

# Women's Studies 2205G

## Making Men: Critical Studies in Masculinity

Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research | Winter 2021

INSTRUCTOR: Christian Ylagan ([cylagan2@uwo.ca](mailto:cylagan2@uwo.ca)) | Office Hours: Mondays 10AM-12PM (Venue TBA)  
Class Schedule: Mondays 130PM-430PM



*"This is my own little town. I'm the mayor, the prosecutor, the cop, and the executioner."*  
~ Joe Exotic, *Tiger King*



*"Your story is important. You tell your story... because I'm proof that there are folks out there who want to hear it."*  
~ Archie Coleman, *Hollywood*

Who is a man? What *makes* a man?

These questions lie at the heart of the convergence of feminist, ethnic, and sexuality studies into the field of "critical masculinity studies", which aims at its core to interrogate how certain discourses created hegemonic gender assumptions and binary categories that in turn foreground the institutionalization of certain power relations across all aspects of social and political life. By drawing from a wide range of theoretical tools, critical masculinity studies provides us with a number of frameworks with which to analyze the asymmetries and hierarchies that have helped construct men, manhood, and masculinity.

In emphasizing the social construction of men, manhood, and masculinity as constitutive of the enormous capital they command, this course aims to advance a more critical view whereby such concepts are seen not as impenetrable bastions of historically oppressive power, but as privileged nodes that have been instrumentalized within discursive ideological networks. Through an examination of diverse media sources (literature, film, art, critical journalism, news articles, music, etc.) and their treatment of issues like "guy" culture, male body image, homosociality, aggression, family, success, and male sexuality, this course encourages the centrality of critical reflection in understanding the oftentimes violent negotiation of masculinity across various intersectional sites, and the refraction of those dynamics in men's relationships with themselves, other men, women, and institutions.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. synthesize concepts from masculinity studies in order to read and think critically about the construction of masculinity across various historical and intersectional contexts;
2. analyze the social operation of literary, artistic, historical, and cultural artifacts as specific cues that belie prevailing sexual scripts and identities, or that otherwise demonstrate the tensions, anxieties, and aspirations embedded in masculinity and male culture;
3. reflect on their experiences in dealing with men, manhood, and masculinity, with the view of identifying points of potential intervention;
4. enhance their ability to express themselves both orally (through in-class participation) and in writing (through quizzes, essays, and examinations).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS – (UPDATED)

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Critical Essay / Ethnographic Report: | 30% (1500-1750 words)                                 |
| Blitzes (short answer quizzes):       | 25% (4-5 in-class quizzes throughout the term)        |
| Poster Project / Presentation:        | 15% (groupwork; rubrics to be provided)               |
| Reading Briefs:                       | 10% (4-5 1-page summaries)                            |
| Oral Exam:                            | 10%   |
| Class Participation / Attendance:     | 10%   |
| <b><u>OPTIONAL Final Exam:</u></b>    | <b><u>EXTRA CREDIT ONLY (see Section E below)</u></b> |
| TOTAL                                 | 100%  |

### A. Class Participation and Attendance

All students are expected to (1) complete all reading assignments and (2) participate in class discussions. Being a critical reader, manifested in the ability to dialogue with assigned texts and formulate informed questions or opinions, is a skill that this class will try to foster. Please come to class prepared to share insights, ask questions, be critical of your own assumptions, and keep an open and collegial demeanour towards others.

Regular attendance is critical in getting the most out of the course. As such, attendance will be checked every class, both during screening and lecture days. University policy on absences and accommodations for legitimate reasons will be observed. **While attendance in every class is necessary, engagement is also of paramount importance.** Simply showing up to class is NOT considered active participation. Attendance entails: being on time and staying for the duration of class time—lateness is disruptive. Your participation will be evaluated based on how well you meet the following criteria: **understanding of the material; interest and enthusiasm; and quality and consistency of contribution.** These will be measured through active engagement in class activities, completion of reading group tasks, and meaningful contribution in class discussions, among others.

Attendance will also be checked through the use of one-point pop quizzes. Partway through each session, the instructor will pause to ask a question related to the ongoing discussion that students must write down in their reading summary sheets (submission copy).

### B. Reading Brief

The Reading Briefs are short (1-page max) interpretive summaries of the assigned weekly readings. A form template will be provided for students to fill out. Some of the expected information in a Reading Brief would be the chosen article's main argument/thesis statement; some supporting details, examples, or key quotes; how the article fits in the larger class discussion, etc. **Every student is expected to write 4-5 Reading Briefs throughout the term.** Please prepare TWO copies (one for submission, one for sharing with your Reading Group). Each student will be assigned to a Reading Group throughout the term to help encourage active reading and collegial discussions. To help facilitate these group discussions, students should refer to their Reading Briefs.

