

WOME 4355FA/FAO Mother Culture: Constructions of Motherhood in Contemporary Society  
*Department of Women's Studies, Lakehead University*  
**Fall 2019**

**Instruction:** In-Class  
**Day/Time:** Friday 11:30am-2:30pm  
**Location:** ATAC 5041/ OA2020

**Instructor:** Dr. Jen Chisholm  
**Office:** Ryan Building, Room 2011  
**Office Hours:** Friday, 10-11:30am (or by appointment)  
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### **Course Description**

The meaning and value of motherhood/mothering has been a topic of passionate personal and political debate for centuries. The framework of reproductive justice includes the right to have, or not have a child, as well as the right to parent one's child in a safe environment. In this course we will interrogate how the right to parent - or, specifically the right to mother - is understood and taken up in both local, national and international contexts. We will examine emergent feminist scholarship on motherhood, with particular attention paid to the distinction between motherhood as a social imperative, or "patriarchal institution" (as described by Adrienne Rich), and the agential practice of mothering as defined by feminist scholars (Andrea O'Reilly, Fiona Green and others). From this theoretical grounding, we will explore constructions of the good vs. bad mother, conceptual and legal definitions of personhood, childless/child-free women, nationalism, neoliberalism, technology and the future of mothering. Particular attention is paid to intersectionality and the ways in which race, class, sexuality, ability, and ethnicity come to bare on the practice of mothering. In this course, we take as a given our collective relationship to motherhood/mothering (as mothers, daughters, sons, partners, humans) and seek to explore our own positionally with greater depth and analysis.

**Required Texts:** All Readings will be made available to students through our course D2L page.

### **Grading Scheme**

Participation	20%	(Evaluated throughout term)
Position Papers (3 x 15%)	45%	(Due Sept. 20th, Oct. 11th & Nov. 15th, 2019)
Class Debate (3 x 5%)	15%	(Due Sept. 20th, Oct. 11th & Nov. 15th, 2019)
Final Essay	20%	(Due December 6th, 2019)

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this course you should be able to:

- \* distinguish between theoretical conceptions of motherhood and mothering
- \* demonstrate an understanding of the social construction of the good mother/bad mother dichotomy
- \* analyze the influence of patriarchy, neoliberalism, capitalism, nationalism and intersectionality on our understanding of motherhood/mothering

- \* develop a nuanced understanding of legal conceptions and arguments relating to fetal personhood and child welfare

### **Skills Outcomes**

At the end of this course you should be able to:

- \* written and oral communication
- \* analytical skills and self reflection
- \* developing sound arguments for debate

### **A note on participation and discussions:**

Discussions require that everyone participates (speaks and listens) in a meaningful and civil way. Please be aware that some of the material we are reading is of a sensitive nature. Some readings may be upsetting or disturbing. I ask that we all use respectful language and be sensitive of one another during our discussions. Personal attacks, gender and racial slurs, disrespectful comments on ability or able-bodiedness, or other such disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated. Please keep in mind that this is a scholarly environment and professionalism is expected at all times. In this course we will deal with many sensitive issues and may encounter historical language no longer appropriate. Please be reminded that respect for the people we study and other students is essential to a productive discussion. Disrespectful behaviour and/or comments about people in class or being studied will not be tolerated.

### **On Campus Help Available to Students:**

Student Success Centre: Additional help regarding academic matters can be found at the Student Success Centre located in SC 0008 or phone 343-8018 or online at - HYPERLINK "<http://academicadvising.lakeheadu.ca/>" <http://academicadvising.lakeheadu.ca/>

Student Accessibility Services: For assistance with accommodations for a disability, please visit Student Accessibility Services located in SC 0003 or phone 343-8047 or online at - HYPERLINK "<http://learningassistance.lakeheadu.ca/>" <http://learningassistance.lakeheadu.ca/>

Student Health and Counselling Centre: For help with personal and/or medical issues, please visit the Student Health and Counselling Centre located in the University Centre 1007 (across from Security) or phone 343-8361 or online at - HYPERLINK "<http://healthservices.lakeheadu.ca/>" <http://healthservices.lakeheadu.ca/>

## **Assignment Guidelines - General**

Note: Assignments will also be discussed in class.

A Note on Submitting Assignments: All assignments must be submitted to the designated “Drop box” folder on our course D2L site, on or before the due date. Please ensure that your assignments are submitted as either a word document (.docx) or a PDF (.pdf). If you require alternate arrangements, please contact Dr Chisholm in advance of the due date to work out an alternative.

