

Feminist Disability Studies
WS 5663.01, Women's Studies Seminar

Texas Woman's University, Spring 2009
Tuesdays 6:00-8:50pm in ASB 209

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HDB 307E

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Office Hours: Tues. 12:30-1:50 and Thurs. 12:30-2:10; also by appointment

*Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains
against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race...
everything finally piling into a single body.*
- Eli Clare

Course Description:

Disability Studies is a new interdisciplinary field that has much to offer feminist and queer theories. In this course we examine how it helps in building theory and activism that embrace and include multiple subjectivities and epistemological differences. Disability scholars have been breaking new ground in analyzing body politics, intersectional theory, genetic and reproductive politics, sexuality, and the ethics of care and interdependence. This scholarship challenges the violences of normalcy stemming from ableist, individualist, and liberal politics. Each political issue considered through theorizing that is inclusive of disability offers new horizons for thinking and new ground for action. We will explore some of these new horizons through theory, autobiography, essay, and film/video.

Course Objectives:

- To gain appreciation for the new field of Disability Studies and to understand its central tenets and concerns
- To develop tools for analysis that draw from feminist, queer, and disability perspectives and theories
- To consider some of the challenges Disability Studies brings to feminism and queer theory and the possibilities it opens
- To think about struggles for social justice through intersectional lenses which consider complex, multiple, and mobile subjectivities

Required Texts:

- Simi Linton, My Body Politic, 2007.
- Nancy Mairs, Waist-High in the World: A Life among the Nondisabled, 2006.
- Robert McRuer, Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability, 2006.
- Bonnie Smith & Beth Hutchinson, eds, Gendering Disability, 2004.
- Additional articles and materials will be made available via BlackBoard.

Recommended Texts:

- Eli Clare, Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation, 1999.
- Lennard Davis, The Disability Studies Reader, 2nd Ed., 2006.
- Harriet McBryde Johnson, Too Late to Die Young, 2005.
- Joseph Shapiro, No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement, 1994.
- Margrit Shildrick, Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self, 2002.
- Susan Wendell, The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability, 1996.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you anticipate the need for reasonable accommodations to meet the requirements of this course, you must register with the office of Disability Support Services (HDB 002, 940-898-3835, dss@twu.edu) in order to obtain the required official notification of your accommodation needs. Please plan to meet with me by appointment or during office hours to discuss approved accommodations and how my course requirements and activities may impact your ability to fully participate.

Course Requirements:

Grades will be calculated on a 600 point scale.

- Participation (40% total):
 - Classroom Participation (15%, 90 pts): Your participation is the most important component of this class. A successful class depends upon everyone coming to class having done the reading and prepared to engage in discussion. Thoughtful engagement does not simply mean speaking a lot. It includes listening attentively, making connections to the readings and comments by others, asking informed questions, offering critique, and so forth. Participation also includes posting continued discussion comments or related resources to the class Discussion Board on Bb. In order to foster classroom participation, you will post discussion questions before each class and do response notes every other week.
 - Discussion Questions (10%, 60pts): In order to prime everyone for discussion, you will be responsible for posting 1-2 discussion questions to the “Discussion Question” Wiki on Bb by 9pm the evening before class. You will post questions for classes 2/3 through 4/28 – 12 classes with each post worth up to 5 points. Questions should be 2-4 sentences long and demonstrate your critical analysis of the readings. They can focus on one reading in particular, but I encourage you to try to put the readings in conversation and to find challenging questions that emanate from that interaction. If someone else has asked a question similar to yours, come up with another one you are interested in.
 - Response Notes (15%, 90 pts): To help me gauge where everyone is with the readings, and to help you delve into them, you will be submitting response notes by 9pm every other Monday. Half the class will be responsible for the readings on six odd weeks and the remaining half for six even weeks between 2/3 and 4/28.

Each response note is worth up to 15 points. The response notes should be submitted using the Bb Assignments feature as MS Word documents (or in Rich Text Format if you don't have Word), and should be 400-700 words (try to fit them on one page single-spaced; be sure to include your name and the date of the readings you are responding to). You may explore one of your discussion questions, critique some aspect of the readings, grapple with different possible interpretations, or suggest connections with other readings. I do not want a summary of the readings. This is a chance for you to share your thinking directly with me. While these are not formal papers, please attend to proper grammar and spelling.

