

Western University
Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies
GSWS 2162B The Body

Preliminary Course Outline Subject to Change

Prerequisites: No Prerequisites

Instructor: Dr. Lauren Auger

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Land Statement

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

Department Course Description

We will examine social and scientific constructions of the body, including concepts of beauty, health, fitness, sexuality, and questions of representation. Among other things, we may examine particular social problems, such as technologies of the body and bodily modification, ideas of health and illness, society's difficulty with understanding the disabled body as sexual, the cultural obsession with body size, psychiatric and medical responses to people who feel that their bodily sex does not match their gender, changing ideas about beauty and attraction, and artistic conceptions, representations, and alterations of the human body.

Detailed Course Description

This course will demonstrate that bodies matter and embodiment matters. How bodies are understood, valued, and represented in our culture has a real impact on people's everyday lives, how people view themselves as individuals, and people's lived experiences in their bodies. Students will consider the concept of 'embodiment' and unpack the ways in which certain bodies are valued in society over others. Taking an interdisciplinary feminist approach, we will consider how the body figures in social attitudes regarding idealized feminine and masculine social roles. The course will unpack contemporary reproductive politics and period politics in the Canada and United States. Students will consider the presence of queer bodies in history examining queer community and healthcare in the Weimar Republic as well as the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We will

examine contemporary queer activist bodies including the Drag Time Story Time phenomenon. We will unpack the considerable incarceration rate of BIPOC folx in Canada and the United States and the continued violence against BIPOC bodies by law enforcement. The course will discuss racist origins of contemporary fat shaming discourses that emphasize thinness as wellness and thinness as the beauty ideal. We will learn about the harms committed against disabled communities in history. Students will unpack the exclusion of disabled bodies from sexual cultures and how disabled folx have advocated to be seen as sexual subjects in an ableist world. We will consider how ideas of good health, politics, and racism influenced responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the course will discuss current issues in reproductive politics and medicine including abortion, IVF, and genetically enhancing bodies.

Course Objectives

1. to understand the concept ‘embodiment’ and how scholars in interdisciplinary fields write about embodiment
2. to understand material and discursive frameworks of bodies in body studies
3. to understand how social perceptions regarding ‘ideal bodies’ influence social hierarchies that have a real effect on people’s lives
4. to unpack the power of representation, why representation matters, and how representation influences social attitudes regarding bodies
5. to understand how cultural discourses regarding bodies impact people’s material lives
6. to understand why problematic understandings of bodies need to be challenged and changed
7. to investigate how folx resist dominant discourses
8. to understand material experiences of the body
9. to develop students’ analytical skills in course assessments making connections between themes and content
10. to enhance students’ written communication skills

Evaluation Breakdown

Attendance	(ongoing)	10%
In-class Response	(1x10%)	10%

Mid-Term Exam	40%
Final Exam	40%

Assignment Description

Attendance and Participation (10% final grade ongoing)

Students will be evaluated based on their attendance in lectures. Students may be asked to participate in digital discussions and polls during class lectures to contribute to their attendance and participation grade.

In-Class Response (1x10% of final grade)

Students will write **one** in-class response over the course of the term. This response will be written on paper during our class time. You will be asked to respond to the following question: What is the importance of this week's topic and how does this topic resonate with you? Students will be evaluated based on their ability to adequately and thoughtfully answer the above questions, based on the extent to which they draw on course content, themes, and terms, and based on their level of analysis. **This is an open-book in-class activity. Students will have one hour to complete the response. Please contact the Professor if you have academic accommodations for course assessments.**

Mid-Term Exam (2 hours) (40% of final grade) The exam will cover weeks 1-6.

Final Exam (2 hours) (40% of the final grade) The exam will cover week 1 as well as weeks 8-13. It will be scheduled during the exam period.

Course Delivery Mode

This course is an in-person course. Weekly readings will be posted online.

Course Materials

All course material will be posted to OWL: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800

