

**The University of Western Ontario
London, Canada
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Winter 2025**



**GSWS 1023G Gay Life and Culture in the 21st Century: Beyond Adam and Steve
Tuesdays 10:30 – 1:30**

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.

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Fairall
Email: jfairall@uwo.ca
Office Hours: By appointment (in person or via Zoom)

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 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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)
 - Cost: \$13.99, available at Western Bookstore
 - Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.
- *BPM (Beats Per Minute)* [dir. Robin Campillo, 2017]
 - Available via Criterion on Demand through Western Libraries
- *Moonlight* (dir. Barry Jenkins, 2016)
 - Available via Criterion on Demand through Western Libraries
- All other reading/viewing material will be provided

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 to the instructor and to Teaching Assistants will be responded to within 48 hours.

Turnitin: All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licencing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)” (<https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/TurnItIn.html>)

Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf>

The library has significant information on plagiarism and how to avoid it:
<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>

A NOTE ON GENERATIVE AI

ChatGPT and its various analogues are not “research help” nor are they “grammar checkers.” They produce text based on a predictive model as to what word is most likely to come next. When asked to cite “research,” they have no capacity to do actual research, so they invent articles and books. You may find yourself citing a work whose author and title are complete fictions; more often, the AI attributes its imaginary research paper to a real scholar, but not necessarily one who even works in the area. Using a Generative AI app may seem like an easy way to manage your time or to simplify your workload, but if you use it without acknowledging that you are doing so, you are cheating. You are also depriving yourself of the value of education, since by using ChatGPT you are not building your own skills in critical thinking, research, or communication, all of which are areas of significant interest to potential employers. In brief, if you use a Generative AI app to help with your assignment, you must identify every part of your assignment that you did not write yourself. Anything else is a violation of academic integrity and subject to all the same penalties as more traditional types of plagiarism. If ChatGPT use is suspected, you may be asked to show your rough work, to answer questions about your sources and your research process, and to explain your argument orally.

Medical Policy: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any miss 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 the 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.

Note for students with disabilities: Please contact gswsugchair@uwo.ca if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you. You may also contact aew@uwo.ca to find out the full range of services available to you.

Missed assignments and academic accommodation:

Academic Accommodation must be requested within 28 days of the missed assignment

STATEMENT ON GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, here. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Assignments

Assignment Submission: All written assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through Brightspace. 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 the assignment is late (accommodations will be made for students regarding issues of illness 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 (Jan 7) *Introduction*

Week 2 (Jan 14) *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 (Jan 21) *It Gets Better?*

- Derritt Mason, "Getting Better: Children's Literature Theory and the *It Gets Better* Project" (2021)
- Michael Hobbes, "[The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness](#)" (2017)
- WATCH: [The Christmas Setup \(traier\)](#) [2020]
- Critical Essay handout

Week 4 (Jan 28) *Queer(ing) Pop Culutre*

- David Levithan, *Ryan and Avery* (excerpt) [2023]
- Jude Kramer, "[What Does Queer Gen Z Want on TV? Everything Under the Rainbow](#)" (2023)
- Rich Juzwiak, "[Katy Perry, Ke\\$ha, and the Great Gay-Pander-Off of 2010](#)" (2011)
- WATCH: selected music videos
 - Katy Perry, [Firework](#) (2010)
 - Sugarland, [Tony](#) (2018)
 - Shura, [What's It Gonna Be?](#) (2016)
 - Lil Nas X, [Industry Baby](#) (2021)
 - Troye Sivan, [Rush](#) (2023)
- Critical Essay Q&A

Week 5 (Feb 4) *Queer Politics*

- John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1983)
- Benjamin H. Shepard, "The Queer/Gay Assimilationist Split: The Suits vs. the Sluts" (2001)
- WATCH: "[Am I Next? Gay and Targeted in Chechnya](#)" (2019)

Week 6 (Feb 11) *AIDS*

- Manuel Betancourt, "Fearing El Sida" (2021)
- WATCH: *BPM (Beats Per Minute)* [2017]

****Critical Essay due****

Week 7 (Feb 18) **READING WEEK—NO CLASS**

- HINT: you should use this time to begin reading *Openly Straight*

Week 8 (Feb 25) *Straight Acting*

- Kevin John Bozelka, “[The Gay-for-pay Gaze in Gay Male Pornography](#)” (2013)
- Nick Levine, “[The One Question Men Need to Stop Asking on Dating Apps](#)” (2019)
- WATCH: “[Why ‘Straight Acting’ Insults the Memory of Stonewall](#)” (2015)
- Research Proposal and Essay handout

Week 9 (Mar 4) *Openly Straight*

- Bill Konigsberg, *Openly Straight* (2013)
- Research Proposal and Essay Q&A

Week 10 (Mar 11) *Culture/Community/Race, Part One: Building Alliances*

- 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)
- Daniel Wenger, “[After the Orlando Shooting, the Changed Lives of Gay Latinos](#)” (2016)
- ****Research Proposal due****

Week 11 (Mar 18) *Culture/Community/Race, Part 2: Moonlight and Black Homophobia*

- Stanley Crouch, “[The Roots of Black Homophobia](#)” (2010)
- WATCH: *Moonlight* (2016)

Week 12 (Mar 25) *Queer/Disabled Existence*

- 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)
- WATCH: *Hole* (2014)

****Note that March 31 is the last day to drop a second-term half course, or a second-term full course without academic penalty**

Week 13 (Apr 1) *Catch-up and Review*

****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^{[L][SEP]}
- Sophisticated writing style^{[L][SEP]}
- Appropriate documentation
- Quotations well integrated into the text, with proper documentation
- Evidence of originality or independence of thought^{[L][SEP]}
- Provision of strong analysis^{[L][SEP]}
- 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^{[L][SEP]}
- Adequate documentation^{[L][SEP]}
- Allowance for some (minor) problems such as:
 - errors in factual content or interpretation^{[L][SEP]}
 - some minor errors in terminology or general writing skills^{[L][SEP]}
 - 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^{[L][SEP]}
- Tends to be too general or superficial in the handling of material^{[L][SEP]}
- Weaknesses in argument including a descriptive thesis, a mechanical approach, lack of adequate evidence, documentation, or support^{[L][SEP]}
- Problems with grammar or matters of style^{[L][SEP]}
- Simplicity of thought, structure, or expression

D (50 to 59)

Fair work, minimally acceptable

- Does not provide an argument or a line of thought^{[L][SEP]}
- Major difficulties with logical structure, and expression of ideas^{[L][SEP]}
- Topic has not been thought through^{[L][SEP]}

- Errors of grammar and diction interfere with understanding^[1]
- Over-generalization with inadequate support, evidence, or documentation

F (49 and down)

Fail

- Assignment submitted does not apply to course^[1]
- Basic requirements of the assignment are not met

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