- Leading Discussion (25%, 150 pts): You will be asked to lead discussion for one of our class sessions. You will prepare a presentation on the materials for that day which gives background information on the authors, summarizes the main arguments of each piece, and discusses connections between the readings. Be creative in your presentation so that you engage the class: use brainstorming, group activities, debates, PowerPoint, multimedia materials, etc. You will also prepare a handout summarizing your presentation to be posted on Bb by 9pm the night before. More information about this assignment will be provided in class.
- Final Paper (35%, 210 pts): A 10-12 page final paper is due 5/5 at the beginning of class. Topics can be drawn from any of the gamut of issues dealt with in the course. Papers must utilize at least three of the course readings and three outside sources, using MLA citation style. More information about this assignment will be provided in class.

Late or Missing Work

Assignments are due as indicated above or announced in class. You must complete all assignments to pass this class. Late assignments will be docked by 25% for each day they are late. It is not fair to your classmates for you to take extra time on an assignment. I will not accept emailed papers except in extraordinary circumstances if you have obtained prior permission. For your protection, keep a file of all your graded work in case any questions arise about an assignment or grade.

Attendance

This small graduate seminar will not be successful unless everyone shows up for each class ready to engage. Therefore, attendance is mandatory, which necessarily means being in class on time and staying the full period. Your final grade will be dropped by 30 points for each unexcused absence after the first two (absences will be excused with documentation from the Office of Student Life; see TWU Attendance Policy: <http://www.twu.edu/o-sl/StudentLifeOffice/AttendancePolicy.html>). It goes without saying that excused absences should be avoided when at all possible since you obviously cannot participate if you do not attend and we only have 16 class sessions. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes and find out about assignments from a classmate.

Conduct

It is important in this seminar that we create as safe a space as possible for all involved. Discussions of ability, race, gender, identity, privilege, oppression, and power challenge all of us. I expect that there will be times in class when we will each feel uncomfortable, angry, sad, confused and/or depressed because we will be dealing with difficult topics and having previously held beliefs/theories unsettled. I need for you to exercise self-care and to reach toward empathy for your classmates (remember, TWU offers free counseling services to students). If you are someone who tends to talk a lot in class, monitor yourself and allow silences for others to step into. If you tend not to speak in class, I want you to challenge yourself to be more vocal.

Think of others in class as peers who will help make you smarter, rather than rivals in competition. I expect us to disagree, and believe disagreement enriches class by stimulating our thinking, but we have to find ways to disagree respectfully. Here are some suggestions:

- Describe your reactions with “I” statements (i.e. “I was uncomfortable when you said...” rather than “Your comment made me uncomfortable...”)
- Be as specific as possible (relate what you are saying to what has already been said or to a specific part of a text; state the reasoning behind your position; avoid broad generalizations)
- Concentrate on sharing information, ideas and experiences, rather than giving advice, persuading, cajoling, or judging.
- Check with others to ensure they have a shared understanding of what is being communicated (i.e. “I hear you saying X, is that correct,” or “I read this author as arguing Y, is that what others got?”)

Academic Integrity

This class assumes that all participants are doing the assignments with integrity. TWU’s policy on Academic Dishonesty states: “Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure or removal from a course, disciplinary probation, and/or dismissal from the University. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, collusion, fabrication, falsification, falsifying academic records and other acts intentionally designed to provide unfair advantage to the student and/or the attempt to commit such acts.” (see: <http://www.twu.edu/o-sl/StudentLifeOffice/AcademicDishonesty.html>).

You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with all TWU student policies, especially those regarding academic dishonesty. As this is a graduate course, I am assuming you know the rules for proper citation and how to avoid plagiarism. If you do not, you need to educate yourself (start with the library web site and come to me with further questions). In this class, if you plagiarize, commit or attempt to commit another act of academic dishonesty, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment, have your actions reported to Student Life, and probably fail the course.

Course Schedule

Be aware that some changes in this schedule are likely as we flex around unforeseen obstacles and opportunities. Any changes will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to stay on top of them. (GD = Gendering Disability anthology, other readings will be posted on Bb unless they are the Linton, Mairs, or McRuer required texts).

I. Feminist Disability Studies

This section provides the groundwork from which the course develops by exploring various definitions and concerns of feminist disability studies. We first discuss ableism and the rise of Disability Studies in the academy. We then read foundational works in feminist disability studies by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Susan Wendell. Feminist disability studies encourages us to consider the activist and theoretical openings made possible when both gender and disability are centered.

Guiding Questions:

What does “feminist” disability studies help us see and what questions does it help us ask? What are some of the challenges feminist disability studies raise for mainstream feminism? How has feminism participated in ableism? What are some productive interrelations between gender, sexuality and disability?

1/20 Course introduction, individual introductions, & video: *Disability Culture Rap* (13 min)

1/27 Sign up for preferred dates to lead discussion. Response Notes groups assigned.

- Rohrer, Ableism encyclopedia entry
- Davis, “Crips Strike back: The Rise of Disability Studies”
- Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies”
- Wendell, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability”

2/3 First Response Notes & Discussion Questions due & streaming video: *Disabled Women: Visions and Voices from the 4th World Conference on Women* (14 min)

- Rohrer, “Toward a Full-Inclusion Feminism”
- Brekenridge & Vogler, “The Critical Limits of Embodiment”
- Corker, “Disability Discourse in a Postmodern World”
- Asch, “Critical Race Theory, Feminism, and Disability” (GD, Gendering Disability)

2/10

- May & Ferri, “Fixated on Ability”
- Meekosha, “Body Battles: Bodies, Gender and Disability”
- Couser, “Signifying Bodies: Life Writing and Disability Studies”

II. Activism, Art, Performance

Like many social movements, the disability movement has an academic arm (Disability Studies), and a cultural arm that includes music, art, performance, literature, web technologies, and so forth. In this section we explore disability art and activism with

particular attention to some of their intersections including modes of challenging degrading images of disability and offering more positive representations. The disability movement suffers from some of the same limitations of other social movements with regard to class, sexuality, race, gender and so forth. We think about who is included and who is excluded, and we learn more about the social/cultural model of disability including its strengths and limitations.

Guiding Questions:

What images or ideas about disability are common in our society, what images of disabled women? How are they promulgated? How do disability activists try to address some of the stereotypes and misconceptions? What images or ideas are not present, i.e. what are the silences? How do disability activists sometimes reinforce other oppressions regarding other marginalized or non-dominant categories? What issues do activists regard as having primary importance? How does art relate to activism? What does it mean to talk about “disability culture,” does the phrase have coherence? How might it relate to “feminist culture?”

Recommended:

- Harriet McBryde Johnson, Too Late to Die Young, 2005
- Joseph Shapiro, No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement, 1994.

2/17 Video: *Freedom, Equality, and Justice for All* (29 min)

- 1st half of Linton book (through Ch 9 “What I Learned”)
- Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History”
- O’Toole, “The Sexist Inheritance of the Disability Movement” (GD)
- Morris, “Impairment and Disability”

2/24 **Speakers from Disability Action Center in Dallas**

- 2nd half of Linton book (from “Weddings and Marriages” to the end)
- Greeley, “Disability, Gender and National Identity in the Painting of Frida Kahlo” (GD)
- Davis, “Bodies of Difference: Politics, Disability, and Representation”
- Web resources on “This Island Alone” play about Martha’s Vineyard

3/3 Video: *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back* (48 min)

- Snyder & Mitchell, “Re-engaging the Body: Disability Studies and the resistance to Embodiment”
- Sandahl, “Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer?”

III. Body Politics & Gender

Disability Studies and activism has much to offer theorizing regarding body politics and gender constructions. Disability advocates insist that society accommodate those with nonnormative bodies/minds and not visa versa. This is similar to feminists insisting society make space for the spectrum of gender, not just masculinity. Women with disabilities deal on a daily basis with discrimination and marginalization because of their multiple

differences. Centering their concerns can help highlight ableist assumptions in feminist theory. Additionally, men with disabilities are seen as feminized and often have to rethink their notions of masculinity. In this section we also consider how physical disabilities continue to receive more attention than those that are developmental, cognitive, or sensory.

Guiding Questions:

In what ways does thinking about body politics and gender relations from a disability perspective support, challenge, or broaden contemporary feminist theorizing? What does Nancy Mairs say about how her disability relates to her identities as a woman, an academic, a writer, a lover? Does any of this resonate with your life experience? What evidence have you seen of ableism in feminist theorizing and practice, and how should the question of intentionality be dealt with? What do you make of the critique of physicalism in Disability Studies?

