



PROSPECTUS

Duration: Twenty hours (10 by 2-hour classes)

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‘...no matter how heinous a crime. If a human being did it, you have to say, “I have all the components that are in her or in him.”’

- Maya Angelou, American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Why We Kill challenges you to read and listen to the stories and words of those who have perpetrated violence or have thought about doing so. While the material in the course has been described by one student as ‘fascinating’, the course offers you more than just 20 hours of an engrossing subject matter. It will enable you to fundamentally rethink everything you think you know about the nature of human beings, their capacity for violence, but also their capacity for change. This course is not simply informative. It aims to be *transformative*. A central aim of the course is to equip and empower students with concrete skills and capacities to understand why and how different forms of violence are committed.

We must go beyond a ‘fear that to explain the behaviours of perpetrators of extraordinary evil is to justify those behaviors’. This should be obvious. *Why We Kill* is based on one fundamental principle: **to understand violence, we must listen to those who have either thought about committing violence or who have indeed done so**. Listening is a very human thing, but this is the point of *Why We Kill*. As James Waller, author of *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* has argued, ‘we must not place human evil beyond human scrutiny’. Through books, film and TV, violence is a medium of entertainment for many. Violence is an absolutely serious subject however, that has relevance for us all. The first line of the *Executive Summary* of a report from the Counter Extremism Project is stark: ‘More than 70 years after the defeat of Nazi Germany, ethno-nationalist and white supremacist movements in Europe continue to thrive.’ In other words, the beliefs, values and attitudes that ultimately led to the systematic mass murder of six million Jewish people not only persist but are growing. It is for this reason among many, that makes the question of ‘why we kill’ so urgent.

The course invites you to go beyond any notion that people who commit violence are ‘monsters’. The lesson from the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocides is that violence and mass murder is not done by ‘monsters and psychopaths’. As James Waller points out, ‘it is ordinary people, like you and me, who commit genocide and mass killing’. Through *Why We Kill*, you will be able to read the words of a person who is expressing anger, animosity, hostility, hatred and say with confidence ‘I think I know what’s going on here’. In fact, you will feel that you really do *know* what is going on. Probably the most uncomfortable thing about the course is not that you might recognise the similarities you share with victims of violence, but the similarities you share with *perpetrators* of it. Indeed, the course is not about why *they* kill. It is about why *we* kill. It is about us.

CLASS 1

THE CREATION OF DANGEROUS VIOLENT CRIMINALS

'It's better to be known for something bad than not to be known for anything at all.'
(Professor Lonnie Athens)

Description

In his book *The Creation of Violent Criminals*, criminologist Lonnie Athens asks:

‘How does a human being in our supposedly highly civilized society become the type of person who would commit violent crimes without any apparent moral qualms or reservations?’

Growing up, Athens was both witness and victim of serious acts of violence, including murder, which prompted him to ask question which many of us sometimes ponder: Why do we kill? As he tells us:

‘I was always puzzled about violence... In my house. In my neighbourhood. I wondered why it happened. I wondered why people did it. I wondered why no one did anything about it.’

Athens acted on his question. By conducting long and thorough interviews with individuals who he called ‘dangerous violent criminals’, he came up with an answer, through this theory of ‘violentization’.

By examining the actual words and stories of individuals who have committed the most heinous of violent crimes, we explore the step-by-step process of how *anybody* has the potential to become what Lonnie Athens calls a ‘dangerous violent criminal’. We will see that violent individuals are not born but *made*.

Learn: the four stages of ‘violentization’ theory

CLASS 2

SHAME: THE ROOT OF VIOLENCE

'I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated... The emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence...'

(Dr. James Gilligan)

'The most dangerous men in the world are those who are afraid that they're wimps.'

(Dr. James Gilligan)

Description

During the 1970s, Walpole, a 600-man prison in the state of Massachusetts United States, had an average of one murder per month and one suicide every six weeks. The prison also experienced riots, hostage takings, fire-settings, murders of corrections offices and even murders of visitors to the prison system. In 1982, Dr. James Gilligan became Clinical Director of the Prison Mental Health Service for all prisons in the Massachusetts prison. During the first five years of the Prison Mental Health Service, the rate of homicides and suicides were brought down to one or two per year throughout the entire prison system, had two hostage-taking incidents during the whole five years and no riots. In the next five years, there were some years where the entire prison system had no violent death from either suicide or homicide for 12 months at a time. Furthermore, during those second five years, there were no riots or hostage-takings throughout that time. The epidemic of lethal violence was over.

