The concept of “health” played an important role in the construction of “normal” sexuality throughout the 20th century. This paper traces the shifts in the medical discourse in Canada from one of “fixing” sexual ambiguity, often constructed as deviancy, to one of “enhancing” bodies for cosmetic purposes. These discourses point to a need to explore in more detail the ways in which cosmetic surgery represents conformism to societal norms and how those norms shift and change over time. The convergence of medical discourse with other discourses in different periods points to the intersections between medical science/technology and cultural views of gender and sexuality. I explore how the medical/scientific discourse converges with that of popular/cultural discourse in different periods to shape our understanding of what represents a “healthy” body, how this understanding is normalized by medicine, and the role of cosmetic surgery in helping those who are “different” to fit the norm.

Biography
Tracy Penny Light, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Studies and History departments at St. Jerome’s University in the University of Waterloo. Her research explores the medical discourse on gender and sexuality in Canada and the United States in the twentieth century. She has published articles on masculinity and the feminine ideal in Canada and on developing historical thinking in students. Her current research explores how the medical profession in North America constructed masculinity, and how gender and sexuality are represented in and constructed by both the medical profession and the media. She teaches courses on the History of Sexuality, Sexual Ethics, and Sex, Gender and History in Film.