

Cultures of Dis/ability (WST 392)

DEC H/SBC STAS

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By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances.

—Erving Goffman, *Stigma*

I situate disability not as the condition of being but of becoming, and this becoming is a historical event, and further, it is its material context that is critical in the theorizing of disabled bodies/subjectivities.

—Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts*

Disability, situated alongside other key lines of stratification such as race, class, nationality, and gender, is central to understanding the complex, varied, and interlocking ways in which incarceration occurs and is made out to be normal, natural, politically necessary, and beneficial.

—Liat Ben-Moshe, et al. *Disability Incarcerated*

In this course we will consider disability historically and cross-culturally, and investigate the shifting ways disability has been understood and misunderstood, celebrated and stigmatized, made invisible and made spectacular. We will look at various models for understanding disability, including the biomedical model and the social model, and we will analyze the emergence of the disability rights movement and disability studies in the university. We will approach disability and dis/ableism as categories of analysis, operating intersectionally with other categories, including race, gender, sexuality, and class. Because the “experiences” of disability are so varied (the concept covers physical and mental disabilities; visible and invisible disabilities; congenital, sudden, or progressive disabilities; permanent or temporary disabilities), and because most of us will, at some point in our lives, become disabled, investigating the “experiences” of disability gives us insight into the complicated and changing relationship between selves, bodies, and worlds. Investigating disability allows us to ask many questions, including: What makes humans human? What is the relationship between thought and language? How do we articulate experiences of the body? How are certain situations, including poverty, war, and incarceration, disabling?