

Sexuality, Gender, and Disability

GSWS 2223F (650) Summer 2026

Professor: Dr. Colangelo (jcolang2@uwo.ca)

Location: Online

Office Hours Location: Online via Zoom (see OWL site for link)

Office Hours Time: Fridays from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Official Course Summary

This interdisciplinary course brings a critical lens to the study of disability, sexuality and gender. A critical disability studies approach defines disability as a form of social oppression experienced by persons whose physical, cognitive or psychological characteristics fall outside of norms, which are understood to be fictional. Critical sexuality studies likewise explores sexuality as identities and practices that are historically, culturally and discursively produced. Employing disability, feminist, critical sexuality and queer theories, students will explore and question various issues effecting the sexual lives and subjectivities of persons with disabilities. Readings for this course will draw from an interdisciplinary range of critical writings in this emerging field.

All course material will be posted to OWL: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>. Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Learning Objectives

Students who complete this course can expect to:

- Develop awareness and understanding of the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, and ability
- Learn key concepts and ideas from disability studies
- Contextualize media and culture in terms of multiple models of disability
- Consider questions of identity intersectionally
- Build and enhance skills in critical thinking and scholarly argumentation

Assignments

- Reflection Essay – 25% – due at 11:55 p.m. on Friday, May 22
- Book Review Group Assignment – 25% – due at 11:55 p.m. on Friday, June 19
- Final Paper – 50% – due at 11:55 p.m. on Friday, July 24

Course Texts

All course texts are available online at no cost– on OWL in the Course Readings tab, or via the university library’s website. Students who prefer to use hard copies of their books are advised to purchase Alison Kafer’s *Feminist Queer Crip* as well as the text they will be discussing in the book review assignment (see Assignment Descriptions).

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Academic Consideration

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar: <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/academicconsiderationSep24.pdf>

This policy does not apply to requests for academic consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult: [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academicconsiderations/>

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course.

Recognition of First Nations Territory

Western University is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are 3 local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada.

AI Policy

AI is not to be used for research, writing, brainstorming, or any other class-related task. All writing and all thinking must be your own. I reserve the right to assign a grade of zero to any student found to have broken these rules.

Assignment Descriptions

*Note: Other than the lecture responses, which can be written directly into the OWL textbox, assignments are to be formatted according to the **MLA manual of style**.*

Reflection Essay: Choose a piece of media – a book, a film, an advertisement, a song, or something else – which you consider to have been an important contributor to your current understanding of gender and sexuality. You are to write an 500-750 word essay reflecting on the role of disability (or the exclusion of disability) in that text with special attention to how reflecting on the role of disability changes your understanding or impression of it. No texts need to be cited besides the one that the essay is about (though you are allowed to bring other texts in if you wish), but please be sure to incorporate concepts or ideas from the course.

Group Book Review: As a group, choose one of the books listed below (all available digitally via the library website). All members of each group are expected to read their book *in its entirety* and, together, write an academic book review of between 800 and 1,000 words. Academic book reviews do not merely summarize the contents and then declare the text good or bad. Instead, they critically engage with the text – analyzing its ideas, arguments, and sources – and express an informed evaluation of its contents. When marking these reviews, I am far less interested in whether you thought the book was good or bad as a whole than I am in how you engage with and think about the ideas. Reviews which critically engage with the text, whether out of agreement or disagreement, will do better than those which merely repeat its main points. Reviews should also pay special attention to each text's incorporation of issues related to gender and sexuality, and/or its use of feminist and queer theory, in relation to disability. For more information about the structure of academic book reviews, see this guide provided by the University of South Carolina: <https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=235208&p=1560694>

The books you have to choose from are:

- Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*
- Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*
- Sami Schalk, *Black Disability Politics*

Since this is an online class, I will be assigning the groups at random near the beginning of the course during the second week; if you have preferences as to who you wish to be grouped with, please let me know before then. If one or more members of your group drops the class or is otherwise unable to participate in the assignment, let me know ASAP. Group lists, and group members' UWO email addresses, will be posted on the front page of the OWL site. Groups are expected to meet (either in person or online) and discuss the text together to agree on the main points which the review will cover and should endeavour to divide the writing amongst themselves as evenly as possible. Failure to participate in writing or discussions could result in a zero for this assignment. Only one copy of the review needs to be submitted, and it should bear the first and last names of each group member.

Final Paper: Students are to write a paper of between 1,000 and 1,250 words analyzing a piece of media of their choice in terms of gender, sexuality, and disability. The piece of media being analyzed cannot have been discussed in any of the previous assignments, and the essay must cite at least three texts discussed in the course (which may include the books from the book review assignment). The essay must include a thesis statement and that thesis statement must be written

in italics. Essays will be graded on the quality of their arguments, both in terms of the strength of their thesis but also how well it is supported. Students should endeavour to make their arguments as narrow and specific as possible, and to focus their argument on the roles of gender, sexuality, and disability with respect to the piece of media which they are analyzing.

Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the [policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#) . Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but **not later than two weeks** prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Religious Accommodation requests for final exams should be submitted via the Student Absence Portal.

Academic Accommodation and Accessible Education

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.” <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with **Accessible Education** at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students” <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

Special Examinations

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

Support Services

Academic Advising

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/facultyacademiccounselling.html>

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>.

Course Schedule

Note: Each week will have several Required readings (indicated with an R) and possibly an Optional reading (indicated with an O). Required readings will be directly addressed in lectures and knowledge of them will be needed to ensure your success in this course. Optional readings are additional texts which interested students are encouraged to read in order to improve their understanding of the topic. Students are expected to have read the required readings prior to watching the lecture for each week. All readings are available online via OWL (in the Course Readings tab) and/or the university library. Lectures will be uploaded on Thursdays.

Week 1 (Begins May 4)

- R Tobin Siebers, “Body Theory: From Social Construction to the New Realism of the Body” in *Disability Theory*
- R Judith Butler, “The Compulsory Order of Sex/Gender/Desire” in *Gender Trouble* (note, this is a short sub-section of a chapter, spanning pages 8-10; the full chapter, called “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire,” can be considered an Optional reading)

Week 2 (May 11)

- R Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion” in *Bodies that Matter*
- R Tobin Siebers, “Disability as Masquerade” in *Disability Theory*
- O Jennie Livingston (dir.), *Paris is Burning* (can be streamed via the Library)

Week 3 (May 18)

- R Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness” in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*
- R Eli Clare, “Violence of Cure” in *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*
- R Lennard J. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy” in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*
- O Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” in *Journal of Women’s History* vol. 15, no. 3 (2001): 11-48. Reprinted with a new foreword by the author.
- REFLECTION ESSAY DUE ON FRIDAY AT 11:55 P.M.

Week 4 (May 25)

- R Jasbir K. Puar, “Disability,” in *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* vol. 1, no. 1 (2014): 77-81. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399659>
- R Susan Stryker, “A Hundred-Plus Years of Transgender History,” in *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*
- O Stef Schuster, “Uncertain Expertise in Trans Medicine,” in *Trans Medicine: The Emergence and Practice of Treating Gender*

Week 5 (June 1)

- R Alison Kafer, “Introduction: Imagined Futures,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Joel Michael Reynolds, “Theories of Disability,” in *The Life Worth Living: Disability, Pain, and Mortality*

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- Q Lerita M. Coleman-Brown, “Stigma: An Enigma Demystified” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, 5th ed.

Week 6 (June 8)

- R Alison Kafer, “Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Lee Edelman, “The Future is Kid Stuff,” in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*
- Q Ellen Samuels, “Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time,” in *Disability Studies Quarterly* vol. 37, no. 3 (2017): np. <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/5824/4684>

Week 7 (June 15)

- R Alison Kafer, “At the Same Time, Out of Time: Ashley X,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Julian Gill-Peterson, “From Johns Hopkins to the Midwest: Transgender Childhood in the 1960s,” in *Histories of the Transgender Child*
- Q Jennifer L. Stevenson, Bev Harp, and Morton Ann Gernsbacher, “Infantilizing Autism,” in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2011): np. <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1675>
- GROUP BOOK REVIEW DUE ON FRIDAY AT 11:55 P.M.

Week 8 (June 22)

- R Alison Kafer, “Debating Feminist Futures: Slippery Slopes, Cultural Anxiety, and the Case of the Deaf Lesbians,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, “The Eugenic Atlantic: Disability and the Making of an International Science” in *Cultural Locations of Disability*
- Q José Esteban Muñoz, “Introduction: Feeling Utopia,” in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*

Week 9 (June 29)

- R Alison Kafer, “A Future for Whom? Passing on Billboard Liberation,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Tobin Siebers, “Disability and Art Vandalism,” in *Disability Aesthetics*
- Q Ato Quayson, “Introduction: Aesthetic Nervousness,” in *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*

Week 10 (July 6)

- R Alison Kafer, “The Cyborg and the Crip: Critical Encounters,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Helen Hester, “What is Xenofeminism?,” in *Xenofeminism*
- Q Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*

Week 11 (July 13)

- R Alison Kafer, “Bodies of Nature: The Environmental Politics of Disability,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*

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- R Mel Y. Chen, “Introduction: Animating Animacy,” in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*

Week 12 (July 20)

- R Alison Kafer, “Accessible Futures, Future Coalitions,” in *Feminist Queer Crip*
- R Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*
- FINAL ESSAYS DUE ON FRIDAY AT 11:55 P.M.