Late Policy: Assignments received after the due date will be penalized 5% per day. Requests for extensions must be made prior to the due date and will ONLY be given in extenuating circumstances and may require documentation (e.g. a doctor’s note). Extensions will not be granted where good time management skills could have avoided the problem; i.e. extensions will not be granted for students who have a number of assignments due at the same time during the semester or for students who have decided to take an overload of classes this semester.

Style and grammar: Marks are not directly deducted for poor writing style and grammar. However, you simply cannot achieve a good grade if the paper is difficult to read and the argument difficult to discern. It is essential to proofread.

Referencing: Assignments must be entirely your own work. If the exact words or phrases of another author are used they must be in quotation marks with an accompanying reference. Material that is paraphrased – that is, an idea from another author but put into your own words – must also be accompanied by a properly formatted citation. Please use appropriate style (either MLA, APA or Chicago) in a consistent manner throughout the paper. References are essential and have four purposes: (1) they indicate the source of the “quotations,” (2) acknowledge the interpretations and ideas of others, (3) provide authority for facts which might be challenged or result from the research of others, and (4) point to other sources or interpretations of the same topic. In general, references acknowledge the use of another person’s ideas and are essential in avoiding plagiarism. Failure to provide adequate references constitutes plagiarism.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:**

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. Presenting an idea, words or an exact phrase of another author as your own work constitutes plagiarism. All students are required to know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism you can consult the Lakehead University calendar available online: "<http://calendar.lakeheadu.ca/current/contents/regulations/univeregs/xacdishon.html>" "<http://calendar.lakeheadu.ca/current/contents/regulations/univeregs/xacdishon.html>" or the professor.

All cases of plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with the Code of Student Behaviour and Disciplinary Procedures approved by Senate and the Board of Governors. Other instances of Academic Dishonesty, including but not limited to double submission, purchasing of assignments (either online or from another student on campus), or copying of assignments will also be dealt with in accordance to the University regulations on Academic Dishonesty. Students may obtain a copy of the “Code of Student Behaviour and Disciplinary Procedures” from the Office of the Registrar for more information. Please do your own work.

## Specific Assignment Guidelines

### Participation (20%):

Your voice is important!

Seminar classes require a significant amount of class discussion and participation. This is a time for you to work through your ideas and questions in a group setting, with the insights of your classmates. Participation from all members of the group is crucial if a discussion is to be both interesting and instructive. Discussion requires preparation which includes reading the articles and thinking critically about them before attending class. It is necessary that students critically read the materials in advance so they are fully prepared to speak about and ask questions regarding the readings. Participation marks are based on active involvement in the discussion and on the content of the student's comments.

Participation marks are broken down into two categories: attendance and active engagement. Attendance accounts for only 10% of the cumulative 25%, meaning if you attend class but do not participate (discuss, ask questions, respond) you are only able to receive up to 10% for your effort. The remaining 15% of the participation grade is reserved for active engagement - coming to class prepared to discuss the readings, ask questions, respond to your peers, make connections with other material or experiences. A seminar class only works when we are all participating!

### Position Papers (3 x 15% = 45%)

DUE: Sept. 20th, Oct. 11th & Nov. 15th, 2019

Students will complete a series of 3 position papers, each of which will reflect a statement/topic provided to the class in advance. Students will be randomly assigned a position, either the affirmative (yay) or oppositional (nay) position. In other words, you may be asked to state a position that you do not necessarily believe. This purpose of this is to get students thinking about the complexities of these issues, to develop convincing arguments, and to think through viewpoints you may not hold.

A position paper will have three parts: (1) an introduction which includes the statement to which you are responding and identifies your position, as well as provides a brief summary of your argument (think of this like a short intro to an essay); (2) evidence and explanation in support of your position; (3) a brief conclusion which sums up your argument and restates your position. Students are encouraged to come up with 2-4 specific points which support their position.

Position papers will be 3-4 (double-spaced) pages and submitted through D2L on the due dates listed above. Papers should be rooted in relevant theory and include reference to course readings. You may also include outside research, though it is not required.

Position papers will address the following statements:

Position Paper #1 (Due Sept. 20th, 2019): Motherhood is a human right.

Position Paper #2 (Due Oct. 11th, 2019): Reproductive labour is work and should therefore be financially compensated.

Position Paper #3 (Due Nov. 15th, 2019): Prenatal genetic testing and screening for disability is in line with a reproductive justice framework.

### **Class Debates (3 x 5% =15%)**

DUE: Sept. 20th, Oct. 11th & Nov. 15th, 2019

In class, on the due dates listed above, students will participate in a class debate, related to the statements provided for the position papers. Approximately half the class will be assigned the affirmative position (yay), while the other half will be assigned the oppositional position (nay). In a structured debate, each side will present arguments and have the opportunity to refute, or speak back to the arguments provided by the other side. At the conclusion of the debate, students will vote on which side they feel was most convincing.

