

The University of Western Ontario  
London Canada  
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies  
Winter 2022



**WS 1023G: Gay Life and Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
**Talbot College**  
**Room 204**  
**Tuesdays 10:30 – 1:30pm**

*The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples.*

**Instructor:** Jeremy Fairall

**Email:** jfairall@uwo.ca

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 2PM-4PM (or by appointment)

**Teaching Assistant:** Kody Muncaster (kmuncas@uwo.ca)

**Course Description:**

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman argues that queer people are “held in thrall by a future continually defined by time itself, constrained to pursue the dream of a day when today and tomorrow are one” (30). In the decades following the Stonewall riots of 1969, queer liberation has appeared, to many queer scholars and activists, as if it were perpetually on the horizon, a promise of a “tomorrow” that was, as Annie sang, “always a day away.” With recent strides that have been made towards marriage equality, legal status, and popular visibility, the 21<sup>st</sup> century would appear to be the fulfillment of the long-awaited promise of freedom and equality. Still, as Michael Hobbes reports in “The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness” (2015), “the rates of depression, loneliness and substance abuse in the gay community remain stuck in the same place they’ve been

for decades.” So, what is really happening in contemporary gay life? This course will examine the state of gay life and culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through a variety of texts, from readings in Queer Theory and journalism to selections from contemporary literature and cinema, that will engage with issues of marriage, politics, health, popular culture, race, and identity. Finally, we will examine what it means to claim the identity of “gay” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the range of identity categories have become at once more expansive and contentious.

### **Learning Objectives:**

This course will enable students to

- Gain a general knowledge of the key concepts of Queer Theory.
- Acquire a broad understanding of some of the major issues and perspectives of contemporary gay life.
- Gather, review, evaluate and interpret information relevant to the topic.
- Develop skills related to critical thinking and analysis, oral and written communication, and scholarly research.

### **Required Texts:**

- Bill Konigsberg, *Openly Straight* (Scholastic, 2013) [Available @ UWO Bookstore]
- All other reading/viewing material will be provided, or linked to, on the course OWL site.

### **Evaluation:**

Participation	15%
Critical Essay (800-1000 words)	20%
Research Proposal	10%
Research Essay (2250-2500 words)	25%
Final Exam	30%

### **Course Policies**

**Prerequisites:** There are no prerequisites for WS 1023G.

**Participation:** Students are expected to attend each week’s lecture prepared to discuss the week’s readings and other materials. If you need to miss a class, please send me a courtesy email.

**E-mail Policy:** Emails by the instructor and by tutorial leaders will be responded to within 48 hours.

**Medical Policy:** Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness see: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2011/pg1117.html> and <http://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Assignments**

**Assignment Submission:** All written assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through OWL. The due dates for each of these assignments are listed on the Course Timetable below. Late assignments will be accepted for a full week after the initial due date, with a demerit of 2% per day that an assignment is late (accommodations will be made for students regarding issues of lateness or bereavement, but please be sure to consult me no later than one week after the assignment is due if you need such consideration). You will be provided with more information about each of these assignments as they approach, but a brief rundown of each assignment is as follows:

**Critical Essay:** Write an 800 to 1000-word critical essay on a topic of your choice (subject to instructor approval) that relates to the course material. This may include any film, television program, web series, fictional text (novel, short story, comic book/graphic novel, children's picture book) or video game that relates to the subject of the course. This assignment does not require the use of any secondary sources, although you are expected to properly document any sources that you do use, including the subject of your essay.

**Research Proposal:** In anticipation for your final research paper, you are to submit a 3-4 page proposal in which you a) identify your research topic, b) explain and discuss why you chose this topic, and c) list and briefly outline 4-5 secondary sources that you intend to use in your research. While this assignment is meant to encourage you to think about a topic that you are interested in, you will, as with the Critical Essay, want to consult me regarding your topic in advance.

**Research Essay:** Write a 2300 to 2500-word essay on the topic that you have chosen and identified in your Research Proposal. Your research will focus on any

topic related to the subject of the course, although you will want to concentrate on issues which require constructing an evidence-based (rather than critical) argument. You may wish to consider relevant issues relating to health, politics, representation, education, business, or global affairs.

