

# WESTERN UNIVERSITY

## DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

### GSWS 2264G FAT IS FEMINIST GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WEIGHT

Winter 2024

INSTRUCTOR: Dr Lauren Auger

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DAY AND TIME:

LOCATION:

OFFICE HOURS:

#### LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“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.”

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Fat shaming discourses are pervasive, permeate popular culture, and have a real impact on people's lives. This course will demonstrate that modern fat phobic discourses have origins in the historical stigmatization of black women's bodies during the Atlantic slave trade. Students will learn about how discourses othering fatness and black bodies were core tenets of the Protestant revitalization and temperance movements. These movements molded modern beauty standards that value white and thin women's bodies over all others. These beauty standards permeate our modern popular culture. While bigger women may be represented in the media, this representation often reinforces fat shaming discourses. However, some women in the arts, like Lizzo and Melissa McCarthy, challenge dominant beauty standards and celebrate their bodies. This course will demonstrate that the fashion industry particularly excludes folks who do not fit the white and thin body ideal. We will consider how terms like 'small', 'medium', 'large', 'extra-large', and 'plus size' reinforce fat shaming discourses. The course will show how achieving an ideal white and thin feminine body is the new 'American Dream.' Students will gain an understanding of how beauty standards have changed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries yet how being thin remains the ultimate feminine beauty standard. The course will consider the ways in which the Kardashian-Jenner media empire and the weight-loss industry promote the understanding that women can achieve an ideal thin and feminine body through hard work and a sensible diet. However, many folks including the Kardashian-Jenners need costly meal plans, gym memberships, personal trainers, plastic surgery procedures, and even medications to achieve this ideal body. Students will also look at the role of social media in pressuring folks to achieve and maintain thinness even promoting disordered eating

practices. This course will demonstrate that historical and modern beauty standards are inherently exclusive, rooted in historical white supremacy, and should be challenged. Ultimately, this course will argue that Fat is Feminist.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. to understand the historical roots of modern fat phobic discourses;
2. to understand how racist discourses othering bodies of colour influenced and continue to influence modern fat phobic discourses;
3. to learn how feminist thinkers have challenged fat phobic discourses
4. to unpack the ways in which popular culture works to further fat shaming discourses;
5. to consider how fat shaming discourses are used to socially control folks and other those who do not fit ideal body molds;
6. to facilitate an understanding of how cultural discourses impact one's own experiences and subjectivities;
7. to investigate how folks resist these dominant discourses;
8. to develop students' analytical skills in course assignments and in discussion making connections between themes and content;
9. to enhance students' written and oral communication skills specifically their ability to clearly articulate, support, and organize arguments;
10. to develop students' written communication skills particularly focusing on organizing essays, developing a clear writing style, and accurate use of grammar;
11. to help students become more comfortable articulating thoughtful analysis, summary, reflections, and observations to their peer;

## EVALUATION BREAKDOWN

**Participation**                      **15%**

**Presentation**                      **15%**

**Memoir Study**                      **30%**

**Exam**                                  **40%**