

Department of Communication and Culture
Communications Studies (COMS) 717.93 - Seminar 01
Vulnerability and the Human Condition
Fall 2011
Wed: 16:30-19:20

Instructor: CGK Atkins
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Course Description

The objective of the course is to encourage students to think critically about vulnerable individuals and populations. It will look at theories, research studies and narratives about marginalized persons and conditions of vulnerability. Students should be able to reflect on the relationships between erudite theoretical discussions and the application of these theories to concrete social, political, legal and moral problems surrounding vulnerability and the human condition.

Course Objectives

As this is a course on ‘vulnerability and the human condition,’ we will spend much of our time reading, examining, discussing and writing about theories and narratives of vulnerabilities and of rights that have emerged during the last few years. We start by examining some of the theoretical and legal framing of vulnerability. As well, ethnographies and narratives that explicate and portray vulnerable states intersperse the course. These will contextualize many of the abstract ideas we read about. But they will also serve to sharpen our analytical skills as we look for concepts and ideas that can be generalized and extrapolated out of the singular experiences. Moreover, as I conduct research and write about disability, we will look at physical illness, dysfunction and difference in some depth.

We will also read works about race, gender and sexuality and their effect on individuals and marginalized communities. Finally, we will look at Participatory Action Research, which seeks to include vulnerable populations in the framing of research that is conducted about these particular communities’ conditions and concerns.

Inevitably our discussions will focus on issues of identity, identity-formation, power and social justice. We will explore the manner in which human rights, legislation, research projects, social programs and other modalities either ameliorate or fail to ameliorate vulnerable persons.

This is a graduate seminar and the reading load is heavy. However, students should note that many of the readings are narratives and thus somewhat easier to read than denser, more theoretical texts.

Students are expected to participate actively in class. Depending on the size of the seminar, one or more students will be responsible for initiating and leading class discussions. Mere attendance is not sufficient to fulfill the participation requirement. As this is a seminar, the purpose of the discussion is to allow everyone to explore novel concepts and, test their own burgeoning ideas against those of their peers, to reflect on this dynamic and, consequently to readjust their ideas and perspectives. It is important that members come to class having read and thought about the materials. They must also possess a willingness to share these thoughts and to listen to the viewpoints of others. Every class will be “lead” by a student or pair of students (and by the instructor) who will be responsible for providing a brief overview of the materials and, then, to pose questions or lines of inquiry which will encourage exploration and greater understanding of the texts. (Participation: 15%, Seminar Lead: 15%)

Students will also keep a journal. Each student will compose 7 entries that are to be handed in on the due dates outlined below. The journal will consist of two parts: (part i) a reflection on the readings and (part ii), a reflection on the manner in which the class discussion transformed the student’s original thoughts about the readings. Again, it is presumed that students are thoughtful and engaged and thus bring the full extent of their intellectual capacities to their journaling. This means that they should draw on their knowledge of other ideas and texts as well as their own experiences in composing their entries. Length does not particular concern me, the quality and originality of the thoughts contained within each journal is what matters most. Journals should provide evidence of engagement with the materials of the course. (Journals: 35%)

Finally, students will write a Take Home Final that will be either in a short answer and essay format, or take the form of a case study/essay. (Final Take Home Assignment: 30%).

Internet and electronic communication device information

Students *may* use laptops in class, so long as they are not writing emails, surfing the net and distracting themselves and fellow seminar participants from the class materials and discussion. Also, the student should make every effort to ensure that the laptop does not obscure his/her face or other individuals’ views of one another across the table. Using a laptop is a privilege and trust is being placed in the student that s/he will abide by these rules. These guidelines will be strictly enforced. If an individual undertakes disruptive activities related to his/her laptop use, s/he will

lose the privilege of using his/her laptop (or other device) during class.

Textbooks/Readings

Chloe G. K. Atkins. *My Imaginary Illness: A Journey of Uncertainty and Prejudice in Medial Diagnosis*. ILR-Cornell University Press, 2010.

Mairin Corker and Sally French eds. *Disability Discourse*. Open University Press, 1999.

Art Frank. *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness*. Mariner Books, 2002.

Simi Linton. *My Body Politic*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein. *Community Based Participatory Research for Health*. Jossey-Bass, 2008 (2nd edition).

Valorie Raoul, Connie Canam, Angela Henderson and Carla Peterson (eds). *Unfitting Stories: Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma*. Wilfred Laurier Press, 2007. Selected chapters.

Barbara Schneider. *Hearing (Our) Voices: Participatory Research in Mental Health*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Peter Singer. *Animal Liberation*. Ecco. (Reprint) 2001.

**Patricia Williams. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

**Kenji Yoshino. *Covering: The Hidden Attack on Our Civil Rights*. Random House, 2006.

** students can purchase either one of these texts as they have the choice of reading one or the other for the week of 9 November 2011.

AND additional readings from online journals: As this is a graduate course, it is expected that students can retrieve the journal articles that have been assigned themselves. Each student has the ability to access the library and the online subscriptions of the journals that are maintained by UofC.

