Disability, Medicine, and Representation

Consortium for Culture and Medicine
CCFM 1417/6417/417, ETS 405, CCM 440/450

Tues. 4-7, Fall 2010
Conference Room, Center for Bioethics & Humanities
618 Irving Ave.

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This course aims to bring disability and medicine into cross-disciplinary dialogue by examining representations of disability and medicine in film, literature, and medical texts. These texts and conventions are considered in light of critical discussions of representation and disability. The "medicalization" of disability is examined, with students invited to explore disability and ability as cultural representations, wherein bodily abilities and limitations are conditioned by subjective perceptions of "normalcy." A principal question is how to incorporate a "social model" of disability into medical education and practice. Disability studies scholars and clinicians working on disability will be guest speakers.

Rationale for the course
People with disability are disproportionately patients in the medical system, yet medical school curricula offer little by way of instruction about disability. At the same time, disability studies programs offer little by way of instruction about medicine and medical culture. This course begins to position its students as translators of different discourses and cultural understandings of disability. Students in this class will represent different disciplinary approaches—such as medicine, the humanities, and the social sciences—and together have a unique opportunity for peer learning on a subject that is represented often dramatically differently by different disciplines. By providing students with the opportunity to examine disability comparatively, this course will help them to understand how different systems of representation produce different understandings of disability.

Course objectives: At the end of the course students will have learned
• a basic range of stereotypes of disability and difference and to consider how those stereotypes are naturalized within the logic of dominant discourses;
• to articulate working models of disability such as the medical and social models and to explore the strengths and limits of those models;
• to identify how disability functions metaphorically in film, literature, and popular culture;
• to analyze the different perspectives of medicine and disability studies in order to translate meanings and goals effectively, working toward collaboration;
• to analyze representations in culture in relation to questions of power and marginalization and in terms of the question of identity and self-representation; and
• to compare high art, popular, and medical discourses and discuss how they mutually inform each other and compete for dominance.
Class 1: Aug. 31
*Introduction: Translation and Representation*
Kenny Fries, “Still Disabled” from *The History of My Shoes*
Suzanne Fiala, “Normal Is a Place I Visit,” *JAMA*
Clips from David Lynch, *The Elephant Man*

Class 2: Sept. 7
*Exploring discourses of disability: the social and the medical models*
Lisa I. Iezzoni and Vicki A. Friedman, “Turning the Disability Tide: The Importance of Definitions,” *JAMA*
Tom Shakespeare, “The Social Model of Disability”

Class 3: Sept. 14
*Disability and medicine: foundational issues*
Nancy Mairs, “Freeing Choices” from *Waist-High in the World*
AM Rosland, “A Piece of My Mind: Assuming the Worst,” *JAMA*
Amanda Baggs, “In My Own Language,” YouTube video
Clips from Gretchen Berland, *Rolling* and *Murderball*

Class 4: Sept. 21
*Autobiography, disability, and medicine*
Selections from Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face*
Selections from Susannah Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*
Garden, “Disability and Narrative”
[Guest speaker: Margaret Turk, MD, Physical Medicine & Rehab, Upstate Medical]

Class 5: Sept. 28
*Staring back: Representations of medicine*
Leonard Kriegel, “Falling into Life” from *Staring Back* (essay)
Jim Ferris, *The Hospital Poems* (selected poems)
Selections from Kenny Fries, *Body, Remember* (memoir)
[Guest speaker, Liat Ben-Moshe, PhD, Disability Studies, Syracuse University]

Class 6: Oct. 5
*Disability and representation*
W. J. T. Mitchell, “Representation” (essay)
Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, “Disability and Representation” (essay)
recommended: David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, “Disability Studies and the Double Bind of Representation” (essay)
In-class screening: *Sound and Fury*
*Discussion of mid-term paper topics*
Class 7: Oct. 12
Deaf culture and medicine
Harlan Lane, “Do Deaf People Have a Disability?”
Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, “Cultures into the Future”
Clips from Through Deaf Eyes [in-class screening]
YouTube: “My Son Is Deaf, Finally!”
Midterm paper due

Class 8: Oct. 26
Genetics and disability
Mark Willis, “Not This Pig”
In class: Clips fromGattaca

Class 9: Nov. 2
“No Pity”: sympathy, empathy, and points of view
Rebecca Garden, “Expanding Clinical Empathy: An Activist Perspective,” Journal of General Internal Medicine
“Telethons and Pity,” Growing Up with a Disability (blog)
Felicia Nimue Ackerman, “We Gather Together” (short story)

Class 10: Nov. 9
Fat, disability and medicine
Judy Freespirit, “On Ward G,” from The Strange History of Suzanne Lafleshe (short story)
Linda Bacon, MA, PhD, “End the War on Obesity: Make Peace With Your Patients
Lisa Roney, “Hunger and Plenty”
Yale University, Weight Bias in Clinical Settings: Improving Health Care Delivery for Obese Patients
“First, Do No Harm: Real Stories of Fat Prejudice in Health Care”
Final paper proposals due

Class 11: Nov. 16
Disability and difference: representations of others
Paul Darke, “Understanding Cinematic Representations of Disability”
Kathleen LeBesco, “Framing Fatness: Popular Representations of Obesity as Disability”
Screening: Selections from Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, The Celluloid Closet and Marlon Riggs, Color Adjustment

Class 12: Nov. 23
Diabetes: representations of excess
Ferguson, “The Cinema of Control”
Lisa Roney, excerpts fromSweet, Invisible Body
film clips
Class 13: Nov. 30
Neurotypical syndrome and the construction of autism
Brownlow, “Re-presenting Autism”
blog: “Ten Things Everyone Should Know about Autism,” Reports from a Resident Alien

Class 14: Dec. 7
A body of knowledge
Student presentations of papers, wrap up & course evaluation
final paper due

Course Requirements

Attendance:
This class meets only once a week; therefore you will be allowed one unexcused absence.

