

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGING

Winter 2022

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Lecture: Mondays | 2:30 – 5:20 PM

Location: LRW 5001
Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

This course draws on perspectives in critical gerontology to explore issues related to the political, social, and cultural aspects of aging.

Over the years, the socio-cultural context, the meanings of aging, and public responses to older people have changed. Also changed is what it means to engage in critical scholarship with regards to aging. The study of aging now regularly reaches across inter-disciplinary boundaries to take account of social, cultural and economic perspectives, and regularly includes subjects ranging from identity, to the body, to social exclusion, space, and 'age' itself.

This course explores the foundations and developments in the fields of social and critical gerontology in order to understand current approaches to the study of aging and late life. It engages in a critical review in order to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions and expand the boundaries of our current research and practice.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Critically appraise an area of aging
- Identify key developments and trends within gerontology
- Situate scholarship and their work within the available critical traditions
- Highlight major tensions or contradictions in the field
- Identify emerging issues and contemporary challenges
- Reach across disciplines and approaches to explore alternate forms of knowledge and ways of knowing

Required Materials and Texts

There is no required text for this course. Required readings will take the form of journal articles, book chapters, news articles, and multimedia (podcasts, video, etc.). Links to these online readings and other media corresponding to weekly topics may be found on the course website on Avenue to Learn (A2L).

Recommended (helpful) books:

- De Medeiros, K. (2016). *The short guide to aging and gerontology*. Policy Press.
- Funk, L. (2016). *Sociological perspectives on aging*. Oxford University Press.
- Phillipson, C. (2013). *Ageing*. Policy Press.

Class Format

This is a seminar style course held on Monday afternoons from 2:30pm – 5:20pm (online classes are unlikely to meet synchronously for the full class time). A link to our weekly meetings will be posted each week on Avenue to Learn using the calendar tool.

Even more than the reading and writing you will be doing throughout the term, the core ideas of this course will emerge through our class discussions. In a seminar course such as this one, students and the teacher are equal partners in research and study. You are equally responsible for the format of our individual class sessions and for the quality of our discussions. Accordingly, a seminar style course format requires active participation, attendance and contribution from all members of the class. Participation in class discussion, after careful reading of and reflection on course material, is indispensable for your success. As such, attendance and participation will comprise a significant part of your grade. You are expected to attend every class, to have completed the assigned readings/viewings for each class, and to come ready to participate in class discussions. Self-reflection, open exchange of ideas, and critical analysis are encouraged. Come to class prepared to share your insightful reflections, ready to share what you know (or are learning!) in discussion with other students, ready to point to specific passages/scenes/sites of interest, and with questions and/or curiosities to pose to the group.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Class engagement – 20% (throughout the term)
2. Class facilitation – 25% (dates as assigned)
3. Research paper
 - a. Academic paper abstract and peer feedback workshop – 5% | February 7th & February 14th
 - b. Academic paper presentation – 15% | March 28th
 - c. Academic paper – 35% | April 8th

Course Evaluation – Details

Assignment 1 | Class engagement (20%), due throughout the term

Class participation grades in this course will be based upon (a) the quality of the discussion each week; (b) observed mastery of the required readings assigned each week; (c) observed ability to engage other students in discussion relevant to the course; (d) consistency of participation in the course. Allowances will be made for differences in personal style.

I put a high premium on a participatory class and I expect students to engage in an active, collegial, and respectful manner. Class participation means not only offering relevant and informed opinions and insights, but also asking questions, working constructively with other students, and listening/reading. Being prepared means you have read the assigned readings, have notes/links on ideas to advance during our Zoom meetings, have good questions (confusions are good, too!), and much more than a summary understanding of the reading. Find a place in the texts that get your brain buzzing and choose to focus on one or two places with more effort. Come prepared to contribute to our collective understanding of the topics of the week. Your personal investments and positions in relationship to this material are important. This class will never happen the same way again, and that is because you are here, with this particular group of colleagues, at this particular moment. Your participation mark also relies on

your timely submission of assignments. Your timely and considered execution of course assignments will demonstrate to me that you are actively participating in the class in relation to course materials and class conversations. Disruptive or disrespectful behaviours will have a negative impact on your participation and preparation grade.