Assignments and Evaluation

Class Participation – 15 %

Seminar Lead– 15%

Journals – 35%

Take Home Final – 35%

Class Participation: As this is a graduate seminar, students are expected to participate actively in class. Regular class participation will make up 15% of the mark. Please note that mere attendance is not sufficient to fulfill the participation requirement. Class participation composes 15% of the overall mark.

Seminar: Each student will be responsible for initiating and leading class discussions for at least one 90-minute period during the term. (Depending on the size of the class, students may be expected to lead two seminar periods.) This will comprise 15% of the overall mark.

Journal Entries: Students will also keep a journal. They will compose 7 entries during the term to be handed in as per the due dates below. Each journal entry will consist of 2 parts: I: contains students' reflections on and questions about the assigned readings, and II: contains students' reflections on the class discussion and the manner in which the discussion has transformed their previous understanding of the materials. (This is why the journal is due two days after the class meets.) Each journal will be worth 5% for a total of 35% of the overall mark.

Final Take Home Assignment: Students will write a Final Take Home Assignment at the end of term. The structure and content of the assignment will be discussed closer to the due date. An appropriate amount of time will be allotted for its completion over a period of several days. Final Take Home Assignment = 35%

It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment.

Note: Please hand in your papers directly to your instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Registrar's- scheduled exam: No

Policy for late assignments: Assignments will be docked a half letter grade for each day after the due date. Students may request extensions in a timely manner from the instructor. The final take home assignment will not be accepted if it is handed in late unless there are extraordinary or extenuating circumstances and only with permission of the instructor.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

This course is conducted in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). As one consequence, students should identify themselves on all written work by placing their name on the front page and their ID number. You will be required to provide a piece of picture identification in order to pick up any assignments or look at a final exam from SS320 after classes have ended.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Research papers must be properly documented.

If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: www.efwr.ucalgary.ca

Grading System - The following grading system is used in the Faculty of Graduate Studies:

Grade	Grade Point Value	Graduate Description
A+	4	Outstanding
A	4	Excellent – superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter
A-	3.7	Very good performance
B+	3.3	Good performance
B	3	Satisfactory performance
Note: The grade point value (3.0) associated with this grade is the minimum acceptable average that a graduate student must maintain throughout the program as computed at the end of each registration anniversary year of the program.		
B-	2.7	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
Note: A student who receives a B- or lower in two or more courses will be required to withdraw regardless of their grade point average unless the program recommends otherwise. Individual programs may require a higher minimum passing grade.		
C+	2.3	
C	2.0	All grades below B- are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements. A student who receives a grade of F will normally be required to withdraw unless the program recommends otherwise.
C-	1.7	
D+	1.3	
D	1.0	
F	0.0	

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. Readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. This includes assignments submitted in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media, and material taken from such sources.

Please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (MacEwan Student Centre 4th floor, efwr.ucalgary.ca) if you have any questions regarding how to document sources.

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and the consequences thereof please see the current University of Calgary Graduate Calendar at the following link:

<http://grad.ucalgary.ca/files/grad/UC%20Graduate%20Calendar%202010-2011%20July%206-10.pdf>

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of the course.

Students' Union

For details about the current Students' Union contacts for the Faculty of Arts, see

www.comcul.ucalgary.ca/su

Graduate Students' Association

For details on the Graduate Students' Association, please see

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/>

Student Ombudsman

For details on the Student Ombudsman, please see

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/GSA/services/ombudsperson.html>

Emergency Evacuation and Assembly Points

For information on the emergency evacuation procedures and assembly points, please see

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

"SAFEWALK" Program -- 220-5333

Campus Security will escort individuals day or night -- call 220-5333 for assistance. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot booths.

Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (ie. surveys, interviews, observation) as a part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see:

Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/cfreb>

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

Please refer to Blackboard for updated reading assignments and seminar topics. **It is extremely important that students refer to Blackboard on an ongoing basis as reading assignments and seminar topics may well be adjusted according to the needs of the seminar and its participants during the term.**

Week I - 14 September 2011

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Week II – 21 September 2011

VULNERABILITY – AN OVERVIEW

Martha Fineman. [“The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition”](#) in *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20:1(2008). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Martha Fineman. [“The Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State”](#) forthcoming in *60 Emory Law Journal* (2011). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Peadar Kirby. “Vulnerability and Globalization: Mediating Impacts on Society” in *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* (Spring 2011). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Bryan S. Turner. “Human Vulnerabilities on Individual and Social Rights” in *The Leading Rogue State: The U.S. and Human Rights*. Edited By Judith Blau et al. Reserved Readings UofC Library. (I may also hand out a copy of the chapter in class, if possible.)

Bryan S. Turner. “Outline of a Theory of Human Rights.” *Sociology* Vol 27. No 3. , pp. 489 -512, (1993). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Week III - 28 September 2011

1ST JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 30 SEPT 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT).

