

WOME 4355FA/FAO Mother Culture: Constructions of Motherhood in Contemporary Society
Department of Women's Studies, Lakehead University
Winter 2023

Instruction: In-Class (Videoconference)
Day/Time: Tuesdays, 2:30pm-5:30pm
Location: ATAC 5041/ OA2020

Instructor: Dr. Jen Chisholm
Office: Ryan Building, Room 2011
Office hours: In- person – Mondays, 11am-12pm (noon)
Virtual - Mondays, 12pm (noon) – 1:00pm

PLEASE NOTE: My in-person office hour location is subject to current COVID-19 guidelines, and may be converted to virtual at any time. I will always communicate any changes to office hours with students via email.

Virtual Office Hours:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://lakeheadu.zoom.us/j/94367781321?pwd=cVJQSXNtR1F5QWQ4QINTN25na2M4dz09>

Meeting ID: 943 6778 1321

Passcode: 053321

I encourage you to log on, or come and see me if you have any questions or concerns, about course material, assignments, topics or discussions.

Email: jen.chisholm@lakeheadu.ca

Phone: (807)343-8059

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	15%	(Evaluated throughout term)
Position Statements (3 x 10%)	30%	(Due Jan. 24th, Feb. 7th & Feb. 28th, 2023)
Moot Court	30%	(Due March 14th 2023)
Summary – 20%		
Presentation – 10%		
Court Decision OR Research Paper	25%	(Due April 11 th , 2023)

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

GENERAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

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.

A Note about COVID-19

This has been an especially challenging time, with many of us struggling with the transition back to in-person learning. I recognize that some of you might be juggling working and learning

from home, as well as helping children, siblings or others in your family complete their own schooling. This can be very challenging, and we can't always anticipate what might come up. Your best practice for success is to be honest with yourself about what you need and what you can handle, and then to reach out and communicate with me. More than anything, I want you to learn, and be successful in this course, so I am open to working with you to find the best path for success. Below is a list of available (free) resources for students who would benefit from more sustained support or accommodations.

Resources 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 - <http://academicadvising.lakeheadu.ca/>

o If you have any question or need our assistance, please email us at ssc@lakeheadu.ca or call us at 807-343-8018.

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 - <http://learningassistance.lakeheadu.ca/>.

o They are also connecting with students via email, telephone and video conference. To book a new appointment via telephone or video conference, email sas@lakeheadu.ca for Thunder Bay Campus and oraccess@lakeheadu.ca for the Orillia Campus.

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 - <http://healthservices.lakeheadu.ca/>.

o Virtual and/or telephone counselling options are also available at: <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/wellness-recreation/student-health-and-wellness/about/covid-19-updates>

GENERAL COURSE GUIDELINES

Email Etiquette:

All correspondence should be polite, respectful and professional. Email inquiries must include:

- a subject line indicating the course name and/or number
- a salutation, (i.e. "hello", "dear", "To", etc.)
- a detailed question, or polite request
- a signature (i.e. your name).

Emails that do not follow this format will not be answered.

Every effort will be made to respond to emails within 72 hours (excluding weekends). If you have not received a response after 72 hours, please send a polite reminder as sometimes emails can get lost in the shuffle!

A Note on Submitting Assignments:

All assignments must be submitted electronically, under the “Assignment” tab on our course D2L site. The best format to submit your assignments is as a .doc or .pdf file.

You should receive confirmation that your assignment has successfully uploaded. If you do not receive confirmation, it is a sign that something may have gone wrong with the submission. If this happens, please try again to submit, or contact Dr. Chisholm to ensure that your assignment properly uploaded. Improper uploading will not be accepted as an excuse for late papers.

Academic Accommodations:

Some students may benefit from receiving academic accommodation, due to a disability (physical, learning or otherwise), illness or disruption. Please reach out to Student Accessibility Services: <http://learningassistance.lakeheadu.ca/> and speak with an advisor. Your SAS advisor will work with you to develop a plan, which will then be communicated to Dr. Chisholm. You need not disclose any personal or medical information to Dr. Chisholm, or any of your professors. SAS will work with you to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Everyone has the right to an accessible education, and all approved accommodations will be honoured, no questions asked.

