SC335 :: Fall 2008
Theorizing Torture
Tuesday, Thursday 1:30-2:45
McGuinn 415

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Office Hours: T/Th 3:00 – 4:00 & by appointment

- Course Descriptions –

This course examines the historical uses of torture in order to address its contemporary relevance, as well as the practice of it in democratic societies. In doing so, we will consider important ethical, social psychological, and sociological explanations of torture. We will then evaluate these explanations through close studies of films, documentaries, memoirs, and investigations of historical cases of torture - such as during The Algerian War and at Abu Ghraib.

- Course Requirements -

(1) Assigned Readings Memos : 20% of your final grade.
(2) Further readings Memos : 20% of your final grade.
(3) Preparation, attendance, and participation : 20% of your final grade.
(4) Torture During the War on Terror: Constructionist Research Project : 40% of your final paper.

(1) Assigned Readings Memos : 20% of your final grade

Assignment Overview: For five readings, you should produce a brief memo of approximately 300-500 words. Your memo should present the major themes, concepts, theories, or historical claims presented in the article.

Purpose: The purposes of the pre-written questions and comments are several. (1) Memos can serve as "talking points" to inform and improve class participation. (2) Memos can serve as an archive of readings for you to reference when writing your final paper. (3) Memos can serve as an indicator of your preparation for class. Because participation depends on adequate preparation, I will take into consideration the quality of your assigned reading memos when assigning a participation grade.

Given (2), I strongly recommend organizing your memos into one directory and the hard-copies in a notebook or folder. Also, while you are free to choose to respond to any reading on the syllabus, I recommend producing memos on readings that you think may be particularly relevant to your constructionist research project.

Grading: All "assigned reading memos" will be graded based on the following scale: A (Exceptional Quality), B (High Quality), C (Adequate Quality), D (Incomplete), F (No Credit).
If you find it difficult to consistently produce exceptional or high quality memos or are generally unhappy with your grades on this assignment, I strongly recommend speaking with me during my office hours. I will be happy to discuss strategies for successful memo-writing with you.

(2) Further Readings Memos: 20% of your final grade

Assignment Overview: For four readings related to torture selected from an academic source – such as a peer-reviewed journal or a university press – you should produce a 300-500 word memo. If, not counting footnotes, notes, images, tables, figures, charts, citation, etc... your article or chapter is longer than 35 pages, you can count it for 2 memos, so long as you produce a memo of approximately 600-1000 words on the reading. Please include a bibliographic citation of your reading with your memo. Additionally, if your reading comes from a non-electronic source, please provide a photocopy of it.

I will provide a workshop on locating academic sources on 10.2.2008.

Recommended due dates for memos are:

10.14.2008 - 1 memo
10.30.2008 - 2 memos
11.18.2008 - 1 memo.
12.2.2008 - All Further Readings Memos Due

Purpose: The purpose of the "further readings memos" are several. (1) We have limited time together this semester. Because of this, I am unable to cover some important topics and issues relevant to the study of torture. By leaving some days of the semester open for you to do further readings in torture, I hope to allow you time to study a topic or issue that is particularly interesting to you. (2) Memos can serve as an archive of readings for you to reference when writing your final paper. (3) By sharing our memos - through class presentations, discussions, and private conversations - we can broaden our knowledge of torture to issues not assigned in the syllabus.

You are free to choose any reading on issues relevant to torture from an academic source; however, I recommend producing memos on readings that you think may be particularly relevant to your constructionist research project. You are encouraged to share further readings and memos with your constructionist research group partner; however, for submitted memos, only up-to two readings can be shared. (In other words, you and your research group partner must produce further readings memos on at least separate eight articles or chapters.) Of course, all submitted memos must be the original work of the student who submits them.

Grading: All "assigned reading memos" will be graded based on the following scale: A (Exceptional Quality), B (High Quality), C (Adequate Quality), D (Incomplete), F (No Credit).

If you find it difficult to consistently produce exceptional or high quality memos or are generally unhappy with your grades on this assignment, I strongly recommend speaking with me during my office hours. I will be happy to discuss strategies for successful memo-writing.
with you.

(3) Preparation, attendance and participation (20% of your final grade)

Assignment Overview: All students are expected to attend class and participate in class discussions. While I will not regularly take attendance, I will note frequent absences and this will affect your participation grade. Finally, I expect all students to contribute to class discussions. Since there are approximately twenty students in our class, I do not expect all students to participate in all classes; however, I do expect consistent contributions from all students. Keep in mind that adequate participation in class depends on adequate preparation for class and your participation grade will be based on the relevance of your participation to course readings and lectures.

