1993) Mark Twain Meets DSM-III-R: Conduct disorder, development, and the concept of harmful dysfunction. <i>Developmental Psychopathology</i>, 5-29.3. "Attention-Deficit and Disruptive Behavior Disorders" in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)</i>, American Psychiatric Association (2000), pp. 85-1034. "Antisocial Personality Disorder" in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)</i>, American Psychiatric Association (2000), pp. 701-706.

Presentation, Course and Prognosis of Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior in children and adolescents presents along a spectrum from mild oppositional behavior to overt aggression and sociopathy. This session will further explore the various dimensions of disruptive behavior and aggression, such as overt vs. covert, affective vs. predatory, and instrumental vs. hostile. We will focus on exploring developmental patterns and trajectories of disruptive behavior from childhood to adulthood. The objective of this session is to gain an understanding of the variance in the manifestations, course, and developmental trajectories of disruptive behavior in children.

As an assignment for this session, students will be expected to complete a 2 page response paper to either the film assignment or the Seabrook (2008) *New Yorker* article, to demonstrate their understanding of the presentation and course of disruptive behavior.

Readings:

1. Dishion, T. J., & Patterson, G. R. (2006). The development and ecology of antisocial behavior. In D. Cicchetti & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology. Vol. 3: Risk, disorder, and adaptation* (Revised ed., pp. 503-541). New York: Wiley & Sons.
2. Chapter 1, "Definitions and Subtyping of Aggressive Behavior;" In Connor, D.F., (2002) *Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents*. New York: The Guilford Press; pp. 1-27.
3. Cote S, Tremblay RE, Nagin DS, Zoccolillo M, Vitaro F. (2002) Childhood behavioral profiles leading to adolescent conduct disorder: risk trajectories for boys and girls. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 41(9): 1086-1094.
4. Seabrook, J. (2008, October 10) Suffering Souls: The Search for the Roots of Psychopathy. *The New Yorker*, pp. 80-92

Film Assignment:

- Kids (1995, 91 minutes) – A dramatic film portraying a fictional group of New York City teenagers engaging in drug use, drug dealing, theft, physical violence, and sexually promiscuous and predatory behavior. The assignment of this fictional portrayal of adolescent disruptive behavior is to provide a stimulus for discussion of manifestations of disruptive behaviors.

<p>4</p>	<p>The Biological Basis of Disruptive Behavior</p> <p>This session will explore a range of biological theories concerning disruptive behavior and sociopathy in children. The session will address theories of genetic/familial transmission, environmental toxins, neonatal and perinatal insults, and neurobiological correlates of disruptive behavior. The objective of this session is to establish an understanding of the major biological perspectives on disruptive behavior.</p> <p>In this session, students will discuss a prepared case study of an adolescent with multiple biological risk factors for a disruptive behavior disorder.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chapter 6, "Psychobiology: Neuropsychology, Psychophysiology, Brain Imaging, and Minor Physical Anomalies;" In Connor, D.F. (2002) <i>Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents</i>. New York: The Guilford Press; pp. 163-196. 2. Chapter 7, "Neurobiology: Biobehavioral Models and Neurological Disorders;" In Connor, D.F. (2002) <i>Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents</i>. New York: The Guilford Press; pp. 197-244. 3. Pfaff, D. W., Kavaliers, M., & Choleris, E. (2008). Mechanisms underlying an ability to behave ethically. <i>The American Journal of Bioethics : AJOB</i>, 8(5), 10-19. 4. Loeber, R., Burke, JD., Lahey, BB., Winters, A., & Zera, M. (2000) Oppositional defiant and conduct disorder: a review of the past 10 years, part I. <i>Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</i> 39(12):1468-84. 5. Blakeslee, S. (1999, October 19) Study links antisocial behavior to early brain injury that bars learning. <i>The New York Times</i>.
<p>5</p>	<p>The Psychology of Disruptive Behavior</p> <p>This session will examine the major psychological approaches to understanding disruptive behavior and sociopathy in children, including the Freudian structural model of the mind, object relations theory, attachment theory, and theories on temperament, intelligence, behavioral inhibition, and social cognition. The objective of this session is to gain a basic understanding of these theoretical constructs as they relate to child development.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guttman-Steinmetz S., Crowell JA. (2006) Attachment and externalizing Disorders: A developmental perspective. <i>Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</i>, 45(4): 440-451. 2. Freud, S. (1916). Some character-types met with in psychoanalytic work; Criminals from A Sense of Guilt. <i>The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud</i>, 14: 309-333.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Goldberg, Arnold. (2003). Addendum to Freud's "Criminals from a sense of guilt." <i>Psychoanalytic Quarterly</i>, 72: 465-468. 4. Chapter.4, Antisocial Personality Disorder. In Kernberg, P. F., Weiner, A. S., & Bardenstein, K. K. (2000). <i>Personality disorders in children and adolescents</i>. New York, NY: Basic Books, pp.193-223 5. Bird, H. R. (2001). Psychoanalytic perspectives on theories regarding the development of antisocial behavior. <i>The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis</i>, 29(1), 57-71.
<p style="text-align: center;">6</p>	<p>The Social Ecology of Disruptive Behavior, Part I</p> <p>This session will explore the roles of parenting and family systems, peer groups and role models in the development of sociopathy. We will also explore the role of early life stress and trauma in the development of later behavioral problems. Finally, the concept of adaptive aggression and antisocial behavior will be addressed. The objective of this session is to gain an understanding of the impact of social factors on the individual and family. As an assignment for this session, students will be expected to complete a 2-page response paper to the film assignment or the Nowak et al <i>Scientific American</i> reading, to discuss how peer relations affect the development of disruptive behavior.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kotch JB, et al. (2008) Importance of Early Neglect for Childhood Aggression. <i>Pediatrics</i>, 121(4): 725-731. 2. Wakefield JC, et al. (2002) Should the DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria for Conduct Disorder Consider Social Context? <i>American Journal of Psychiatry</i>, 159(3): 380-38. 3. Hill, J. (2001) Biosocial influences on antisocial behaviours in childhood and adolescence. In Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds.). <i>Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence</i> (pp 103-126). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press 4. Vitaro, F., Tremblay, R., & Bukowski, W. (2001). Friends, friendships and conduct disorders. In Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds.). <i>Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence</i> (pp 346-379). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press 5. Nowak, M. A., May, R. M., & Sigmund, K. (1995). The arithmetics of mutual help. <i>Scientific American</i>, 272(6), 76-81. <p><i>Film Assignment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha Dog (2006, 122 minutes) – A crime drama film set in Southern California that is based on the real life kidnapping and subsequent murder of 15-year-old Nicholas Markowitz by adolescent drug dealer Jesse James Hollywood and his gang of adolescent peers. The objective of this assignment is to provide a fictional portrayal of peer relations and gang involvement and their impact on disruptive behavior.

