CUL 324

Fat Studies: Panic, Politics and Embodiment

D2 2012

Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies

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Disclaimer

Macquarie University has taken all reasonable measures to ensure the information in this publication is accurate and up-to-date. However, the information may change or become out-dated as a result of change in University policies, procedures or rules. The University reserves the right to make changes to any information in this publication without notice. Users of this publication are advised to check the website version of this publication [or the relevant faculty or department] before acting on any information in this publication.
General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff
Unit Convenor
Samantha Murray
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Contact via samantha.murray@mq.edu.au
Y3A 148
TBA

Credit points
3

Prerequisites
39cp including 3cp in CUL units at 200 level

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description
Fat bodies have increasingly become medicalised in recent times through the disease category of 'obesity', but for more than a century in Western cultures, fat flesh has been considered an aesthetic failure, particularly in relation to women's bodies. How and why has slenderness become emblematic of 'health' and normative gendered bodily aesthetics in Western cultures, while fatness continues to be positioned as abject, pathological and morally suspect? Drawing on feminist, poststructuralist and critical theories, in this unit we will engage with popular, clinical and activist literature concerned with fat bodies. We examine the socio-cultural, popular and medical constructions of fatness, particularly in the context of the Western 'obesity' epidemic, and we critically engage with pervasive cultural anxieties about excessive bodies. We will look at the intersection of fatness with a range of modes of being (such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality), and how these intersections reproduce dominant attitudes towards fatness. In response to cultural 'fatphobia', we will examine the political responses to fat stigmatisation, the formation of the Fat Acceptance movement, and other forms of fat activism.

Important Academic Dates
Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at https://students.mq.edu.au/important-dates

Learning Outcomes
On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:
An understanding of the ways in which dominant, historically and culturally specific conceptions of ‘fatness’ are constitutive of our bodily being and relations with others. [Graduate Capability 1, 2]

The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]

An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]

The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

Assessment Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Due</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Response</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5pm, Friday 31 August 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reflexive Response</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>5pm, Friday 12 October 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5pm, Friday 9 November 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critical Response

Due: **5pm, Friday 31 August 2012**
Weighting: **20%**

1000 word task. You will be asked to provide a brief critical response to ONE pre-selected text. There will be four texts to choose from, including either news reports, a blog post or a book excerpt, all dealing with various issues relating to negative constructions of fatness. You are expected to identify the discursive assumptions underpinning these texts, and critically engage with the ways in which they (re)produce and/or challenge dominant understandings of the ‘normal’ body.

I will distribute copies of these text excerpts to you in Week 3 classes, so you can select which one you wish to address in your written response. Your critical response should engage with relevant course material covered in the course up to and including Week 5.

You must submit this assignment (with a completed Arts coversheet) to the Arts Faculty
office in the foyer of W6A, no later than 5pm on Friday 31 August.

On successful completion you will be able to:

• The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]

• An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]

Self-Reflexive Response

Due: 5pm, Friday 12 October 2012
Weighting: 25%

1250 word task. This task asks you to critically reflect on the course so far, and on your own positionality in relation to the material covered in the course. This written response should include a reflective account of your learning in the semester to date, and should include considered responses to the following:

(i) an identification of key issues raised in the course that have been especially important to you, or that have challenged your ideas about a particular issue/construction of bodily being;

(ii) critical responses to (and brief analyses of) sections of course readings that relate to the specific weekly topics of most interest to you.

You do not have to cover all topics raised in the course – you may choose to focus on one or two that have been particularly resonant with you.

Remember: this is not an exercise where you describe a particular issue. It is not a formal essay either. Rather, it is a space for you to critically reflect on your own responses to the course material, and the readings.

On successful completion you will be able to:

• An understanding of the ways in which dominant, historically and culturally specific conceptions of ‘fatness’ are constitutive of our bodily being and relations with others. [Graduate Capability 1, 2]

• The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]
An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]

Final Essay
Due: 5pm, Friday 9 November 2012
Weighting: 40%

2500 word task. Essay questions will be posted on the CUL324 iLearn site after the mid-semester break/reading week.