I understand that for some students class participation can induce all sorts of anxieties. I encourage all students to attend my offices to talk about strategies for participation, as well as our course material.

Purpose: The purpose of the "preparation, attendance, and participation" are several. I have found that course lectures are more interesting and useful to students who have thoroughly prepared for that class. Additionally, preparing for each class will provide you with the overall background in the study of torture necessary to successfully complete your constructionist research project. By asking you to rigorously prepare for class and actively participate in class periods, I hope to get a sense of our collective concerns about torture, so that I can adequately address them in future class periods. Finally, my experience as a teaching assistant and instructor at Boston College has taught me that students consistently raise interesting and important questions about course readings and theories. By listening to your thoughts and analysis on studies of torture, I also hope to expand my knowledge of this phenomena.

Grading: "Preparation, attendance, and participation" will be graded based on the following scale: A (Exceptional Quality), B (High Quality), C (Adequate Quality), D (Incomplete), F (No Credit).

(4) Torture During the War on Terror: A Constructionist Research Project: 40% of your final grade.

Assignment Overview: In groups of two (with a single group of three, if we have an odd number of students enrolled in the class), students are to conduct a constructionist research project on torture during the war on terror. A final draft of this project, which will include a introduction, literature review, method section, findings section, and conclusion will be due TBA.

I will provide an in-depth discussion of this assignment on 10.02.2008.

Assignment Components

All groups should meet with me during my office hours with a research plan by 10.16.2008. 2.5% of your final grade; credit / no credit.
A first draft of the literature review and method section must be submitted to the Online Writing Lab and to me by 11.6.2008. 2.5% of your final grade; credit / no credit.

A first draft of the findings section must be submitted to the Online Writing Lab and to me by 11.18.2008. 2.5% of your final grade; credit / no credit.

All groups should meet with me during my office hours to discuss their feedback from the Online Writing Lab, their final drafts, and their presentations by 12.4.2008. 2.5% of your final grade; credit / no credit.

A final draft of the paper should be submitted to me by TBA. (20% of your final grade.)

A creative presentation, of approximately 10 minutes in length, must be prepared for a class presentation during our assigned final exam block by TBA. (10% of your final grade)

**Purpose:** The purpose of the "Torture During the War on Terror: A Constructionist Research Project" are several. Firstly, this research project introduces you to a major sociological approach to the study of social problems - the constructionist approach. Secondly, this research project will familiarize you with recent and controversial events in American politics.

Of the images of violence against Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison, Mark Danner writes, “We must look squarely at the photographs and ask: Is what has changed only what we know, or what we are willing to accept?” (2005:9). In his study of democracy and torture, Darius Rejali observes that as international monitoring of human rights violations has increased, democratic nations - which tend to be open to this monitoring and influenced by international opinion - have increasingly practiced stealth torture against their prisoners. The transition to stealth torture has induced "a breakdown in one's ability to show one's pain to others, stripping their words of the marks that give the speaker credibility" (2007:30).

For the sufferer of stealth torture, **the practice undermines the body's capacity to bear witness to its victimization.** And with the capacity to bear witness goes the social link; by denying pain "home in the body," the wounds or marks of violence, stealth torture tangles "victims and their communities in doubts, uncertainties, and illusions," which can result in political confusion or apathy (2007:443)

Danner's question and Rejali's analysis suggest that studies of social responses to torture can contribute to our understanding of how, after a society has become aware of torture, the social link between the victim and the victim's political community is acknowledged or tangled in doubt. This research project asks you to contribute to our understanding of this process by closely examining one aspect of the collective response - either through Congressional hearings, media responses, blog posts, etc - to the use of torture during the war on terror.

**Grading:** The meeting and drafts are graded on a credit / no credit basis. Your final draft and presentation will be graded based on the following scale: A (Exceptional Quality), B (High Quality), C (Adequate Quality), D (Incomplete), F (No Credit).
- Course Readings -

ISBN 9780691114224 - Torture and Democracy - Darius Rejali
ISBN 9781590171523 - Torture and Truth - Mark Danner

You can find used copies of the assigned reading online, often at significantly lower prices than are the copies available in local bookstores. Also, the four books are on reserve at the O'Neill library.

Readings marked with an “*” in the course schedule are available through online course reserves.

Note: Readings should be completed by the date that they are assigned.

