

Sarah Shropshire**PhD Final Oral Examination****Sun Science: environmental health, medical specialization and
body politics in 20th-century Canada****ABSTRACT**

Focusing on 20th century Canada, this dissertation uses human interaction with the sun and sunlight as a thematic framework to explore a diverse range of topics touching on the history and philosophy of science, history of medicine, gender, racial identity, environmental history, and the history of the body. While the sun may appear constant, the way that the sun and sunlight are understood, and now humans have chosen to interact with the sun have changed over time. In Canada over the course of the 20th century, those changes were substantial, with fundamental shifts in epistemological frameworks and complete reversals in the kinds of behaviours considered appropriate or desirable. During the early 20th century, suntans shifted from a Victorian Era marker of low class to a fashionable and highly visible symbol of modern life. This shift demonstrates explicit value placed on “whiteness” in the social hierarchy of the Victorian world, the determination of class status through women’s ascriptive bodies, and suntans as a visible symbol of subsequent rebellion against socially constructed and limiting gender roles. In the final decades of the 20th century, sun exposure increasingly came to be associated with the threats of ultraviolet radiation and potentially deadly skin cancer. This latter shift was influenced by multiple factors including new discoveries in atmospheric science, increasing awareness of human made environmental health risks, and the aggressive public health efforts of dermatologists. Dermatology takes a central place in the dissertation, allowing for discussion of the history of medical specialization. The Canadian Dermatology Association and its sun safety campaigns are used as a case study of how one medical specialty has been influenced by the financial pressures and professional competition of Canada’s single payer health insurance system, as well as the new communications, public relations, and administrative demands of the late-20th century. Throughout these various topics, the dissertation explores the growing application and influence of science into increasingly diverse elements of culture and society

Date: Tuesday, Dec 14, 2021**Time:** 1 pm**Location:** virtual

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meeting invite here:*

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