On successful completion you will be able to:
• An understanding of the ways in which dominant, historically and culturally specific conceptions of ‘fatness’ are constitutive of our bodily being and relations with others. [Graduate Capability 1, 2]
• The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]
• An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]
• The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

Tutorial Participation
Due: Ongoing
Weighting: 15%

You are expected to complete the readings for each week prior to each tutorial, and come to classes prepared to contribute to discussion and various workshop activities.

On successful completion you will be able to:
• The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]
• The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with
particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

Delivery and Resources

Lecture and tutorials times and classrooms are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Time</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Wednesdays, 10 - 11am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 1</td>
<td>Wednesdays, 1 - 3pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 2</td>
<td>Currently on hold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may also wish to consult the MQ Timetable website: http://www.timetables.mq.edu.au. This website will display up-to-date information on your classes and classroom locations.

Tutorial attendance is compulsory. Please ensure that you are enrolled in a weekly 2-hour tutorial. Please note that if you do not attend 70% of tutorials and you do not provide medical certificates or other similar support documentation, you will fail the course.

iLectures will be available for download, and the unit guide and lecture notes will be posted on the CUL324 iLearn website. You can access this via https://ilearn.mq.edu.au/login/MQ/

Unit Schedule

WEEK ONE: Wednesday 1 August

Introduction: What is Fat Studies?

Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


WEEK TWO: Wednesday 8 August

From ‘corpulent’ to ‘obese’: the medicalisation of fatness
Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


WEEK THREE: Wednesday 15 August

Epidemics of Shame: Childhood Obesity and discourses of class
Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


Fox, Rebekah & Smith, Graham (2011) “Sinner Ladies and the gospel of good taste: Geographies of food, class and care” in *Health & Place*, 17: 2, pp 403 – 412


WEEK FOUR: Wednesday 22 August

*Fat bodies in the eyes of the law*
Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


Kirkland, Anna (2006) "What’s at Stake in Fatness as a Disability? In *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 26: 1


**WEEK FIVE: Wednesday 29 August**

*Negotiating Space as a Fat Body*

Essential Readings:


Further Readings:


Longhurst, Robin (2005) Fat Bodies: Developing geographical research agendas in Progress in Human Geography, 29: 3, pp 247 - 259

**WEEK SIX: Wednesday 5 September**

*Fatness Beyond Whiteness, Fat Studies beyond the US*

**Essential Readings:**


**Further Readings:**


Rasmussen, S. J. (2010) Remaking Body Politics: Dilemmas Over Female Fatness as Symbolic Capital in Two Rural Tuareg Communities in Culture, Medicine and...
WEEK SEVEN: Wednesday 12 September

(En)Gendered Fat Embodiment

Essential Reading:
Rice, Carla (2007) “Becoming “the fat girl”: Acquisition of an unfit identity” in Women’s Studies International Forum, 30: 2, pp 158 - 174

Further Reading:

*** MID-SEMESTER BREAK 17 - 28 September inclusive ***

*** READING WEEK 1 – 5 October inclusive (WEEK EIGHT) ***

WEEK NINE: Wednesday 10 October

Fatness, Celebrity and Popular Culture

Essential Reading:


Nault, Curran (2009) “‘Punk Will Never Diet’: Beth Ditto and the (Queer) Revaluation of Fat” in NeoAmericanist, 4: 2, pp 1 - 14

Further Reading:


Understood Emotion” (written with Michael Moon) in *Tendencies* (Duke University Press: Durham) pp 215 - 251


**WEEK TEN: Wednesday 17 October**

*Fat Politics: Activism Then and Now*

**Essential Reading:**


**Further Reading:**


**WEEK ELEVEN: Wednesday 24 October**
Fat Visibility and Resignification

Essential Readings:


Further Reading:

Big Fat Blog (blog) http://www.bigfatblog.com

Cooper, Charlotte (blog) Obesity Timebomb http://www.obesitytimebomb.blogspot.com


WEEK TWELVE: Wednesday 31 October

Fat Identity Politics and its discontents

Essential Reading:


Further Reading:


**WEEK THIRTEEN: Wednesday 7 November**

*Traitors to the Cause: Fat Activism and Weight Loss Practices*

Essential Reading:

Murray, Samantha (2009) “‘Banded Bodies’: The Somatechnics of Gastric Banding” in Sullivan, Nikki & Murray, Samantha (eds) *Somatechnics: The Technologisation of Bodies* (Ashgate: Farnham)


Further Reading:


**Policies and Procedures**

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- **Special Consideration Policy** [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/policy.html)

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/) of Policy Central.
Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of Academic Student Support Services. Details of these services can be accessed at: [http://students.mq.edu.au/support/](http://students.mq.edu.au/support/).