Assignment 2 | Class facilitation (25%), dates as assigned

From the third class onwards, students will create, conduct, and lead our weekly seminars. The sign-up for a specific week will take place after we conclude the first class (a link will be made available under 'Week 1' on Avenue to Learn), and whether this is done solo, pairs, or trios will depend on final enrolment numbers.

As part of your facilitation, you will:

- Provide critical presentation of your week's overarching topic/concept
 - Part of your work is to discern the best format in which to present your 'lecture'
 - Part of your 'lecture' will include an overview to the week's readings
 - In addition to the two readings that have been selected, you will select and post one additional reading that fits within the week's topic and that speaks to your own interests or curiosities (for a total of three readings per week)
 - You will post your selected third reading by the Friday (noon) prior to our Monday class
 - Note that you may choose to incorporate additional information and material (eg. readings, videos, podcasts, etc.) from outside of the course readings, if desired
 - Your presentation should be 45mins – 60mins
 - In addition to speaking to the readings, presentations must include descriptive and analytical elements that link your week's topic/concept to the broader landscape of critical gerontology (e.g., what does this reveal about aging?; how does it challenge our current knowledge and practice?) and will demonstrate familiarity with the conceptual/theoretical issues. You might choose to ground your presentation in an example.
 - If we are meeting virtually (to be determined), you may elect to pre-record your presentation and show it during our class time to avoid technological woes.
- Lead a discussion
 - After your lecture, you will lead a fulsome discussion period - come prepared with questions to ask and/or curiosities that you're still mulling over
 - You might consider having the class complete a short exercise or activity or you might make use of the 'breakout room' feature on Zoom (if presenting virtually)
 - The discussion portion of your facilitation should span approximately 45-60 minutes

- Your classmates will support your facilitation and will come prepared to participate as an active and engaged audience (having read through the readings, having their own questions prepared, etc.)

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions and/or would like to discuss your ideas for your seminar facilitation.

Assignment 3 | Research paper

There are three, scaffolded components to this third assignment:

1. Research paper outline and peer feedback workshop – 5% | February 7th & February 14th
 - This is an opportunity to begin thinking about the topic you will explore in-depth for your final research paper
 - Your abstract/outline will be 250-500 words
 - In this abstract, you will outline an introduction to the topic/problem/issue; a potential theoretical perspective/standpoint you will undertake; and a brief discussion of what this means both for the study of aging and/or what this might contribute to the field.
 - You will post your abstract to the corresponding A2L Forum thread by February 7th
 - I will pair you with a classmate who will read your abstract and who will come up with potential questions and feedback (and for whom you will do the same)
 - You will meet for 20-30 minutes with your partner during class time on February 14th to share your feedback with one another
2. Research paper workshop presentation – 15% | April 1st
 - Students will develop a short oral presentation of their research paper and present this to the class during a workshop on Monday, April 1st.
 - Each of you will prepare a brief (no more than 10 minutes) presentation of the material for your final paper
 - You will be able to use feedback from the question time as you continue to develop your research paper.
3. Research paper – 35% | April 8th
 - Using feedback from the abstract workshop and the presentation, you will compose an academic paper on the contemporary issue of your choice, taking up a critical perspective as learned throughout our course.
 - The paper must present a clear argument and evidence for your point. It must include a clear theoretical perspective/standpoint, articulation of challenges/contradictions for the field, discussion of what this means both for the study of aging, and an incorporation of the voices or experiences of older people.

- The paper will be ~15-18 double spaced pages.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (January 10, 2022) | Introductions and course overview

Readings:

- Katz, S. (2014). What is age studies? *Age Culture Humanities*, 1(1), 17-23.

