

An Introduction to Disability Studies and the Cultural Politics of Health

18.-22.3.2013, AV 232

Instructor:

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Introduction:

What does the World Health Organization, a U.S. based-national health campaign for LGBTQ Health, the politics of global pharmaceutical companies and a documentary about disability culture have to do with one another? *An Introduction to Disability Studies and the Cultural Politics of Health* examines the construction and circulation of knowledge about bodies, health, medicine and impairment from a disability studies perspective. We will examine the way that cultural discourses construct health as a natural, value-free desired state of being by marking disability as health's "negative" corollary. Using the analytic tools offered by disability studies, which seeks to situate disability within a social, political and historical context and privilege the knowledge about disability produced from experiences of disabled people, we will deconstruct the relationship between health and disability.

Course Design:

As Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, course readings and material will draw from a variety of humanities-based scholarship (from Queer Theory to Performance Studies) to explore issues related to the cultural framing of disability, health, bodies, difference and medical knowledge. We will take as our object of analysis cultural representations of disability and health as found in texts such as: TV, film, advertisements, public health posters, political campaigns, etc. Using the analytical tools laid out in the lecture and course readings, students will learn to read these texts as locations that reflect and shape broader attitudes and cultural politics of disability and health.

This course offers a continuous dialogue between theoretical concepts and practical application. Each session introduces students to disability studies concepts and then discusses the way that scholars in various disciplines have applied those concepts to their research. We will also examine the ways that artists, activists and others "outside of the classroom" apply critical concepts of health. Course sessions, readings and assignments will reflect this dialogue between theory and practice as we explore the ways that knowledge about health and disability circulate culturally.

Course Objectives:

At the completion of the course, students should be able to:

- * Identify the main themes within the field of Disability Studies
- * Identify the ways that ideas about health and disability circulate culturally

- * Critically discuss the production of knowledge related to health
- * Situate concepts of disability and health culturally, politically and historically
- * Understand how to “read” cultural texts as places where ideas circulate
- * Identify and articulate Disability Studies critiques of the cultural concepts of disability and health
- * Analyze cultural texts using a Disability Studies analytical lens

Course Readings:

There are no required textbooks for the course. Readings will be provided in electronic format. However, I do draw several articles from Jonathan Metzl and Ann Kirkland’s edited text *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality* (2009) and would recommend purchasing the text.

All of the course readings are in English. However, I have included two Czech texts from Kateřina Kolářová’s forthcoming edited collection of Disability Studies texts, *Jinakost – postižení – kritika: Společenské konstrukty nezpůsobilosti a hendikepu Antologie textů z oboru disability studies* (2013) as recommended reading in order to help you ground disability studies in the Czech context. Kolářová’s collection offers further readings that can be used in your analytical papers as well.

Assignments:

Attendance and Participation (40%):

Attendance and active participation in discussions are required in this class and therefore are worth a major percentage of the course grade. This means coming to class with the reading completed and ready to discuss the material. If you need to miss class for any reason, please inform the instructor BEFORE class so that alternative arrangements can be made to make up for the missed lesson.

Discussion Questions (20%):

For each article you are assigned to read, you are asked to write two discussion questions that reflect your engagement with the reading material. These questions are meant to facilitate dialogue in the discussion as well as to communicate areas in the reading that may be more difficult. Questions can be clarifying in nature: “What does the author mean when she says health is a cultural construct?” However, the bulk of the questions should probe deeper into a concept: “How might the author’s analysis change if she were to consider a non-U.S. context?” All discussion questions should be handed in at the beginning of class.

Final Paper (40%):

The course will culminate in a 3 to 5 page analytical paper that demonstrates your understanding of the main course contents. You will be asked to find and analyze a cultural representation of health through a disability studies lens. We will talk more about what these representations might look like but they can include advertisements for health campaigns, posters or pamphlets from the doctor’s office, a commercial you saw on

television, an advertisement in the newspaper, etc. I welcome examples from the Czech context as well as other non-English contexts (though the paper analyzing the examples must be written in English and therefore you should be prepared to translate any text into English).

You will bring your example to class on the final day and we will “workshop” an analysis, meaning you will have an opportunity to discuss with the class why you chose the representation you chose, what ideas from the course you think are reflected in these representations and how you might go about analyzing it through a disability studies lens. These discussions are meant *not* to be formal presentations but to give you the opportunity to think through the ideas we discuss in class collectively.

These papers must include a *minimum* of three scholarly sources, cited properly throughout the text. At least two of the three citations must come from either the required or recommended reading material for the course. Papers are graded on the clarity of the argument that they forward, the ability to provide evidence to support that argument and the ability to articulate (and refute) counterarguments.