**UniWISE provides:**

- Online learning resources and academic skills workshops [http://www.mq.edu.au/learning_skills/](http://www.mq.edu.au/learning_skills/)
- Personal assistance with your learning & study related questions.
- The Learning Help Desk is located in the Library foyer (level 2).
- Online and on-campus orientation events run by Mentors@Macquarie.

Student Enquiry Service

Details of these services can be accessed at [http://www.student.mq.edu.au/ses/](http://www.student.mq.edu.au/ses/).

Equity Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Support Unit](http://www.mq.edu.au/disability) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

IT Help

If you wish to receive IT help, we would be glad to assist you at [http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/](http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/).

When using the university's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](http://www.mq.edu.au/acceptable_use). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students and it outlines what can be done.

Graduate Capabilities

**Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills**

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcomes**

- An understanding of the ways in which dominant, historically and culturally specific conceptions of ‘fatness’ are constitutive of our bodily being and relations with others. [Graduate Capability 1, 2]
Unit guide CUL 324 Fat Studies: Panic, Politics and Embodiment

- An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]
- The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

Assessment tasks

- Critical Response
- Self-Reflexive Response
- Final Essay
- Tutorial Participation

Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- An understanding of the ways in which dominant, historically and culturally specific conceptions of ‘fatness’ are constitutive of our bodily being and relations with others. [Graduate Capability 1, 2]
- The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]
- An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]
- The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

Assessment tasks

- Critical Response
Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcomes**

- The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]
- The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

**Assessment tasks**

- Final Essay
- Tutorial Participation

Creative and Innovative

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Assessment task**

- Self-Reflexive Response

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication...
technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcome**

- The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

**Assessment tasks**

- Self-Reflexive Response
- Final Essay
- Tutorial Participation

**Engaged and Ethical Local and Global citizens**

As local citizens our graduates will be aware of indigenous perspectives and of the nation’s historical context. They will be engaged with the challenges of contemporary society and with knowledge and ideas. We want our graduates to have respect for diversity, to be open-minded, sensitive to others and inclusive, and to be open to other cultures and perspectives: they should have a level of cultural literacy. Our graduates should be aware of disadvantage and social justice, and be willing to participate to help create a wiser and better society.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcomes**

- The development of critical and analytical skills that will enable students to evaluate the ethical, political and social implications of ‘fatphobia’ and the ways in which discourses about body size intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and health. [Graduate Capability 2, 3, 6]
- An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]

**Assessment tasks**

- Critical Response
- Self-Reflexive Response
- Final Essay
- Tutorial Participation

**Socially and Environmentally Active and Responsible**

We want our graduates to be aware of and have respect for self and others; to be able to work
with others as a leader and a team player; to have a sense of connectedness with others and country; and to have a sense of mutual obligation. Our graduates should be informed and active participants in moving society towards sustainability.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcome**

- An understanding of the role of these discourses in normalising and shaping our evaluation of ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ bodies. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 6, 7]

**Assessment tasks**

- Critical Response
- Final Essay

**Commitment to Continuous Learning**

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

**Learning outcome**

- The ability to deploy interdisciplinary theories and concepts in order more effectively to analyse complex issues of topical importance concerning our embodiment, with particular reference to contemporary constructions of ‘fatness’ and the scholarly and activist responses to them. [Graduate Capability 1, 2, 3, 5, 9]

**Assessment tasks**

- Self-Reflexive Response
- Final Essay
- Tutorial Participation

**Changes since First Published**

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<thead>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20/07/2012</td>
<td>Technical Team has corrected bug regarding the numbering of Learning Outcomes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>