Late Policy:

Assignments received after the due date (where the student does not have an approved accommodation) 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 approval through Student Accessibility Services.

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. Failure to provide adequate references constitutes plagiarism. 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.

A great resource for help with citations:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

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.

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/univeregsIXacdishon.html>

All cases of plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct 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 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. Your ideas and contributions are valuable. See each assignment as an opportunity to build your writing and analysis skills.

ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Note: Assignments will also be discussed in class

Participation (15%):

Evaluated throughout the semester

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 you 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.

Attendance is not the same as participation! The participation grade is reserved for active engagement - coming to class prepared to discuss the readings, asking questions, responding to your peers, active listening, making connections with other material or experiences. A seminar class works best when we are all participating!

It can be helpful to think about class discussions as a way of demonstrating feminist solidarity with each other, and as a way of engaging in feminist world-building. The voices of women and marginalized folks have, historically, been silenced and/or dismissed. In this class, we have the opportunity to use our voices, build confidence, learn from each other and participate in the active dismantling of what bell hooks calls “the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. Opting out of this important aspect of feminist community building, shifts responsibility to your peers and creates more work for them and for Dr. Chisholm.

If you struggle with class participation, please reach out to Dr. Chisholm for some helpful tips and tricks!

Position Statements (3 x 10% = 30%)

DUE: Jan. 24th, Feb. 7th & Feb. 28th, 2023

Students will complete a series of 3 position statements, 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. The 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 statement will have three parts: (1) an introduction which includes the statement to which you are responding and identifies your position, and a brief summary/indication of your argument (think of this like a short intro to an essay – 3-5 sentences); (2) evidence and explanation in support of your position (about 350 words) ; (3) a brief concluding sentence which sums up your argument and restates your position. Students are encouraged to come up with 2 specific points which support their position.

Position statements should be **no more than 500 words** (i.e. 500 words MAX.). Students will post their position statement to the discussion forum posted on our course D2L page, on the dates listed above. Statements should be rooted in relevant theory and include reference to a course reading(s). You may also include outside research/sources, though it is not required.

Position statements will address the following:

Position Statement #1 (Due Jan. 24th, 2023): Motherhood is a human right.

Position Statement #2 (Due Feb. 7th, 2023): Reproductive labour is work and should therefore be financially compensated.

Position Statement #3 (Due Feb. 28th, 2023): The decision to terminate a pregnancy belongs to the person who gestates the fetus/births the child.

Moot Court (Written Summary – 20% + Presentation – 10% = 30%)

DUE: March 14th and March 21st, 2023

This activity is adopted from the practice of “mooting” in law schools, which is designed to engage the class with the myriad legal difficulties in hearing cases involving fetal personhood

and child welfare. A Moot is a mock court exercise where students argue the sides of actual Canadian legal cases. These legal cases address mothering/motherhood in some capacity and reflect many of the complex issues present in realizing the right to parent.

The class will be split into groups of four, with each group assigned a specific case. Your group will decide which two students will argue on the side of the Crown (i.e. the state) and which two students will argue on the side of the Defense. You may choose to work together on developing the arguments for both sides, however, you must divide the presentation of your case evenly between all four members. The cases will be assigned at random. Each group will receive a description of their case, including all the information and details provided when the case was originally heard in court.

Along with the facts of each case, students will receive clarification about the direction of arguments for each side (for example. “The Crown will argue that the accused was negligent which resulted in injury to the child. The Defense will argue that the accused cannot be held responsible for actions taken which indirectly resulted in injury to the child.”). In offering justifications for your arguments, students are asked to draw on course concepts and material. As such, I am less concerned about the legal precedent and language, and more concerned about how you apply the theories we’ve been discussing to the real-life scenarios presented in the cases. It is expected that students will develop an argument based primarily on course material and class discussion to date. Outside research is encouraged but not required.