If Gilligan oversaw the initiatives and services that managed to eliminate the epidemic of lethal violence through the entire Massachusetts prison system, then he must have something valuable to say about the cause and prevention of violence. In this class, the foundational understanding of violence the underpins each class is established. We learn about Dr. James Gilligan's shame theory of violence. His argument that all violence is about overcoming feelings of shame, humiliation and inferiority is a powerful framework that will help you build a solid and empowering toolkit towards understanding the central question of 'why we kill'. After this class, your views on the nature of violence and human beings will be challenged and will be fundamentally changed. You will find that the shame theory of violence is not only useful and powerful for understanding serious violence, but understanding even the most simple disagreements and feelings of anger which we all commonly experience.

Learn: the shame theory of violence; how gender roles and expectations create shame

CLASS 3 ESCALATION

'One who embarrasses another in public is as if he is committing murder.'
(Jewish teaching)

'Most males can imagine circumstances under which they might have to kill another male to prove their manhood. Most males can imagine circumstances under which they would feel compelled to embrace death to prove their manhood. Many males would profess to prefer death to being unmanned.'
(Michael Schwalbe, Professor of Sociology)

'I never got so much respect before in my life as I did when I first pointed a gun at somebody.'
(anonymous prisoner)

Description

In 2010, almost half a million people were estimated to have been murdered worldwide, with men comprising 80% of these victims. In other words, around the world, men are four times more likely than women to lose their lives as a result of homicide. There is an enormous variety of circumstances under which violence may take place but there are some common patterns between these circumstances. In this class we learn about how violence can be the result of an escalation that started with a single, seemingly innocuous insult. We learn how the same patterns underpinning some violent acts between individuals and which lead to escalation of violence are the same ones that we experience when we have even the simplest of arguments with another person.

Learn: how violence escalates from a desire to avoid shame

CLASS 4

‘BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT ME’?

‘To call someone gay or fag is like the lowest thing you can call someone. Because that’s like saying that you’re nothing.’

(Jeremy, age 14)

‘A broken bone is much easier to heal than a broken heart.’

(‘Alex C. Lee’)

Description

The old adage goes ‘sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me’, but is this true? Is all violence only physically hurtful? And is death something that only has to do with the physical body? In 1957 at age 19 for example, Charles Starkweather killed and mutilated 11 people in a shooting spree in Nebraska, United States. In his dictated autobiography, he commented that ‘the people I murdered had murdered me.’ What did he mean? When we consider the fact that Starkweather was severely bullied at school, we begin to think about how bullying and emotional forms of violence can leave individuals feel as if they are ‘dead’.

The issue of bullying and the shame that results from bullying cannot be ignored as a contributor to hostile feelings including resentment, hate and later violence. In the United States, researchers measured the prevalence of bullying among 15,686 young people. They defined bullying as 1) behaviour that is intended to harm, where 2) the behaviour occurs repeatedly over time. Using this definition, they found that 26% of boys reported bullying others sometimes to weekly, whereas 21% of boys reported being bullied sometimes or weekly. That is equal to millions of boys in the United States. Using the words and stories of victims of bullying themselves, we learn about the factors that contribute to being both a perpetrator of bullying and a victim of it. We also learn how bullying elicits feelings of shame in the victim and how these feelings can produce feelings of hostility, resentment and a wish to bully others and commit violence.

Learn: the different factors that contribute to bullying; how bullying produces feelings of hostility and a desire to commit violence

CLASS 5

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

'Isn't it fun to get the respect that we're going to deserve?'

(Eric Harris, Columbine High School Shooter)

'The hardest part to understand was kids killing kids.'

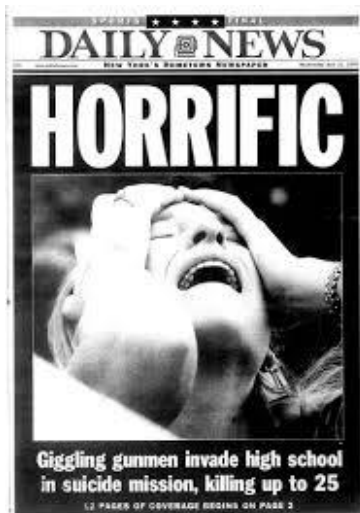
(anonymous student of Columbine High School)

'I had no problem fathoming Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's motives... Watching SWAT teams inch their way toward Columbine High, I wasn't shocked that something like this could happen in a high school. I was shocked that something like this hadn't happened at any of mine.'