Video:

- CBC. (2020). Aging well Suzuki style [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://gem.cbc.ca/media/the-nature-of-things/s59e16>

Notes:

- We will be meeting virtually for this first class (Zoom link posted on A2L)
- Please come to our class prepared to share a short introduction
- Select facilitation date (and pairs) – link in A2L (under “Week 1”)

Week 2 (January 17, 2022) | Critical perspectives on aging

Readings:

- Chazan, M. (2020). Unsettling aging futures: Challenging colonial-normativity in social gerontology. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 14(1), 91-119.
- Grenier, A. (2012). Critical perspectives on ageing and the lifecourse. In *Transitions and the Life Course: Challenging the constructions of growing old* (pp. 19-36). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Katz, S. (2015). Five eye-openers in my life of critical gerontology. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 10(1), 21-34.
- Minkler, M. (1996). Critical perspectives on ageing: New challenges for gerontology. *Ageing and Society*, 16(4), 467-487.

Notes:

- Come prepared to discuss the above readings (questions, curiosities, related readings you've encountered, etc.) and come prepared to share your understandings of what 'critical' means to you
- Student facilitators for Week 3: post your reading by Friday, January 21st at noon

Week 3 (January 24, 2022) | Expectations of later life: Successful aging

Readings:

- Katz, S., & Calasanti, T. (2015). Critical perspectives on successful aging: Does it "appeal more than it illuminates"? *The Gerontologist*, 55(1), 26-33.
- Sandberg, L. J., & Marshall, B. L. (2017). Queering aging futures. *Societies*, 7(21), 1-11.

Notes:

- Student seminar facilitation begins
- Student facilitators for Week 4: post your reading by Friday, January 28th at noon

Week 4 (January 31, 2022) | Expectations of later life: Aging and/in place

Readings:

- Wiles, J. L., Leibing, A., Guberman, N., Reeve, J., & Allen, R. E. (2012). The meaning of "aging in place" to older people. *The Gerontologist*, 52(3), 357-366.
- Grenier, A., Barken, R., & McGrath, C. (2016). Homelessness and aging: The contradictory ordering of 'house' and 'home'. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 39, 73-80.

Video:

- Out at Home Project. (2020). Out at Home: LGBTQI2S older adults and home care [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOWsDsgP2Cw>

Notes:

- Student seminar facilitation continues

Week 5 (February 7, 2022) | Expectations of later life: Agelessness

Guest speaker: Dr. Kirsten Ellison
Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Calgary

Readings:

- Dumas, A., & Turner, B. S. (2007). The life-extension project: A sociological critique. *Health Sociology Review*, 16(1), 5-17.
- Ellison, K. L. (2014). Age transcended: A semiotic and rhetorical analysis of the discourse of agelessness in North American anti-aging skin care advertisements. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 29, 20–31.
- Ellison, K.L. (in press). 'Who wants to live forever? You want to live well': The appeal to health in coverage of anti-ageing science and medicine. In J. Greenberg & C. Elliott (Eds.) *Communication & Health: Media, Marketing and Risk*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan Publishers, Ltd.

Notes:

- Research paper abstract due
 - Post your abstract to the A2L forum
 - In preparation for next week's peer review session, you will receive the name of the individual whose abstract you'll be critiquing
- Student facilitators for Week 6: post your reading by Friday, February 11th at noon

Week 6 (February 14, 2022) | Digital futures

Readings:

- Katz, S., & Marshall, B. L. (2018). Tracked and fit: FitBits, brain games, and the quantified aging body. *Journal of Aging Studies, 45*, 63-68.
- Neven, L., & Peine, A. (2017). From triple win to triple sin: How a problematic future discourse is shaping the way people age with technology. *Societies, 7*(3), 26-37.