<p>7</p>	<p>The Social Ecology of Disruptive Behavior, Part II</p> <p>This session will build on the discussion from session #6 to explore larger societal and cultural factors that influence disruptive behavior and sociopathy, such as the influence of socioeconomic status, neighborhood and community effects, and racial/ethnic factors. In addition, this session will serve as an opportunity to explore cross-cultural differences in definitions of disruptive behavior. The objective of this session is to gain a broader sociological perspective on disruptive behavior, with an understanding of the social and cultural variables that affect its presentation.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Social Deprivation” and “Community Factors,” In Chapter 5, “Risk and Protective Factors,” In Connor, D.F. (2002) <i>Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents</i>. New York: The Guilford Press; 147-154. 2. Kirk, D. S. (2008). The neighborhood context of racial and ethnic disparities in arrest. <i>Demography</i>, 45(1), 55-77. 3. Yasui M, Dishion TJ. (2007) The ethnic context of child and adolescent problematic behavior: implications for child and family interventions. <i>Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review</i>, 10(2); 137-179. <p>MIDTERM EXAM, IN CLASS – For the midterm exam students will take an in-class short essay exam, consisting of 4 short essay questions which explore the topics presented in class up until this session.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Disruptive Behavior in the School Setting</p> <p>This session will focus exclusively on the presentation of childhood disruptive behavior in schools. We will explore the prevalence, manifestations, and theories of overt bullying and aggression, as well as the idea of relational aggression (also described as covert bullying) in which harm is inflicted on peers through relationships, rumors, and other indirect means. The objective of this session is to apply the theories presented thus far in the course specifically to the issue of school experiences in child and adolescent development.</p> <p>As an assignment for this session, students will be asked to write a 2 page response paper on disruptive behavior in schools, in response to the <i>New York Times</i> or <i>Time</i> articles or the film assignment.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barker ED, Arseneault L, Brendgen M, Fontaine N, & B Maughan. (2008) Joint Development of Bullying and Victimization in Adolescence: Relations to Delinquency and Self-Harm. <i>Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</i>, 47(9): 1030-1038.

2. Boynton-Jarrett, R., Ryan, LM., Berkman, LF., & Wright RJ. (2008) Cumulative violence exposure and self-rated health: longitudinal study of adolescents in the United States. *Pediatrics*, 122(5): 961-70.
3. Jerome L, & Segal A. (2003) Bullying by Internet. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(7): 751.
4. Barry, D. (2008, March 24) A boy the bullies love to beat up, repeatedly. *New York Times*.
5. Lemonick M.D. (2005, April 11) The bully blight. *Time*.

Film Assignment:

- Welcome to the Dollhouse (1995, 90 minutes) – A dark comedy detailing the fictional experience of a female protagonist in the 7th grade who is bullied and rejected by her peers. The objective of the assignment of this fictional portrayal is to provide a stimulus for the discussion of bullying behavior in schools.

9

Gender and Disruptive Behavior

This session will explore the differential risk and presentation of disruptive behavior in male versus female children and adolescents. We will begin by contrasting conceptions of normal social behavior in boys and girls. We will then shift to discussing in greater detail the presentation of disruptive behavior and sociopathy in girls, with further exploration of bullying and relational aggression as introduced in session #8. The objective of this session is to apply theories learned in the first half of the course to the specific issue of gender differences in disruptive behavior.

In this session, students will examine case studies of females and of males with disruptive behavior and discuss the gender-related differences between them.

Readings:

1. Chapter 9, "Issues in Female Aggression and Related Behaviors," In Connor, D.F. (2002) *Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents*. New York: The Guilford Press; pp. 270-301.
2. Chapter 1, "The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls," In Simmons R., (2002) *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*. Orlando: Harcourt Books; pp. 15-38.
3. Pajer K, et al., (2008) Conduct disorder in girls: neighborhoods, family characteristics, and parenting behaviors. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 2: 28-35.
4. Pollak, W. (1999) Chapter 13: Violence: Slay or Be Slain. In *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, pp. 338-363.

Dramatic Acts of Violence and Severe Psychopathy

This session will explore significant acts of violence committed by children and adolescents in the United States, including the Columbine shootings, subsequent school shootings, and the Virginia Tech massacre. We will explore theories about precipitation of these events and characteristics of these children/adolescents (Dylan Klebold, Eric Harris, Seung-Hui Cho); the impact on communities and our society after such events; and the portrayal of these events in the media. The objective of this session is to explore the most severe end of the spectrum of disruptive behavior and its impact on society. As an assignment for this session, students will be expected to complete a 2 page response paper to either the reading from the Brown & Merritt book or the film assignment.

Readings:

1. Marshall, E. (2000). The shots heard 'round the world. *Science (New York, N.Y.)*, 289(5479), 570-574.
2. Weisbrot, D. M. (2008). Prelude to a school shooting? Assessing threatening behaviors in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 47(8), 847-852.
3. Meloy, J. R., Hempel, A. G., Mohandie, K., Shiva, A. A., & Gray, B. T. (2001). Offender and offense characteristics of a nonrandom sample of adolescent mass murderers. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 40(6), 719-728.
4. Lewis, D. O., Moy, E., Jackson, L. D., Aaronson, R., Restifo, N., & Simos, A. (1985). Biopsychosocial characteristics of children who later murder: A prospective study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 142(10), 1161-1167.
5. Selected readings from: Brown, B., & Merritt, R. (2002). *No easy answers: The truth behind death at Columbine*. New York: Lantern Books.

Film Assignment:

- Elephant (2003, 81 minutes) – A fictional crime drama set in suburban Oregon which chronicles the events surrounding a school shooting, loosely based on the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. The purpose of the film assignment is to provide a starting point for discussions of the factors that contribute to dramatic acts of violence and their impact on the community.

<p>11</p>	<p>The Role of Contemporary Media</p> <p>This session will explore the impact of media on the development of disruptive behavior. In this session we will discuss depictions of crime and violence in the media to which children and adolescents are exposed, including television, film, Internet sites, video games, music, and music videos. The objective of this session is to examine the media’s impact on disruptive behavior.</p> <p>In this session, students will read and discuss a brief case study on the impact of exposure to violence in the media on the development of disruptive behavior in a child.</p> <p>As an assignment for this session, students will be asked to find an example of a media depiction of crime and violence and discuss in a 2 page response paper their opinion on how exposure to that depiction might affect a child’s behavior.</p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Media Violence,” In Chapter 5 “Risk and Protective Factors,” In Connor, D.F. (2002) <i>Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents</i>. New York: The Guilford Press; 154-158. 2. Ybarra, M. L., Diener-West, M., Markow, D., Leaf, P. J., Hamburger, M., & Boxer, P. (2008). Linkages between internet and other media violence with seriously violent behavior by youth. <i>Pediatrics</i>, 122(5), 929-937. 3. Browne KD, Hamilton-Giachritsis C. <i>Lancet</i>. (2005). The influence of violent media on children and adolescents: a public-health approach. <i>Lancet</i>. 365(9460): 702-10. 4. Huesmann, L. R. (2007). The impact of electronic media violence: Scientific theory and research. <i>The Journal of Adolescent Health : Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine</i>, 41(6 Suppl 1), S6-13. 5. Christakis, D. A., & Zimmerman, F. J. (2007). Violent television viewing during preschool is associated with antisocial behavior during school age. <i>Pediatrics</i>, 120(5), 993-999. 6. Mozes, A. (2008, October 29). Less exposure to violent media makes youths less aggressive. <i>Washington Post</i>.
<p>12</p>	<p>Disruptive Behavior and the Law</p> <p>This session will focus on a brief exploration of child forensic psychiatry, including how children are perceived by the law. We will also explore questions related to punishment, reform and rehabilitation of children with conduct disorder and criminality, and the juvenile criminal justice system. The objective of this session is to gain a sense of how our society addresses disruptive behavior in children and adolescents from a legal perspective.</p> <p>In this session, students will examine a case of an adolescent who was involved in the juvenile criminal justice system due to his disruptive behavior.</p>