Each group will be given 25 minutes to present their case. You are encouraged to provide the facts of the case, while walking the class through your argument. How do you see the facts supporting your side of the argument? How do you see course content and material supporting your argument? Or, how do you see the facts of the case as outside of/apart from course concepts?

The rest of the class will hear both sides of the case, and be given an opportunity to consider their points, after which the class will issue a “ruling”. Because each decision will be highly personal, each student or “judge” will be given one vote. After each case is heard, and a ruling is made, there will be space for discussion and a description of the actual findings of the legal case within the Canadian court system.

Students will be graded on the strength of their argument, and how well you tie the details of the case to course materials and discussion. Given that the cases and sides will be assigned at random, it is likely that some students will be in a position where you must argue for a side you do not necessarily agree with. No one will judge you based on the arguments you make! We all understand that this is a thought exercise, not a statement of belief. This assignment presents us with the opportunity to better understand the complexities of such cases, and hopefully develop a greater sense of empathy for the ethical, personal and legal difficulties present for mothers.

This assignment is made up of two components – a written summary and a presentation. The expectations are as follows:

Written Summary (15%): Each group will submit a 4-5 page (double-spaced) written summary of their arguments. The summary should include a very brief description of the case facts (a short paragraph at most), and a written description of the arguments presented by both the Crown

and the Defense, including reference to course material and themes. This summary can form the basis of your presentation.

All written summaries are due on March 14th, 2023, regardless of the date your group presents. Each group should submit ONE summary and include the names of all group members.

Presentation (10%): Each group will present their case, as well the arguments of both the Crown and the Defense, to the class. You will have 25 minutes to present, and another 25 minutes to answer questions from your peers and interrogate in more depth the nuances and challenges of arguing the case.

Final Assignment- 25%

DUE: April 11th, 2023

For the final assignment, students can choose ONE of the following options:

Court Decision:

Students will write a detailed court decision for one of the cases presented by their peers. Please note that you cannot choose the case you argued. Written case summaries will be posted on D2L, and students are encouraged to use these as the starting point to write your decision. The summaries will detail the arguments presented by both sides. Your task in writing the court decision, is to act as the “Judge” in the case, and to provide a written decision, outlining both your “verdict” and the reasons why you “ruled” in favour of a particular side.

The written decision should include reference to at least (3) three course readings. You may include outside sources, however it is not required. This assignment should be 8-10 pages (double-spaced), with full and proper citations. Court decisions need not be written in essay format, however they should be clear, organized and include full sentences, and proper citation. Papers will be evaluated based on quality of argument, originality and connection to course concepts and theories. 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.

OR

Research Essay:

Students will submit an 8-10 page research paper on a course-related topic of your choice. The 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 Dr. Chisholm. 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 (January 10th, 2023): Introduction to Course

Welcome, Syllabus Review

Week 2 (January 17th, 2023): Mothering and 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 (January 24th, 2023): Motherhood as Institution Position Statement #1 DUE

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.

Week 4 (January 31st, 2023): 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 (February 7th, 2023): Mothering as Work: Local and Global Reproductive Labour - Position Statement #2 DUE

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 (February 14th, 2023): Prenatal Mothering

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.

****Winter Reading Break (February 20th-24th, 2023): NO CLASSES***

Week 7 (February 28th, 2023): Child Welfare and "Dangerous" Mothers Position Statement #3 DUE

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 (March 7th, 2023): 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 (March 14th, 2023): Class Moot Court Moot Court Summary DUE

Students will present their Moot Court Assignments to the class.

Week 10 (March 21st, 2023): Class Moot Court

Students will present their Moot Court Assignments to the class.

Week 11 (March 28th, 2023): “Other” Mothers: Queer, Trans and Disabled Mothers

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.

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.

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 (April 4th, 2023): 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.

Final Papers DUE April 11th, 2023

Looking forward to a great semester!