### **Course Timetable:**

#### **Week 1 (January 3): *Introduction***

#### **Week 2 (January 10): *Who's Gay?***

- Annamarie Jagose, "Theorising Same-Sex Desire" (1996)
- Ritch C. Savin-Williams, "Who's Gay?" (2005)
- Cody Lawrence, "Brief Thoughts on Bi-Erasure" (2020)

#### **Week 3 (January 17): *It Gets Better?***

- Richard Dyer, "Coming Out as Going In: The image of the homosexual as a sad young man" (2001)
- Derritt Mason, "Getting Better: Children's Literature Theory and the *It Gets Better* Project" (2021)
- Michael Hobbes, "The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness" (2017)
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: *The Christmas Setup* (trailer) [2020]
- Critical Essay handout

#### **Week 4 (January 24): *Let's Dance!***

- Sasha Geffen, "Infinite Utopia: Queer Time in Disco and House" (2020)
- Rich Juzwiak, "Katy Perry, Ke\$ha, and the Great Gay-Pander-Off of 2010" (2011)
- Alfred Soto, "Only When I'm Dancing Can I Feel This Free" (2016)
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: Shura, "What's it Gonna Be?" (2016)
- Critical essay Q&A session

#### **Week 5 (February 1): *Out of (and into) the Closet***

- Bill Konigsberg, *Openly Straight* (2013)

**Week 6 (February 8): *Masculinities***

- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys” (1991)
- Kevin John Bozelka, “The gay-for-pay gaze in gay male pornography” (2013)
- Nick Levine, “The One Question Men Need to Stop Asking on Gay Dating Apps” (2019)
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: “Why ‘Straight Acting’ Insults the Memory of Stonewall” (2015)

**\*\*Critical Essay due\*\***

**Week 7 (February 15): *Queer Politics***

- John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (1983)
- Benjamin H. Shepard, “The Queer/Gay Assimilationist Split: The Suits vs. the Sluts” (2001)
- Nathan J. Robinson, “All About Pete” (2019)
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: “Am I Next? Gay and Targeted in Chechnya” (2019)
- Research Proposal and Essay handout

**Week 8 (February 22): READING WEEK – NO CLASS**

**Week 9 (March 1): *Culture/Community/Race***

- Jack Kapac, “Culture/Community/Race: Chinese Gay Men and the Politics of Identity” (1998)
- Quo-Li Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies” (2010)
- Stanley Crouch, “The Roots of Black Homophobia” (2010)
- Research Proposal and Essay Q&A

**Week 10 (March 8): *AIDS and Its Metaphors***

- Susan Sontag, “AIDS and Its Metaphors” (excerpt) [1989]
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: *1985* (2018)

**\*\*Research Proposal due\*\***

**Week 11 (March 15): *Disability***

- Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence” (2013)
- Patrick Strudwick, “This Is What Dating Is Like When You’re LGBT and Disabled” (2015)
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: *Hole* (2014)

**Week 12 (March 22): *Married (with Children?)***

- glenn mcdonald, “More Human (in defense of marriage)” (2004)
- Katherine Mason, “‘Won’t Someone Think of the Children?’: Reproductive Futurism and Same-Sex Marriage in US Courts, 2003-2015” (2018)
- IN-CLASS SCREENING: “Faith, Foster care, and LGBT rights collide at Supreme Court” (2020)
- Review for Final Exam

**\*\*Research Essay due\*\***

## Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies: Grading Criteria

### A+ (90 to 100)

*One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level.*

### A (80 and up)

*Superior work which is clearly above average*

- Challenging and specific thesis that is clearly developed
- Correct and interesting sentence structure
- Sophisticated writing style
- Appropriate documentation
- Quotations well integrated into the text, with proper documentation
- Evidence of originality or independence of thought
- Provision of strong analysis
- Complexity, and subtlety in approach to subject
- Well-organized with a logical development of the argument

### B (70 to 79)

*Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory*

- Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs
- Correct sentence structure
- Adequate documentation
- Allowance for some (minor) problems such as:
  - errors in factual content or interpretation
  - some minor errors in terminology or general writing skills
  - occasional lapses in clarity, including vagueness, incompleteness, flaws in structure

*Note:* A grade in the range of 75-79 indicates an essay that borders on an A but has some significant flaw that prevents giving out the higher grade.

### C (60 to 69)

*Competent work, meeting requirements*

- Generally correct but tends to provide more description than analysis
- Tends to be too general or superficial in the handling of material
- Weaknesses in argument including a descriptive thesis, a mechanical approach, lack of adequate evidence, documentation, or support

- Problems with grammar or matters of style
- Simplicity of thought, structure, or expression

### **D (50 to 59)**

#### ***Fair work, minimally acceptable***

- Does not provide an argument or a line of thought
- Major difficulties with logical structure, and expression of ideas
- Topic has not been thought through
- Errors of grammar and diction interfere with understanding
- Over-generalization with inadequate support, evidence, or documentation

### **F (49 and down)**

#### ***Fail***

- Assignment submitted does not apply to course
- Basic requirements of the assignment are not met

### **Plagiarism with intent to deceive (to be handled by the department)**

Photo credits (l to r): “What’s It Gonna Be?” (dir. Chloe Wallace, 2016), *1985* (dir. Yen Tan, 2018)