Recommended:

- Eli Clare, Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation, 1999
- Margrit Shildrick, Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self, 2002
- Susan Wendell, The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability, 1996

3/10

- Mairs book
- Lindgren, “Bodies in Trouble: Identity, Embodiment and Disability” (GD)

3/24 Video: *Diana & Kathy: Body & Soul* (40 min)

- Wendell, “Feminism, Disability, and the Transcendence of the Body”
- Samuels “Critical Divides: Judith Butler’s Body Theory and the Question of Disability”
- Kafer, “Inseparable: Gender and Disability in the Amputee-devotee Community” (GD)

3/31 Streaming video: *In my Language* (9 min)

- Bumiller, “Quirky Citizens: Autism, Gender and Reimagining Disability”
- Nicki, “The Abused Mind: Feminist Theory, Psychiatric Disability, and Trauma”
- Shuttleworth, “Disabled Masculinity: Expanding the Masculine Repertoire” (GD)

IV. Choice v. Eugenics

The politics of reproductive “choice” take on a new dimension when considered through a disability rights framework. This week we will think about prenatal testing, abortion, kinship, quality of life, eugenics and the medicalization of our lives. Considering these questions forces us to consider the cultural depth of ableism and the radical alternative notion of valuing/celebrating/desiring the differences of disability.

Guiding Questions:

What is the disability argument regarding selective abortion and what is your analysis of it? What are the ties to eugenics and genocide? If we think it is appropriate, how can we educate people to think beyond a narrow reproductive rights framework? Who should be responsible for this education, nondisabled people, disabled people?

Recommended:

- Adrienne Asch and Erik Parens, Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights, 2002

4/7 Video: *Gimp Parade* (selected shorts)

- Asch, “Why I Haven’t Changed My Mind about Prenatal Diagnosis: Reflections and Refinements”
- Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion”
- Johnson, “Unspeakable Conversations or How I spent a day as a Token Cripple at Princeton University”
- Rapp & Ginsburg, “Enabling Disability: Rewriting Kinship, Reimagining Citizenship”

V. Sexuality

Thinking about sexuality through a disability perspective also opens doors previously shut. This is primarily the case because disabled sexuality has been considered an oxymoron, an impossibility. When sexuality is tied to reproduction, as it is in dominant heterosexual discourse, health slides quickly into eugenics, fetal rights take precedence over women’s rights, queer sexuality is inherently perverted, misinformation about living with a disability holds sway, and pleasure is no where to be found. Disabled activists and scholars are forcing us to rethink the ways we think about sexuality.

Guiding Questions:

In what ways does thinking about sexuality through disability change your thinking? Does it change what you consider to be sex or sexuality? Can disability be sexy and desirable? Will we ever see love for someone’s disability as anything other than kinky or abnormal? How do ableist notions about the body discipline sexuality?

4/14 Streaming video: *Sins Invalid 2008 (excerpts)*

- Clare, “Gawking, Gaping, Staring”
- McRuer book: Intro and “Coming out Crip”
- Samuels, “My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming-out Discourse”

4/21

- McRuer: “Composing Queerness and Disability”
- Clare, “Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness”
- Kafer, “Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-bodiedness”

4/28 Last Response Notes & Discussion Questions due

- McRuer: “Capitalism and Disabled Identity” & “Crip Eye for the Normate Guy”
- Hall “Queerness, Disability and *The Vagina Monologues*”

VI. Interdependence & Care

Feminists have long been interested in the ethics of care and have developed a substantial literature on the topic that mainly centers questions of gender and domestic labor. Disability activists are asking for a revamping of notions of independence, health, illness and care for all people. Their ideas challenge individualist notions of independence and success and favor a valuing of our interrelation and interdependence.

Guiding Questions:

How do ideas about strength and independence work against a more inclusive politics? How are notions of the “super crip” and the “super mom” related to this? What evidence have you encountered of feminist politics valuing independence at the expense of interdependence? What are some of the ways disability is related to ageism?

5/5 Final Papers Due

- Overall, “Old Age and Ageism, Impairment and Ableism”
- Saxton, “Caring for Aunt Alice”
- Wendell, “Unhealthy Disabled: Treating Chronic Illness as Disability”
- Shildrick & Price, “Breaking the Boundaries of the Broken Body”

5/12 Final course wrap up, return papers

Full Citations for Course Materials
(in Chicago B style)