Video:

- Superflux Lab. (2015). Uninvited guests [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/128873380>

Notes:

- Student seminar facilitation continues
- Research paper abstract peer review workshop (during class)
 - Come prepared to meet and discuss the abstract you critiqued

Week 7 (February 21, 2022) | Reading week

Notes:

- No class scheduled

Week 8 (February 28, 2022) | Alzheimer's disease and dementia culture

Guest speaker: Dr. Megan Graham
Postdoctoral Fellow, Trent University

Readings:

- Graham, M. E. (2017). From wandering to wayfaring: Reconsidering movement in people with dementia in long-term care. *Dementia, 16*(6), 732-749.
- Kenner, A. M. (2008). Securing the elderly body: Dementia, surveillance, and the politics of "aging in place". *Surveillance & Society, 5*(3), 252-269.
- Kontos, P., & Martin, W. (2013). Embodiment and dementia: Exploring critical narratives of selfhood, surveillance, and dementia care. *Dementia, 12*(3), 288-302.

Notes:

- Student facilitators for Week 9: post your reading by Friday, March 4th

Week 9 (March 7, 2022) | Care work

Readings:

- Daly, T., & Armstrong, P. (2016). Liminal and invisible long-term care labour: Precarity in the face of austerity. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 58(4), 473-490.
- Roberts, C., & Mort, M. (2009). Reshaping what counts as care: Older people, work and new technologies. *Alter: European Journal of Disability Research*, 3(2), 138-158.

Notes:

- Student facilitators for Week 10: post your reading by Friday, March 11th

Week 10 (March 14, 2022) | Portrayals of aging and ageism

Readings:

- Low, J., & Dupuis-Blanchard, S. (2013). From zoomers to geezerade: Representations of the aging body in ageist and consumerist society. *Societies*, 3(1), 52-65.
- Meisner, B. A. (2020). Are you OK, Boomer? Intensification of ageism and intergenerational tensions on social media amid COVID-19. *Leisure Sciences*, 1-6.

Notes:

- Last week of student seminar facilitation
 - Facilitators: post reading and content by Sunday, March 14th at noon

Week 11 (March 21, 2022) | Reflection week

Notes:

- No scheduled class
- Use this time to work on your workshop presentation, final paper, and/or to meet with me to discuss questions or ideas

Week 12 (March 28, 2022) | Research paper workshop

Notes:

- Research paper presentations due (during class)
- Please note that this class is likely to go over time

Week 13 (April 4, 2022) | Wrap-up and discussion

Notes:

- Research papers due April 8th

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments will be turned in via Avenue to Learn. For ease of providing feedback, please submit assignments as a **Word document** and include your last name in the assignment file name. Your assignments should be typed, double-spaced, and use a 12 point font of your choosing. Any citation style is acceptable, as long as it is correctly and consistently used. For assistance with citation style, please consult

<https://library.mcmaster.ca/research/citing>.

Note that McMaster University Library is a fantastic source for research assistance! Students may call or e-mail to get help finding library resources. Students may also get online research help by using the "Ask a Librarian" virtual reference service

<https://library.mcmaster.ca/justask>

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
0-69	F

All course work will be carefully and thoughtfully graded. On occasion, students may disagree with the mark they receive. If this occurs, I would be happy to review your assignment, provided the following procedure is followed. Write a one-page statement describing in detail why you think a grading error was made. Support your argument with examples from your assignment that demonstrate how you satisfied the assignment criteria better than your grade reflected. The statement should be submitted, along with the marked assignment, to me for review. You may submit the request for a re-grading no sooner than one week and no later than one month after the assignment was returned. I will review your assignment and will provide additional written feedback. *Please note that there is a possibility that when an assignment is reviewed, you may receive a grade lower than the original.*

Late Assignments

Extensions for course assignments will only be granted under conditions of medical, family, or other extraordinary circumstances. All other late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 3% per day, including weekend days and holidays. Assignments

more than one week overdue will not be accepted. Please note that late assignments will receive minimal feedback. If you've read this far, thank you for engaging with the syllabus – please send me an email with your favourite type of cheese for an additional participation mark.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Absence for medical or other reasons will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Students should contact the instructor prior to or immediately following an absence to discuss and/or arrange accommodation. Supplemental information may be requested (i.e., doctor's note, etc.).

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g., use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx, or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.