Grading:

Written assignments are graded as follows:

A (90-100) = excellent in all areas. The assignment presents a strong thesis statement, is argued coherently, and offers clear evidence to support your ideas. Counterarguments are considered and addressed. All sources are clearly cited.

B (80-89) = good. The assignment presents a good thesis statement; the argument and evidence are sufficient, but could be stronger or more compelling. All sources are clearly cited.

C (70-79) = meets minimum requirements of assignment. The assignment presents a passable thesis statement. An argument and evidence exists, but is either not convincing or not well articulated. All sources are clearly cited.

D (60-69) = falls short of minimum requirement, but effort in completing the assignment clearly made. Thesis, evidence, and argument either very weak or missing. Missing sources or fails to cite sources properly.

F (59- below) = does not meet minimum requirement in any way.

Students with Disabilities

If you need an accommodation to fully participate in the class, please contact the instructor as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made to facilitate access to the course and/or course material.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Session One: March 18, 2013: **Introduction to Disability Studies and the Cultural Politics of Health**

Lecture:

- The Construction of Knowledge
 - o How do we know what Health is?
 - o Who constructs and has authority over this knowledge?
- Disability Studies: A Form of Knowledge Production
 - o What is Disability Studies?
 - o What can Disability Studies offer an analysis of Health?

Reading:

Metzl, Jonathan. "Introduction." *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. New York: NYU Press, 2010. 1-11.

Dumit, Joseph. *Drugs For Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health*. Durham: Duke U.P., 2012. 1-10; 15-22.

Recommended:

Kolářová, Kateřina. "Disability studies: jiný pohled na „postižení“" *Jinakost – postižení – kritika: Společenské konstrukty nezpůsobilosti a hendikepu Antologie textů z oboru disability studies*.

Kolářová, Kateřina. "Tělesná jinakost, ne/způsobilost, „postižení“, hendikep... K politice překladu a teoretickému vymezení pojmů." *Jinakost – postižení – kritika: Společenské konstrukty nezpůsobilosti a hendikepu Antologie textů z oboru disability studies*.

Session Two: March 19, 2013: **Historicizing Disability, Difference and Disease**

Lecture:

- How have we understood disability in history?
 - o Eugenics and Medicalization
- What relationship does medical knowledge have to cultural production?
- How do ideas circulate culturally?

Readings:

Davis, Lennard. "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century." *The Disability Studies Reader 2nd Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 3-16.

Mitchell, David and Sharon Snyder. "The Eugenic Atlantic and the Making of an International Science." *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 100-129.

Recommended:

Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York U.P., 1998. 1-33.

Session Three: March 22, 2013: **Deconstructing Discourse: A Disability Analytic**

Lecture:

- Reading Representation
- Situating Disability in Structures of Power
- Deconstructing Images of Disability and Health

Readings:

Clare, Eli. "Reading Across the Grain." *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1999. 103-123.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Disability, Identity and Representation: An Introduction." *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia Press, 1997. 1 – 18.

Recommended:

Pernick, Martin. "Defining the Defective: Eugenics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century America." *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*. Ed. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. 89-110.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Picador, 1977. 1-20. (Introduction, Chapter 1 and 2).

Session Four: March 21, 2013 **Difference Matters: Considering Current Trends of Targeted Health from a D.S. Perspective**

Lecture:

- The Scientific Construction of Knowledge and Difference
- Trending toward Difference in Medicine
- Material Reality: "But there's a real difference here"
- "Come Out for Health" – Reading U.S. National LGBT Health Campaign

Reading:

- Epstein, Steven. "Introduction: Health Research and the Remaking of Common Sense." *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. 1-16.
- Roberts, Dorothy. "The Social Immorality of Health in the Gene Age: Race, Disability and Inequality." *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. New York: NYU Press, 2010. 61-71.

Recommended:

- Erevelles, Nirmala. "In Search of the Disabled Subject." *Embodied Rhetoric's: Disability in Language and Culture*. Ed. James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson. Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P., 2001. 92-111.
- McRuer, Robert. "Introduction: Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence." *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York U.P., 2006.

Session Five: March 22, 2013: **Constructing Disability and Health Differently**

Lecture:

- Alternative Knowledge about Health and Disability
- The Crip Perspective
- Applying Disability Studies to Research

Cultural Artifact Workshop

Readings:

- Kirkland, Anna. "Conclusion: What Next?" *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. New York: NYU Press, 2010. 195-203.
- Kuppers, Petra. "Freaks, stages, and medical theaters." *Disability in Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 31-48.

Recommended:

- Sandahl, Carrie. "Queering the Crip Or Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9.1-2 (2003): 25-56.

Final Paper Due Date: May 31, 2013
