

**The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research**

**WS 4460G RACE AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERHOOD  
Patricia Hamilton**

**Instructor:**

**Email:**

**Location:**

**Office:**

**Class time:**

**Office hours:**

**Course description**

What is a good mother? *Who* is a good mother? How do dominant racial ideologies and practices shape notions of 'good' motherhood? What effect does this have on the mothering experiences of racialized women? And how have women of colour differently theorized, challenged or incorporated "mainstream" motherhood theories in feminist scholarship? With a focus on examining motherhood at the intersection of race and other social locations such as class, dis/ability and sexuality, this course seeks to address these, among a number of other questions.

In particular, the course is concerned with the contested parameters that define 'good' motherhood as well as its theoretical foundations in the neoliberal state. Through discussions, readings, films and presentations we will examine the historical and contemporary circumstances that have shaped racialized notions of 'good' motherhood. By considering how different groups of women experience racialized motherhood this course will attend to how mothers disrupt, challenge and/or conform to disciplinary scripts about who mothers should be and what they should do. In our focus on mothers of colour, we begin to "shift the center", examining motherhood from the perspective of women situated outside of the boundaries of 'good' motherhood.

**Learning objectives**

Throughout this course, students will:

- Examine historical and contemporary forms of 'good mothering' ideologies and their intersections with race and other social locations
- Critically examine the political context in which these forms of mothering have emerged
- Engage with some of the feminist theories and debates in the discipline of motherhood studies
- Reflect on the policy implications for racialized mothers

In addition, students will also:

- Develop written and oral communication skills
- Develop critical thinking skills
- Develop the skills to critically read and evaluate academic and popular texts

**Assignments**

Participation	15%
Response papers	30%
Facilitation	15%
Essay proposal	10%
Final essay	30%

### **Assignment guidelines:**

- **Participation (15%)**

Students are expected to come to class having read and critically engaged with the assigned materials and prepared to engage in discussion. This participation can include asking salient questions and/or making thoughtful comments. Thoughtful participation will be especially important during the essay workshop.

- **Two response papers worth 15% each (2 x 15 = 30%)**

Over the first seven weeks of class, students will be required to write two short essay-style responses (1500 – 2000 words) to one of the readings, identifying and critically engaging with the reading's central argument. These papers can be a response to any aspect of the reading of interest to the student. Students cannot respond to readings already discussed in class or to the reading they choose to present during their seminar facilitation.

- **Seminar facilitation (15%)**

Each student will lead a 25-minute discussion of one reading (of their choosing) to the class. This presentation will not summarise the article but will consist of a critical evaluation of the article's central argument and its relationship to the themes of the course or broader political issues. Students will pose two discussion questions and lead discussion of this article, using whatever method they choose to facilitate discussion.

- **Essay proposal (10%)**

Students will prepare a proposal detailing their approach to the final essay. This proposal will be 750 words long and must include 1) a tentative thesis or argument, 2) brief summaries of one book/chapter and one journal article relevant to the topic and a few sentences on how this literature will contribute to the student's argument and 3) a tentative outline of the essay.

- **Final essay (30%)**

Building on the essay proposal, students will write a 4000-word research essay. The topic of the essay will have a clear link to one of the themes we have covered in this course.

## **Readings**

**Week 1 – Introduction to the course**

**Theme 1: Being a ‘good’ mother**

**Week 2 – Scientific motherhood: a history of ‘good’ motherhood**

**Week 3 – Intensive mothering and attachment parenting: ‘good’ motherhood today**

**Week 4 – Being a good mother in the neoliberal order: health, risk and citizenship**

**Theme 2: Managing medicalization**

**Week 5 – The medicalization of pregnancy and birth**

**Week 6 - Critiquing the medicalization of pregnancy and birth**

**Week 7 – Experiences of medicalization**

***Week 8 – Essay proposal workshop***

**Theme 3: Good mothers, good policies**

**Week 9 – The promotion of ‘breast is best’**

**Week 10 - Parental leave**

**Week 11 – Mothers’ experiences with the state**

**Theme 4: Challenging dominant discourses of motherhood**

**Week 12 – Community and other-mothering**

**Week 13 – Concluding thoughts: empowered mothering and revolutionary parenting**

## **Course policies**

### **Attendance:**

This course does not have a final exam. Students are expected to attend class regularly and make thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Please note that WSFR department policy states: “In classes without final examinations, persistent absenteeism (defined by the Department as three [3] weeks in half courses, and six [6] weeks in full courses) may be rendered grounds for failure in the course (after due warning is given).

### **Submitting Assignments:**

Both hard and electronic copies of all written assignments will be required for this course. Hard copies must be submitted in class or delivered to the WSFR drop box, located just outside the main office doors (Lawson Hall 3260). Electronic copies must be submitted to Turnitin.com through the link provided on the course website.

### **Turnitin:**

“All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>.)” ([http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/exam/courseoutlines.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/courseoutlines.pdf))

### **Academic Offences:**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offense, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)  
[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/exam/courseoutlines.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/courseoutlines.pdf)

### **Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see the ‘Scholastic Offense Policy’ in the Western Academic Calendar).

### **Late & Missed Assignments:**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness see: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2011/pg117.html> and (<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>). See also

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf) and the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) at: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>

Late assignments will only be accepted without penalty if a prior agreement with the instructor has been made, or if academic accommodation has been granted. Students who need to submit an assignment late must contact the instructor before the assignment is due to arrange an alternative date. Students who do not make such an arrangement or who fail to provide academic accommodation will be subject to a 2% penalty per day, including weekends. Academic accommodation for missed assignments must be requested within 28 days (4 weeks) from the assignment's deadline.

### **Email:**

I will endeavour to respond to emails within 48 hours (except weekends). When sending emails please use your UWO email address and remember to include the course code in the subject line.

### **Note for students with disabilities:**

Please contact [ws-ugrad@uwo.ca](mailto:ws-ugrad@uwo.ca) if you require any information in plain text format, or if any other accommodation can make the course material and/or physical space accessible to you.

### **Electronic devices:**

Laptops are permitted during class. Please do not use class time for non-academic purposes. Cellphones and other non-note taking devices are not permitted and should be switched off or kept on silent during class. If you urgently need to receive a call, please step outside the room to avoid disrupting the class.

### **Support services:**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Students who are interested in learning, writing or psychological support can visit the Student Development Centre for more information: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

### **Land acknowledgement:**

Western University is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are 3 local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada.