

SOCI 307 Moral Panics

(Monday/Thursday 1:00-2:20pm)

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 drug use, youth conflict, rave dance parties, school shootings, muggings, clothing styles, child murderers, racially-motivated police violence, Satanism, climate change, and reconciliation politics.

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



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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

The tentative evaluation for SOCI 307 consists of

1. Three online module examinations that will be completed in a generous writing window at the close of each module (e.g., Thursday-Saturday).
2. A concept presentation consisting of a video presentation on a concept you find especially interesting. A groupwork option might be offered.
3. A photovoice assignment consisting of an application of course material. A groupwork option might be offered.
4. A take-home two-week final written examination.