

Department of English & Writing Studies
Theatre Studies Program

Theatre Studies 3211G (001)
In Your Skin (Sexualities in Performance)

Winter 2024

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Gender and sexuality. Intersectional experiences of gender identity. Trans, non-binary, queer lives. This is an unprecedented moment in modern history: these once-taboo topics are not only being spoken about openly, in the social mainstream, but are being taken up and explored with rigour, kindness, and hot, sweaty desire in all manner of theatrical and performance forms. In Your Skin introduces students to the past and present of sex and gender performatives on Western (that is: European and trans-American) stages. We will meet the trailblazers, learn about the ways in which contemporary artists are pushing the boundaries of gender representation on stage today, and we'll pay particular attention in the intersections among sexual and gender identities and experiences of race, Indigeneity, class, and ability on and off stage.

2. COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this term, students who commit to our shared class labour can expect:

1. To be introduced to a range of different performance forms that focus on gender and sexuality, made by artists who use their bodies as key source material for their work;
2. To explore some of the theory and history of sexuality in performance;
3. To explore how intersections of race, gender, ability, sexuality, and Indigeneity shape artists' approaches to sexuality in performance;
4. To understand theatre and performance "as a public practice," and to be able to discuss the risks and benefits of theatre and performance as tools for public engagement in matters of gender and sexuality (and their intersections);
5. To put this understanding into action, by making performance that responds to some of the work we're investigating in class;
6. To be able to reflect critically on their own experiences as students in our class, including engaging independently with class material, as well as reflecting on their individual learning styles and practices;
- 7.

For this assignment, you'll be placed in a group, based on your interest in working on one of the following texts: *Dress Suits to Hire*; *Fun Home*; *Seven Methods of Killing Kylie Jenner*.

Your performance should engage directly with the piece you're working on – be that literal content, aesthetic choices, political focus, or otherwise – but it isn't a "scene study" in the traditional sense. That is, you aren't just staging the piece as given. Instead, think of this task as staging *something of your piece*, but with a *critical difference* that lets us all look more deeply at a core issue it touches.

Your performance does not need to be professional-looking or polished, but it DOES need to evidence a good deal of "thought work": critical engagement with the issue(s) you and your group decide to focus on, and time spent figuring out how best to perform that engagement in order to draw the rest of us into your discussion.

We're scheduled to present/experience/engage with your response performances on the three Wednesdays before reading week (Jan 31, Feb 7, 14).

THE FINE PRINT

- Your response performance will be

Whichever option you choose, this project marks the culmination of your work in Theatre 3211G. The goal of the assignment is for you to make a piece of work that examines, in depth, the issue(s) on which our course has touched that are most important to *you*. I also hope you'll pick a mode (essay or performance) that feels both doable and challenging to you.

Research essay option:

*This is a great choice for those who are really interested in exploring a topic in depth, in writing. It's also a great choice for those who want to challenge their research skills, or who want to build on critical discoveries made during the term in a medium that supports extended intellectual discovery. Advice: don't default here, just because you *prefer* essays/are good at them. Consider what it would mean to step out of your comfort zone before you make a final call.*

Your research essay will be on a topic devised by you, with help from Jo. If you've never created your own essay topic before, don't panic; just come speak to Jo ASAP so she can help you draft a compelling set of research questions.

Your essay will use, in some depth, at least three secondary sources to help build and shape your argument. That is: no quote bombs, please. Engage with your sources meaningfully and let them help you nuance your response to your primary texts.

Your essay will be supported by an annotated bibliography (see #5 below), which you will hand in by mid-March. This scaffold is in place so that you can change your mind, if you need to, about the direction of your investigation, and so that Jo can offer her advice on the path(s) you are taking.

THE FINE PRINT

Your performance project must be created with a group, though that group may be as few as two people strong. You will need to find your own group mates, though Jo is available to assist.

Your group's work may be scripted like a play, or it may be performance art or action-based. (By the end of the term you will know what this means. ☺)

Your group's work may be wholly original – your own creation, start to finish – or it may choose to perform, adapt, or re-perform work that we have looked at together in class, though it will do so *with a difference* (take your cue from the Response Performance task, then big it up!)

Your group's work will strive to showcase your learning, holistically, over the course of our term together. That means it may be uncomfortable to make or to view (in a good, productive way – trigger warnings as needed please). At the same time, that means it may be rich, generous fun – provocative, exploratory, creative-as-duck. Above all, it will engage its audience, either directly or indirectly, with much to witness, to think about, and perhaps even to participate in.

THE FINE PRINT

- Your performance piece should run **no less than 10 and no more than 15 minutes in length** (IE: twice as long as the Response Performance task).
- You'll present your performance work **on either Wednesday 27 March or Monday 1 April during class time**. Your presentation will be followed by a class discussion of about 10 minutes.
- **Your mark will be a group mark**. (Relax, it's going to be amazing!)
- **Top marks will go to** pieces that clearly show time, effort, and investment in making work that looks and sounds *quite professional* (this is different from the Response Performance task – take note). Your performance will be original in its idea and practiced in execution. It will demonstrate strong intellectual, aesthetic, and political engagement, in process and in product. It will also take care for its audience, demonstrating consideration for the ethical challenges of making work about sensitive topics – even as it challenges us to think in new or unexpected ways. These pieces will be original, creative, and provocative. They will make us all go, “bravo!”

5. Final project supplement (15%)

Research Essay option: Annotated Bibliography

If you have chosen to complete a research essay, you will first prepare an annotated bibliography. This bibliography may be composed entirely of scholarly materials related to your topic and/or primary source, or it may include a mix of scholarly, popular, or other materials related to your topic and/or primary source. Either way, your annotated bibliography must include *at least two* scholarly resources.

THE FINE PRINT

- **Your bibliography will be composed of 6-8 sources**, including a complete citation for each source, followed by a short (+/- 150 words or so) paragraph that briefly summarizes the source's core argument or component(s) and comments on its strengths and/or weaknesses as a resource for your project.

- **Your bibliography is due during the week of 18 March, and no later than Sunday**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Religious Accommodation:

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requireme

Intellectual Property

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain Jo's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person without permission. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

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.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

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

7. WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week ONE (January 8 & 10)

READ: your syllabus! (And read ahead for next week! REALLY!)

EXPERIENCE: all things welcome! How will we work safely and productively together?

Week TWO (January 15 & 17)

READ: Dolan; Colbert

(Please read these two books in full if you can. They are written in accessible language for students and are our theoretical and historical foundations for the term!)

Week THREE (January 22 & 24) NB: Jo will be away on the 24th, so no class that day!

READ: Split Britches, *Dress Suits to Hire*, in Hughes

VIEW: *Dress Suits to Hire* (the video is grainy; it was the 90s! Stick with it. It's amazing.)

Week FOUR (