Class Participation:
The class will be run as a seminar, not a lecture, and therefore depends on your ideas and input. You are expected to participate in class discussion.

Presentations:
Each student will give a presentation on a concept related to the week’s readings/viewings or on a text or topic related to the week's readings/viewings. The presentations will be 15-20 minutes in length and will be graded on the selection and organization of information presented, its relevance to the class topic, and, to a lesser extent, the “performance” of the presentation.

Paper Proposals:
Write one full page, single-spaced and include at least a general outline and a proposed title. Your proposal should cover most if not all of the following: what your argument/thesis might be; which texts you’ll be discussing and which passages you might be focusing on through “close readings”; which concepts from class you'll be making use of in your analysis; problems you might encounter in writing; and a discussion of why you’re writing the paper. We will devote a large part of a class session to discussing these proposals. Students will read and discuss each other’s final paper proposals.

Class Participation, your Presentation, and Paper Proposals count for 20% of your final grade.

Study Questions (1-2 pages per set; four highest grades at 5% each for total of 20%)
Each week I'll give you a list questions and/or suggestions for discussion that will cover the next week’s readings. These will help you to know what in the readings I’m interested in, and they’ll help you to formulate your ideas and opinions about the readings. You can use these writings as a basis for class discussion. I may ask you to read one or more of your responses out loud to the group. Write a couple of paragraphs in response to each, totaling one to two pages. Think of this writing as preparation for your papers.

Midterm Paper (5 pages, 7-10 for grad students; 20% of final course grade)
Term Paper (8-10 pages for undergrads, 10-15 for grad students; term paper is 40% of the final course grade.)
Papers (See also Paper Proposals above):
Both midterm and term paper topic (each student’s choice and approved by me) will relate to concepts covered in readings and class discussions and may focus on course text(s). These papers comprise a large part of the course grade, so students should think carefully about their topics. During the course, I will discuss with students how to select a topic for their papers and how to refine that topic into a question or argument that will lead into a fruitful paper project.

I will provide an overview of and many resources for reviewing essay form so that students feel clear and confident about writing the paper. I will prepare the students for the paper writing process and leave a portion of several class periods open for discussion of papers.

Papers will be graded on the clarity of writing, the logic of the argument(s), demonstration of comprehension of concepts discussed in class, the coherence, and the persuasiveness of the essay. Form and content are two sides of the same coin; clear, logical, and carefully considered analysis will best reflect comprehension of the ideas set forth in the narratives we read and in our class discussions. All papers will be graded on the clarity of writing, because it is interwoven with clarity of thought. Students will be guided to choose topics that will allow them to focus their energies on clear and straightforward engagements with their topics. Papers must be proofread and edited for grammatical clarity (another component of one’s argument). Students will be teamed up to share this tedious but crucial task.

Undergraduate students may write exclusively about the readings assigned and recommended for the course. They should focus carefully on the texts at hand, engaging with their topic by plotting out an outline for the exploration of the question or argument and finding examples from the readings that support or further the question/argument. The paper is a way to think through a specific idea by poring over one or more readings and writing through one’s ideas about it/them. Putting your thoughts into writing that can be understood by others and persuades them of your argument demands that you set down and logically organize your ideas and test your hypotheses in a way that oral discussion does not require. Thus students who may not have a background in writing are nonetheless as capable of well-argued writing as students with more experience writing.

Graduate students will be expected to research their paper topics beyond the assigned course texts, and their papers will be graded in part on the aptness of the cited texts and the way that the students integrate them into their line of questioning or argument. The emphasis is on the usefulness of the material cited, rather than on the number of citations. Grad students are expected to know the rules of proper citation, both ethically and in terms of citation format, and to demonstrate that knowledge in their papers; I will supply students with resources for reviewing documentation and avoiding ambiguous citation that might appear as plagiarism. Papers must include close readings of the text(s), where either a selected passage or passages are discussed in detail or images, tone, sequence of events, or other details of the structure of the narrative are explored in terms of language and the ideas expressed.
Course Texts

Ackerman, Felicia Nimue, “We Gather Together,” Ragged Edge Online: http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/departments-fiction/002894.html
Baggs, Amanda, “In My Own Language,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1h12jc
Berland, Gretchen, dir., Galen Buckwalter, Vicki Elman, Ernie Wallengren, assoc. dirs., Rolling, Fourwheeldrive Productions, 2004
Epstein, Rob and Jeffrey Friedman The Celluloid Closet (1995) (film)
Galloway, Terry, Mean Little Deaf Queer: A Memoir (Boston: Beacon, 2009)
Garden, Rebecca, “Disability and Narrative: New Directions for Medicine and the Medical Humanities,” Medical Humanities. Published online, DOI: 10.1136/jmh.2010.004143.
LeBesco, Kathleen, “Framing Fatness: Popular Representations of Obesity as Disability,” in Revolting Bodies?: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), pp. 74-84
Lynch, David, The Elephant Man, Paramount Pictures, 1980
Mairs, Nancy Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996)
Merrill, Emily & Jane Grassley, “Women’s stories of their experiences as overweight patients,” Journal of Advanced Nursing 64(2):139-146.


“My Son Is Deaf, Finally!” YouTube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YN5Fdz1En0

Niccol, Andrew, Gattaca (Columbia TriStar, 1997)

Nimue Ackerman, Felicia, “We Gather Togethers,” from Ragged Edge Online magazine: http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/departments/fiction/002894.html


Sacks, Oliver, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales (NY: Touchstone, 1998)


