WS 306-4 Women's Autobiographies, Memoirs and Journals: Autobiographies of Transsexuality, Illness, and Disability

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Thursdays, 8:30 – 12:20
WMC 3253

Course Description:
In response to medical narratives about transsexuality, illness, and disability, individuals living with these so-called “dysfunctional” bodies reclaim their voices through autobiography. In this course, we will read these personal narratives and examine the similarities and differences, focusing on their shared themes of pain and suffering, journey, and transformation. Starting from the question of why these experiences of the body lend themselves to the particular expression of autobiographical language, we will consider what we can learn about the nature of embodiment from these stories, including an exploration of the issues of sex, gender, and (dis)ability, self and other, and normal and abnormal.
As well as books, we will also engage with other forms of autobiographical expression such as film, radio, stand-up comedy, and blog. Students will be introduced to ideas from critical feminist and queer perspectives, as well as transgender studies and disability theory, and examine them in relation to the autobiographical genre.

Course Texts and Courseware:
Sacks, Oliver, A Leg to Stand On (Harper Collins, 1984)
Lorde, Audre, The Cancer Journals (aunt lute books, 1980)
Clare, Eli, Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation (South End Press, 1999)
Course Reader (including theoretical essays)

Film/Radio/Performance
She’s a Boy I Knew (dir. Gwen Haworth, 2007)
Bonnie & Gladys (Bonnie Sherr Klein, CBC Morningside, October 1994)
Performing Live at the Improv (Ian Harvie, 2009)

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Attendance and Participation: 20%
Journal Responses: 10%
Short Paper: 20%
Creative Group Project: 15%
Final Paper Proposal: 5%
Final Paper: 30%

Prerequisite: Six units in Women's Studies or Gender Studies.