Participation in these class debates is mandatory and thus students must be in class on dates listed.

### **Final Essay - 20%**

Due December 6th, 2019

Students will submit a 10-12 page paper on a course-related topic of your choice. The final essay is intended for students to critically engage with course concepts, offer critique and analysis, and develop an argument or standpoint. Papers must integrate at least two (2) course readings and four (4) or more outside sources. You are welcome to reference news media, films and television, or current events, however this does not take the place of the four (4) academic sources required. You may take this opportunity to examine a topic we've covered in more depth, or you may choose to write about a related topic that we did not cover in class.

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss their topics with the professor. Papers will be evaluated based on quality of argument, originality and use of sources. Students should not be concerned with whether the instructor agrees with their standpoint, argument or position, but rather that their arguments are well-articulated and properly supported by source material and citation.

### **Weekly Reading Schedule**

#### **Week 1 (September 6th, 2019) : Introduction to Course**

Introduction to Course, Syllabus Review

#### **Week 2 (September 13th, 2019): Reproductive Justice**

Ross, Loretta. (2017). *Reproductive Justice and the Right to Parent*. Ross, Loretta & Solinger, Rickie (Eds.). Reproductive Justice: An Introduction. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. pgs. 168-237.

Full Frontal with Samantha Bee: Reproductive Justice  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTr3phgBrPQ>

#### **Week 3 (September 20th, 2019): Motherhood as Institution**

Rich, A. (1986). *Forward. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W.W Norton & Company: New York. pgs. 11-17.

Rich, A. (1986). *The "Sacred Calling"*. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. W.W Norton & Company: New York. pgs. 41-55.

Rich, A. (1986). *The Kingdom of the Fathers. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W.W Norton & Company: New York. pgs. 56-83.

In-Class Debate: Motherhood is a human right.

**\*\*Position Paper #1 DUE\*\***

#### **Week 4 (September 27th, 2019): Mothering as Practice**

Ruddick, S. (1990). Maternal Thinking. *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 6(2). pgs. 342-367.

Turner, T. (2017). *I Am a Metis Mother*. In Listening to the Beat of Our Drum: Indigenous Parenting in Contemporary Society. Bourassa, C., McKenna, B. & Juschka, D. (Eds.). Demeter Press: Toronto. pgs. 106-115.

Roberts, L. (2017). *On Becoming and Being a Mother in Four Movements: An Intergenerational View through a Reproductive Justice Lens*. In Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Thoery, Practice, Critique. Feminist Press: New York. pgs. 111-133.

#### **Week 5 (October 4th, 2019): Mothering as Work: Local and Global Reproductive Labour**

Maher, J. (2004). Skills, Not Attributes: Rethinking Mothering as Work. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. Vol. 6(2). pgs. 7-16.

Banerjee, A. (2014). "Race and a Transnational Reproductive Caste System: Indian Transnational Surrogacy". *Hypatia*. Vol. 29(1). pgs. 113-128.

Fulfer, K. (2017). "Cross-Border Reproductive Travel, Neocolonialism and Canadian Policy". *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*. Vol. 10(1). pgs. 225-247.

#### **Week 6 (October 11th, 2019): Prenatal Mothering**

Davies, J. (2009). *Premature (M)othering: Levinasian Ethics and the Politics of Fetal Ultrasound Imaging*. In Campbell, S., Meynell, L. & Sherwin, S (Eds.). Embodiment and Agency. Pennsylvania University Press: Philadelphia. pgs. 184-210.

Petchesky, R. (1980). Reproductive Freedom: Beyond "A Woman's Right to Choose". *Signs*. Vol.5(4). pgs. 661-685.

Parsons, K. (2010). Feminist Reflections on Miscarriage in Light of Abortion. *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*. Vol. 3(1). pgs. 1-22.

In-Class Debate: Reproductive labour is work and should therefore be financially compensated.

**\*\*Position Paper #2 DUE\*\***

**\*\*Fall Reading Break (October 14th-18th, 2019): NO CLASSES\***

**Week 7 (October 25th, 2019): Child Welfare and “Dangerous” Mothers**

Weir, L. (2006). *Child Welfare at the Perinatal Threshold. Pregnancy, Risk and Biopolitics: On the Threshold of the Living Subject*. Routledge: New York. pgs. 143-180.