- Course Schedule -

I reserve the right to alter the course schedule with due notice.

Topic One  Introducing The Constructionist Approach to the Study of Social Problems

(1) 9.2.2008 : Course Introduction
(2) 9.4.2008 : The Constructionist Approach to the Study of Social Problems
(3) 9.9.2008 : Applying the Constructionist Approach to Abu Ghraib
   b. OPTIONAL: Bennett, W. Lance, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston. 2006. "None Dare Call It Torture: Indexing the Limits of Press Independence in the Abu Ghraib Scandal." Journal of Communication. 56: 467-485. (I strongly recommend reading at least pages 474-482 of this article or reading the entire article as a “further reading” and producing a memo on it.)

Topic Two  'Regarding the Torture of Others'

(1) 9.11.2008 : Picturing Torture
(2) 9.16.2008 : Communicating Torture
(3) 9.18.2008 : Communicating Torture
(4) 9.23.2008 : Studying Torture

Topic Three  Histories of Torture

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**Required Reading:**

a. Peters, Edward. *Torture*. Introduction, 'The Discovery of Algeria,' & 'To Become, or to remain, human'


**Please read at least two of the following readings**


**Topic Four **

**Explaining Torture**

10.09.2008 : The Social Psychological Explanation


**Recommended Due Date, 1 Further Readings Memo.**


10.16.2008 : The Origin of Totalitarianism


**Due Date: 10.16.2008 : Meeting w/ instructor to discuss research plan**
10.21.2008:

10.23.2008: Democracy and Torture

Transition *The Battle of Algiers*


Required Reading:


OPTIONAL: The Pentagon's Film Festival (http://www.slate.com/id/2087628/)

**Recommended Due Date:** Two further readings memos

**Topic Four** *Torture, The War on Terror, & Its Precedents*

11.4.2008 ELECTION DAY
NO CLASS

11.6.2008: Defending Torture

**Due Date:** 11.6.2008: Literature Review / Method Section to OWL & Instructor

11.11.2008: Debating Torture: the Ticking Bomb

11.13.2008: Debating Torture: Torture Lite?

11.18.2008: Debating Torture: Law
No Assigned Reading

**Recommended Due Date:** 11.18.2008: All Further Readings Memos Due

**Due Date:** 11.18.2008: First Draft, Findings Section Due to OWL & instructor

11.20.2008

11.25.2008
  a. Standard Operating Procedure

11.27.2008 - No class

12.2.2008
  a. Standard Operating Procedure

  **Due Date: 12.2.2008 : All Further Readings Memos Due**

12.4.2008
  a. Standard Operating Procedure

  **Due Date 12.4.2008 : Meeting w/ instructor to discuss final project.**

**Academic Integrity**

In class, we will work together to comprehend important readings on the history and dynamics of torture. In the spirit of this collective effort, please feel welcome to speak with classmates about course readings and assignments. However, your work must be original and, when using, paraphrasing, or referencing the work of another, you must include a citation of the source. I will treat plagiarism in accordance with Boston College’s Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures.

“The pursuit of knowledge can proceed only when scholars take responsibility and receive credit for their work. Recognition of individual contributions to knowledge and of the intellectual property of others builds trust within the University and encourages the sharing of ideas that is essential to scholarship. Similarly, the educational process requires that individuals present their own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique, and eventual reformulation. Presentation of others' work as one's own is not only intellectual dishonesty, but also undermines the educational process.”

Please note that in this class the minimum penalty for cheating or plagiarizing will be failure of that course requirement. Also, cheating or plagiarizing on an "assigned readings memo" will, at the minimum, result in a failing grade for both that requirement and course “preparation, attendance, and participation.”

**You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with these policies and procedures, which you can find at -** [http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity](http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity)

**A message on our semester together**

Having instructed two courses and been a teaching assistant in eight others, I am aware that the semester can produce any number of stresses, surprises, emergencies, and frustrations for students.

If you find yourself struggling to understand course readings, class assignments or my grading, I strongly encourage you to speak with me immediately. I am always happy to share my thoughts on your assignments, as well as strategies for improvement. Of course, it is more helpful to have such a discussion before the final week or two of classes - which is when the reality of "the final grade" tends to set-in.
If you find yourself struggling to complete assignments or attend class, I strongly encourage you to let me know about your concerns. Additionally, you may want to speak with your class dean, who can provide you with some general advice on whatever is interfering with your learning. You can find your class dean's email address and office number at the following site: http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/about/contact.html.