(Dan Savage)

Description

On April 20th, 1999, Eric Harris (aged 18) and Dylan Klebold (aged 17) shot and killed 13 people and injured more than 20 others at Columbine High School. They then turned the gun



on themselves. The Columbine High massacre was a watershed moment in American history for a multitude of reasons. High school rampage shootings continued years after Columbine and continue to this day in the United States. In the US, Gun massacres have now become what Michael Grynbaum and John Koblin of the New York Times describe as 'an unending, uniquely American horror show'. In the investigation of the shootings, the Jefferson Sheriff Country Office prepared a report that relied on the work of around 80 investigators from all levels of government. The investigators contacted students, teachers,

and others who may have had information about the crime. In all, investigators conducted about 4,400 leads. The report notes:

'While this report establishes the record of events of April 20th, it cannot answer the fundamental question—WHY? That is, why would two young men, in the spring of their lives, choose to murder faculty and classmates? The evidence provides no definitive explanation, and the question continues to haunt us all.'

The class explores that very question: why?

Learn: some different theories for the Columbine High School Massacre; the role of feelings of powerlessness and shame as one explanation for the shooting

CLASS 6

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: HONOUR KILLINGS AND INTIMATE PARTNER MURDER

*'It would be better for a person to die rather than being dishonored. Without honor death
would be better than life.'*

(male, age 47, research participant in Recep Doğan's research on honour killings)

Description

This class explores why men kill women. In 2017, 50,000 women were intentionally killed by either intimate partners or other family members, meaning 137 women across the world were murdered by a member of their own family in that year every day. We first explore why men may kill their ex or current girlfriend, partner or wife. One in seven homicides (13.5%) are committed by an intimate partner, however, there is a significant gap between who kills who (whether it is men killing woman or women killing men). Simply put, men kill women intimate partners more than women kill men intimate partners. The proportion of murdered women killed by a partner is six times higher than the proportion of murdered men killed by a partner.

In the second part of the class, we explore why women are killed for so called 'honour' crimes. 'Honour'-related murders involve a girl or woman who has been killed by a male or female family member because the woman has done something 'dishonourable'. Overall, however, majority of perpetrators of this type of murder are men, which include intimate partners, but also fathers, sons, uncles and brothers. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that the annual worldwide number of honour killings is as high as 5,000 women and girls with some non-governmental organizations estimating that as many as 20,000 honour killings occur annually worldwide.

In both these forms of violence against women, we learn how gender roles and gender expectations moderate and influence how and why men kill women. We see how gender roles and gender expectations create the feelings of shame and powerlessness that motivate men to kill their intimate partners or women members of the family. In the case of 'honour' killings specifically, we will learn about the role of the wider community in its role in placing psychological pressure on men to kill women.

Learn: how violence against women is influenced by gender roles; the concept of 'honour'; the concept of 'social death'

CLASS 7

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

'I asked Sam how it made him feel when he sexually assaulted the girls. He replied, "I didn't feel like I was small anymore... like I was a wimp... when I did this to girls, I felt like I was big, I was in control of everything.'"

(Sam, an adolescent-male sex offender)

'Rape is – it's a violation of your... self. It's trying to kill the self...'

(unnamed research participant)

'If all the girls who have ever been sexually harassed reported the guys who did it, there would no longer be any boys in school.'

(anonymous teenage girl)

Description

In 2000, the Australian public learned that police in Sydney were investigating allegations of 75 sexual assaults that were perpetrated on a fourteen- and fifteen-year-old- boys at Trinity Grammar School. The assaults were reported to have occurred 'often during lunch hour and in front of "spectators"' who 'stood by and cheered them on and laughed as the victims screamed'. On October 5th, 2002, a 16-year-old girl was gang raped at an out-of-control house party in Chico, California, attended by around 100 people. She had passed out and was molested by four men (one adult and three juveniles) with fingers and a pool cue while at least six others watched. In another case, on October 24th, 2009, around ten men repeatedly gang raped a 16-year-old girl over the course of two-and-a-half hours on the Richmond High School campus, California. Six men aged from 15-21 were later charged. According to authorities, twenty others a stood by and watched, with some photographing the rape on their mobile phones.