Chambers, L. (2016). *Child Apprehension. A Legal History of Adoption in Ontario: 1921-2015*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto. pgs. 52-62.

Power, E. (2005). “The Unfreedom of Being Other: Canadian Lone Mothers’ Experiences of Poverty and ‘Life on the Cheque’.” *Sociology*. Vol. 39(4). pgs. 643-660.

**Week 8 (November 1st, 2019): Colonizing Motherhood**

Juschka, D. (2017). *Indigenous Women, Reproductive Justice, and Indigenous Feminisms*. In Listening to the Beat of Our Drum: Indigenous Parenting in Contemporary Society. Bourassa, C., McKenna, B. & Juschka, D. (Eds.). Demeter Press: Toronto. pgs. 13-45.

Davis, Angela. (1981). *Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights. Women, Race & Class*. New York: Vintage Books. pgs. 202-221.

Davis, Angela. (1993). *Outcast Mothers and Surrogates: Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties*. J. James (Ed.). The Angela Davis Reader. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. pgs. 210-221.

**Week 9 (November 8th, 2019): Mothering with Disability**

Ryan, S. & Runswick-Cole, K. (2008). “Repositioning Mothers: Mothers, Disabled Children and Disability Studies.” *Disability & Society*. Vol. 23(3). pgs. 199-210.

Kuttai, H. (2010). *Inaccessibility. Maternity Rolls: Pregnancy, Childbirth and Disability*. Fernwood Publishing: Halifax. pgs. 93-107.

Kuttai, H. (2010). *In The Family Way. Maternity Rolls: Pregnancy, Childbirth and Disability*. Fernwood Publishing: Halifax. pgs. 49-82.

Shakespeare, T. (1998). “Choices and Rights: Eugenics, Genetics and Disability Equality”. *Disability & Society*. Vol. 13(5). pgs. 665-681.

**Week 10 (November 15th, 2019): Choice (?) Constructions of Non-Motherhood**

Kelly, M. (2009). Women’s Voluntary Childlessness: A Radical Rejection of Motherhood?. *Women’s Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 37(3). pgs. 157-172.

Letherby, G. & Williams, C. (1999). Non-Motherhood: Ambivalent Autobiographies. *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 25(3). pgs. 719-747.

Tyler May, E. (1998). *Non mothers as Bad Mothers: Infertility and the "Maternal Instinct"*. In Ladd-Taylor, M. & Umansky, L. (Eds.). "Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America. New York University Press: New York. pgs.198-219.

In-Class Debate: Prenatal genetic testing and screening for disability is in line with a reproductive justice framework.

**\*\*Position Paper #3 DUE\*\***

### **Week 11 (November 22nd, 2019): Queer Parenting**

Spector, S. (2009). *Red Rock Baby Candy: Infertile Homosexual Speaks!* In Who's Your Daddy?: And Other Writings on Queer Parenting. Epstein, R. (Ed.). Sumach Press: Toronto. pgs. 73-82.

Hill-Meyer, T. (2009). *Race Relations in the Family: On Being a Transracial Spawn of White Queer Parents*. In Who's Your Daddy?: And Other Writings on Queer Parenting. Epstein, R. (Ed.). Sumach Press: Toronto. pgs. 267-276.

Starr, C. (2009). *In the Best Interests of the Child: The Awful Truth about Queer Raised Kids*. In Who's Your Daddy?: And Other Writings on Queer Parenting. Epstein, R. (Ed.). Sumach Press: Toronto. pgs. 310-315.

Park, S. (2009). *Is Queer Parenting Possible?* In Who's Your Daddy?: And Other Writings on Queer Parenting. Epstein, R. (Ed.). Sumach Press: Toronto. pgs. 316-327.

### **Week 12 (November 29th, 2019): TransParenting**

Ryan, M. (2009). *Beyond Thomas Beatie: Trans Men and the New Parenthood*. In Who's Your Daddy?: And Other Writings on Queer Parenting. Epstein, R. (Ed.). Sumach Press: Toronto. pgs. 139-152.

Walks, M. (2014). *Stratified Reproduction: Making the Case for Butch Lesbians', Transmen's and Genderqueer Individuals' Experiences in British Columbia*. In Fertile Ground: Exploring Reproduction in Canada. McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal & Kingston. pgs. 74-93.

Verlinden, J. (2012). "Transgender Bodies and Male Pregnancy: The Ethics of Self-Refashioning". In Machine: Bodies, Genders, Technologies. Hampf, M. & Snyder-Korber, M. (Eds.). Heidelberg: Berlin. pgs. 107-136.

**\*Final Papers DUE December 6th, 2019\***

**Looking forward to a great semester!**