VULNERABILITY - NON-HUMAN SPECIES

Ani. B. Satz. Would Rosa Parks Wear Fur? Toward a Nondiscrimination Approach to Animal Welfare. *Journal of Animal Law & Ethics*, Vol. 1, p. 139, 2006. Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Ani B. Satz. “Animals as Vulnerable Subjects: Beyond Interest-Convergence, Hierarchy, and Property.” *Animal Law*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2009. Available as online an journal via UofC library.

Peter Singer. *Animal Liberation*. Ecco. (Reprint) 2001.

Week IV - 5 October 2011

2ND JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 7 OCTOBER 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT)

VULNERABILITY- NARRATIVES (ILLNESS/DISABILITY)

Joao Bahl, Byron Good and Arthur Kleinman (eds). *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*. University of California Press, 2007. Selected chapters.

Art Frank. *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness*. Mariner Books, 2002.

Week V - 12 October 2011

3RD JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 14 OCTOBER 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT)

VULNERABILITY – NARRATIVES (ILLNESS/DISABILITY) CONTINUED

Chloe G. K. Atkins. *My Imaginary Illness: A Journey of Uncertainty and Prejudice in Medial Diagnosis*. ILR-Cornell University Press, 2010.

Valorie Raoul, Connie Canam, Angela Henderson and Carla Peterson (eds). *Unfitting Stories: Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma*. Wilfred Laurier Press, 2007. Selected chapters.

Week VI - 19 October 2011

4TH JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 21 OCTOBER 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT)

VULNERABILITY – NARRATIVES (ILLNESS/DISABILITY) CONTINUED

Mairin Corker and Sally French eds. *Disability Discourse*. Open University Press, 1999. Chapters 2-6.

Simi Linton. *My Body Politic*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Week VII - 26 October 2011

VULNERABILITY – PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mairin Corker and Sally French eds. *Disability Discourse*. Open University Press, 1999. Chapters 7- 12.

Ruth O'Brien. *Bodies in Revolt: Gender, Disability and a Workplace Ethic of Care*. Routledge, 2005. Chapter 7. Reserved Readings UofC Library. (I may also hand out a copy of the chapter in class, if possible.)

Ani B. Satz. "Disability, Vulnerability, and the Limits of Antidiscrimination" *Washington Law Review*, Vol. 83, p. 513, 2008. Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Week VIII - 2 November 2011

5TH JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 4 NOVEMBER 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT)

VULNERABILITY – PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Chloe G. K. Atkins. "A Cripple at a Rich Man's Gate: A Comparison of Disability, Employment and Anti-discrimination Law." In *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, Vol 21, No 2, pp. 87-111 (2006). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

S. Chivers. "Move, You're in the Way! Disability and Age Meet on Screen." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol 17, No.1, pp. 30-43 (Spring 2008). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Ani B. Satz. "A Jurisprudence of Dysfunction: On the Role of 'Normal Species Functioning' in Disability Analysis." *Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law, and Ethics*, Vol. 6, p. 221, June 2006. Emory Public Law Research Paper No. 06-19. Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Robert McRuer. "Introduction." in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York University Press, 2006. Reserved Readings UofC Library. (I may also hand out a copy of the chapter in class, if possible.)

Week IX - 9 November 2011

6TH JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 11 NOVEMBER 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT)

VULNERABILITY- NARRATIVES (SEXUALITY/RACE) CONTINUED

Anthony Simpson. "Sons and Fathers/Boys to Men in the Time of AIDS: Learning Masculinity in Zambia." *Journal of South African Studies*. Vol. 31 No 3, (September 2005). Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Kenji Yoshino. *Covering: The Hidden Attack on Our Civil Rights*. Random House, 2006.

OR

Jocelyn Hollander. "Vulnerability and Dangerousness: The Construction of Gender through a Conversation about Violence." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Feb., 2001), pp. 83-109. Available as an online journal via UofC library.

Patricia Williams. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

Week X - 16 November 2011

VULNERABILITY- NARRATIVES (SEXUALITY/DISABILITY) CONTINUED

SICK: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan Supermasochist. Warning: some viewers/students may find material difficult or offensive – as a result, with permission of the instructor, students may opt to view a different film on their own time.

Week XI - 23 November 2011

7TH JOURNAL ENTRY DUE 25 NOVEMBER 2011 (BLACKBOARD DIGITAL DROPBOX BY MIDNIGHT)

FINAL TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT AT END OF CLASS

VULNERABILITY – PARTICIPANT ACTION RESEARCH

Meredith Minkler and Nina Wallerstein. *Community Based Participatory Research for Health*. Chapters 1, 2, 3 (pp.5-66), 5, 6, 7 (pp. 91- 136), 9, 10 (pp. 153-182), 14, 15 (pp. 243-284)

Barbara Schneider. *Hearing (Our) Voices: Participatory Research in Mental Health*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Week XII - 20 November 2011

VULNERABILITY – OVERVIEW AND RECAP

Week XII - 7 December 2011

VULNERABILITY - FINAL TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT DUE