What is common to these real-life cases? Rape and sexual assault have too often been thought of as something perpetrated by psychologically disturbed stranger men who lurk out of the shadows and violate their victim alone and out of sight of others. In this class, we learn about how sexual coercion, assault and rape is linked to the pressure on boys and young men to prove their manhood by showing that they are attracted to women and/or to maintain dominance over others.

Learn: how boys and young men's desire to prove their attraction to women can motivate them to perpetrate sexual coercion, assault, and rape

CLASS 8

TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

'I was fourteen and I was a neo-Nazi skinhead. For the first time in my life, I felt like I mattered.'

(Frankie, former Neo-Nazi)

'Death is better than humiliated life... Death is better than life in humiliation and shame.'
(Osama Bin Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks)

'It's so much easier to say, "I hate Jews..." than to say, "I'm afraid. I'm afraid nobody is going to like me. I'm afraid I'm not worthy of being loved."'

(Anro Michaelis, former Neo-Nazi)

'The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.'

(African proverb)

Description

The first line of the *Executive Summary of the Counter Extremism Project* is stark: 'More than 70 years after the defeat of Nazi Germany, ethno-nationalist and white supremacist movements in Europe continue to thrive.' It is for these reasons like courses such as *Why We Kill* are important. We need to understand why, despite the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators, the beliefs associated with Adolf Hitler remain. It is imperative we learn how to understand the origins and maintenance of unchecked hatred. Those of us who are old enough to remember the September 11th terror tacks on New York City will forever remember the images of that day. It is not enough however to 'remember' the Holocaust, the September 11th attacks or any other example of genocidal or extremist violence. We must seek and try and understand.

In this class we learn about forms of violence that are on the surface, driven by hate-fuelled and extreme beliefs and values. Below this surface however, these beliefs are driven by familiar feelings which we have all felt at some point in time: isolation, loneliness and feeling like a 'nobody'.

Learn: the relationship between isolation, loneliness, inferiority and shame and membership of extremist groups

CLASS 9

GENOCIDE: THE WORST CRIME

'If the question is posed to me why I shot with the others in the first place... I must answer that no one wants to be thought a coward.'

(Unnamed member of Reserve Police Battalion 101, a 500-man unit who shot and killed 38,000 Jewish people during the Holocaust)

Description

By 1945, around six million Jews were systematically murdered by one of the most infamous regimes in history - Hitler's Germany. It has been argued that genocide is 'greatest crime a person can commit'. In this case, we focus on a battalion of 500 men in during the German Nazi regime. This battalion shot and killed 38,000 Jewish people and sent 45,2000 Jewish people to their deaths in the Treblinka death camp. In this class we focus on why this group of 'ordinary men' choose to commit acts of genocide despite being explicit told they could 'step out' and not participate.

Learn: how the pressure to conform can contribute to the perpetration of in mass murder

CLASS 10

PREVENTING VIOLENCE

'With guns you can kill terrorists, with education you can kill terrorism.'
(United Nations Messenger of Peace & Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai)

*'... it is really quite clear that we can prevent violence, and it is also clear how we can do so,
if we want to.'*
(Dr. James Gilligan)

Description

Around two-hundred and fifty years ago, British philosopher David Hume believed that there could never be a such thing as a nonviolent, peaceful society:

'Should a traveler, returning from a far country, bring us an account of men wholly different from any with whom we were ever acquainted; men who were entirely divested of vice, ambition, or revenge; who knew no pleasure but friendship, generosity, and public spirit; we should immediately, from these circumstances, detect the falsehood, and prove him a liar, with the same certainty as if he had stuffed his narration with stories of centaurs and dragons, miracles and prodigies.'

In this class, we reflect on the course and question the idea that that there that a nonviolent and peaceful society cannot be achieved. Despite the violence that occurs all around us, a nonviolent and peaceful society *is* achievable. In this class, we finish the course by highlighting what anthropologists have identified as the key themes that contributes to a violent society. Furthermore, we will examine some highly successful therapeutic interventions which have successfully reduced the rates of violence amongst even amongst the most violent individuals in society.

Learn: the central features that contribute to a violent society; successful violence prevention interventions

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