Readings:

1. Vermeiren, R., Jaspers, I., & Moffitt, T. (2006). Mental health problems in juvenile justice populations. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 15(2), 333-51, vii-viii.
2. Decoene, S., & Bijttebier, P. (2008). On risk assessment of delinquent juveniles: Some questions concerning the role of psychopathy. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 31(3), 229-235.
3. Dolan, M., & Smith, C. (2001). Juvenile homicide offenders: 10 years' experience of an adolescent forensic psychiatry service. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 12(2), 313-329.
4. Neumann, C. S., Kosson, D. S., Forth, A. E., & Hare, R. D. (2006). Factor structure of the Hare psychopathy checklist: Youth version (PCL: YV) in incarcerated adolescents. *Psychological Assessment*, 18(2), 142-154.
5. Bragg, R. (August 12, 1998). Judge punishes Arkansas boys who killed 5. *New York Times*.

13

The Prevention, Prognosis and Treatment of Disruptive Behavior

This session will focus specifically on the treatment of disruptive behavior in childhood and adolescence, including behavioral therapy, parent training, family therapy, medication, and treatment within hospitals and other institutions. We will build on the discussion of the course and trajectory of disruptive behavior that was initiated in session # 3. This session will also address the issue of rehabilitation and the widespread belief that certain traits (e.g. sociopathy) are untreatable. The objective of this session is to gain an understanding of the range of treatments in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Readings:

1. Kazdin, A. E. (2001). Treatment of conduct disorders. In Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds). *Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence* (pp 408-448). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
2. LeMarquand, D., Tremblay R. E., Vitaro, F. (2001). The prevention of conduct disorder: a review of successful and unsuccessful experiments. In Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds). *Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence* (pp 449-478). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
3. Hipwell, A. E., & Loeber, R. (2006). Do we know which interventions are effective for disruptive and delinquent girls? *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 9(3-4), 221-255.
4. Littell, J. H., Popa, M., & Forsythe, B. (2005). Multisystemic therapy for social, emotional, and behavioral problems in youth aged 10-17. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (Online)*, (4)(4), CD004797.

14

Where Are We?

This session will serve as an opportunity for students to synthesize what has been learned throughout the course and to discuss how perspectives on disruptive behavior may be expected to evolve in the future. We will address remaining questions and consider what we as a society and individuals can do for children with disruptive behavior disorders.

FINAL ESSAY DUE For the final assignment, students will be provided with 5 case studies of children and adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders. Students will be required to select one of the 5 cases and write a 12-15 page paper exploring the case. Students must consider the causes and consequences of the disruptive behaviors in the case and describe the various contributions from biological, psychological, and social factors. Students will be expected to integrate information and perspectives and demonstrate a cohesive approach to the understanding of the case.

Examinations and Grades:

Class grade will be composed of:

- a. Class participation (20%)
- b. Five 2-page **response papers**, as described in above syllabus, to be completed for sessions #3, #6, #8, #10, and #11 (25%).
- c. **Midterm exam** (25%): For the midterm exam, students will take an in-class short essay exam, consisting of 4 short essay questions which explore the topics presented in class up until this session.
- d. **Final essay** (30%): For the final assignment, students will be provided with 5 case studies of children and adolescents with disruptive behavior disorders. Students will be required to select one of the 5 cases and write a 12-15 page paper exploring of the case. Students must consider the causes and consequences of the disruptive behaviors in the case and describe the various contributions from biological, psychological, and social factors. Students will be expected to integrate information and perspectives and demonstrate a cohesive approach to the understanding of the case.

Course Readings:

1. Hill, J., & Maughan, B (Eds). (2001) *Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
2. Connor, D.F. (2002) *Aggression and Antisocial Behavior in Children and Adolescents*. New York: The Guilford Press.