- Asch, Adrienne. 2002. Why I Haven't Changed My Mind About Prenatal Diagnosis: Reflections and Refinements. In *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights*, edited by E. Parens and A. Asch. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Baynton, Douglas C. 2001. Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History. In *The New Disability History : American Perspectives*, edited by P. K. Longmore and L. Umansky. New York: New York University Press.
- Breckenridge, Carol Appadurai, and Candace A. Vogler. 2001. The Critical Limits of Embodiment: Disability's Criticism. *Public Culture* 13 (3):349-357.
- Bumiller, Kristin. 2008. Quirky Citizens: Autism, Gender, and Reimagining Disability. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 33 (4):967-991.
- Chadwick, Pat, and Suzanne Levine. *Disabled Women: Visions and Voices from the 4th World Conference on Women*. Wide Vision Productions 1996 [cited. Available from <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4833198064580117217>].
- Clare, Eli. 1999. *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness and Liberation*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- — —. 2001. Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness. *Public Culture* 13 (3):359-365.
- — —. 2003. Gawking, Gaping, Staring. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9 (1):257-261.
- Corker, Mairian. 1998. Disability Discourse in a Postmodern World. In *The Disability Reader : Social Science Perspectives*, edited by T. Shakespeare. London ; New York: Cassell.
- Couser, G. Thomas. 2002. Signifying Bodies: Life Writing and Disability Studies. In *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, edited by S. L. Snyder, B. J. Brueggemann and R. Garland-Thomson. New York: Modern Language Association of America.
- Davis, Lennard J. 1999. Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies. *American Literary History* 11 (3):500-512.
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- — —, ed. 2006. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. 2005. Feminist Disability Studies. *Signs* 30 (2):1557-1587.
- Hall, Kim Q. 2005. Queerness, Disability, and the Vagina Monologues. *Hypatia* 20 (1):99-119.
- Johnson, Harriet McBryde. 2003. Unspeakable Conversations or How I spent a day as a Token Cripple at Princeton University. *The New York Times Magazine*, February 16.
- — —. 2005. *Too Late to Die Young*. 1st ed. New York: Henry Holt and Co.
- Kafer, Alison. 2003. Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-Bodiedness. *Journal of Women's History* 15 (3):77-89.
- Linton, Simi. 2006. *My Body Politic : A Memoir*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Longmore, Paul K., and Lauri Umansky. 2001. *The New Disability History : American Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Mairs, Nancy. 1996. *Waist-High in the World : A Life among the Nondisabled*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- May, Vivian M., and Beth A. Ferri. 2005. Fixated on Ability. *Prose Studies* 27 (1):120-140.
- McRuer, Robert. 2006. *Crip Theory : Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press.
- Meekosha, Helen. 1998. Body Battles: Bodies, Gender and Disability. In *The Disability Reader : Social Science Perspectives*, edited by T. Shakespeare. London ; New York: Cassell.
- Mitchell, David. 1998. *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*. Boston, MA: Fanlight Productions. videorecording.
- Morris, Jenny. 2001. Impairment and Disability: Constructing an Ethics of Care That Promotes Human Rights. *Hypatia* 16 (4):1-16.
- Nicki, Andrea. 2001. The Abused Mind: Feminist Theory, Psychiatric Disability, and Trauma. *Hypatia* 16 (4):80-104.
- Overall, Christine. 2006. Old Age and Ageism, Impairment and Ableism: Exploring the Conceptual and Material Connections. *NWSA Journal* 18 (1):126-137.
- Parens, Erik, and Adrienne Asch. 2002. *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Rapp, Rayna, and Faye D. Ginsburg. 2001. Enabling Disability: Rewriting Kinship, Reimagining Citizenship. *Public Culture* 13 (3):533-556.
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- . 2003. My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming-out Discourse. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9 (1):233-255.
- Sandahl, Carrie. 2003. 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):25-56.
- Saxton, Marsha. 2005. Caring for Aunt Alice. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 16 (1):61-67.
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- Shildrick, Margrit, and Janet Price. 1999. Breaking the Boundaries of the Broken Body. In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, edited by J. Price and M. Shildrick. New York: Routledge.
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- Snyder, Sharon L., and David T. Mitchell. 2001. Re-Engaging the Body: Disability Studies and the Resistance to Embodiment. *Public Culture* 13 (3):367-389.
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- — —. 2006. Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability. In *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by L. J. Davis. New York: Routledge.

Videos & Streaming Video

- Baggs, A M. *In My Language* [Streaming video] 2007 [cited. Available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>].
- Chadwick, Pat, and Suzanne Levine. *Disabled Women: Visions and Voices from the 4th World Conference on Women*. Wide Vision Productions 1996 [cited. Available from <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4833198064580117217>].
- Elliott, Alice. 2004? *Body & Soul: Diana & Kathy*. Harriman, NY: New Day Films. DVD.
- Faust, Mickee. 2008. *Gimp Parade*. Tallahassee, FL. DVD.
- Freedom, Equality and Justice for All*. 1996. Syracuse: Program Development Associates. DVD.
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- Sins Invalid* [Streaming video] 2008 [cited. Available from http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=sins+invalid&search_type=&aq=0&oq=sins+inval].