### C. Oral Exam

The Oral Exam will be a brief group dialogue between the instructor/TAs and three students on predetermined topics (give or take 30 minutes for each meeting). The topics will vary from week to week, and may come in the form of defining terms, synthesizing concepts, contextualizing an image, explaining a quote or statement, elaborating on a forum post, etc. The Oral Exam will take place during office hours and will be ongoing throughout the term. Students are to sign-up for slots. **The Oral Exam may be conducted over Zoom or in-person (as social distancing allows).**

### D. Blitzes

Blitzes are short-answer response quizzes structured accordingly: one question worth ten points, to be answered in ten lines and within ten minutes. These quizzes are formative; they are meant to help you increase your familiarity with assigned texts prior to coming to lecture, as well as to help you find the thematic "thread" that runs across course readings. As such, the questions will typically ask you to relate concepts from the previous week's readings AND the current week's readings. The Blitz questions can be used as prompts for the discussion for the day. **We will have four to five Blitzes throughout the term, with your lowest score dropped. No Blitz will be given until the previous week's quiz has been returned.**

### E. Poster Project

A poster presentation is 'as an experiential learning activity that stimulates curiosity and interest, encourages exploration and integration of concepts and provides students with a novel way of demonstrating understanding' (Handron, 1994, in Bracher, Cantrell & Wilkie 1998). Working in small groups, students will collaborate to create a positive, life-affirming poster campaign with the goal of applying lessons learned in class to advocate for issues affecting men, their behaviours, and relationships.

### F. Critical Essay / Ethnographic Report

Fetterman (1998) defines ethnography as "the art and science used to describe a group or culture", and Angrosino (2007) describes the work of ethnographers as "[searching] for predictable patterns in the lived human experiences by carefully observing and participating in the lives of those under study". Each student must choose to carry out a simple ethnographic exercise that will require either 1) an observation of a social setting on-campus or elsewhere in the surrounding areas; or 2) engagement with individuals or groups that are involved with community-based work related to course topics. Themes to be observed and potential networks to be contacted will be given at some point during the term. **Students will produce a paper (1500-1750 words)** detailing their insights about the experience and relating their observations with at least TWO assigned readings for the course (**no outside readings are required**). Detailed instructions to follow.

### G. OPTIONAL Final Exams

As class standing requirements are weighted to 100% of your mark, the final exam will serve as a way to raise your final grade. Each student will be informed of their class standing mark in due course to allow them to decide if they would benefit from writing the final exam. The extra credit you earn will correspond to the mark you receive in your final exam, should you decide to take it. The breakdown is as follows:

|    |        | POINTS ADDED TO YOUR CLASS STANDING MARK |
|----|--------|--|
| A+ | 90-100 | + 4 points                               |
| A  | 85-89  | + 2.5 points                             |
|    | 80-84  |  |
| B  | 75-79  | + 1.5 points                             |
|    | 70-74  | + 1 point                                |
| C  | 65-69  | + 0.5 point                              |
|    | 60-64  | NO POINTS ADDED                          |
| D  | 50-59  |  |

For those who decide to write it, the final exam may comprise identification-, short answer-, and essay-type questions.

#### REQUIRED READINGS / COURSE CALENDAR

(please refer to the separate Course Calendar document)

- 1) Reeser, Todd. *Masculinities in Theory*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- 2) Fu, Kim. *For Today I Am A Boy*(novel). HarperCollins, 2014.
- 3) Additional readings to be posted on OWL (in PDF form or links to online articles)

#### COURSE CALENDAR

The course calendar will be posted on OWL, alongside weekly readings, by the first day of class.

#### GENERAL COURSE GUIDELINES

Students are expected to be both physically and mentally present in class; participation is integral to the learning experience. Use of electronic devices in-class should be for academic purposes only.

#### A. Email

Email correspondences will be sent often and the OWL site will be updated regularly. Please use your UWO email account for official inquiries and correspondences, and please allow up to 24 hours for a response (up to 48 hours over the weekend). Standard email etiquette is expected. **NO ESSAYS SUBMITTED BY EMAIL WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

**NO EMAILS EXPLAINING ABSENCES PLEASE.** If your absence merits reasonable accommodation (for example, for observing religious obligations, representing the University in an official capacity, medical emergencies, compassionate grounds, etc.), please get in touch with your academic counsellor.

#### B. Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate, and by proper referencing such as footnotes and citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses plagiarism checking software. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

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.

#### C. Accommodation, Absenteeism, and Deadlines

Students seeking academic accommodation for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. The same is true for accommodation requests pertaining to known disabilities or medical conditions. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Please find UWO's Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness here: <https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>

All requirements must be submitted in a timely fashion, unless there are serious mitigating circumstances with official, university-approved documentation. Late submissions will incur a **5% Not Following Directions (NFD)** penalty if submitted within three days of the deadline, but this may only be allowed **ONCE** throughout the term. **No late submissions will be accepted thereafter.**

#### D. Academic Offences

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

#### E. Classroom Behaviour

Everyone is expected to behave in a manner befitting of adults in a social and intellectual community setting. As such, everyone is expected to familiarize themselves with Western's Code of Conduct, <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>, especially section E (Examples of Prohibited Student Conduct). Occasionally, topics and information of a sensitive nature may crop up in class, so it's important for everyone to adhere to respectful and sensitive behaviour, and to provide comments and opinions in the context of discourse that is both constructive (not pedantic or inflammatory) and self-reflexive (critical of one's assumptions).

**Honour Pledge**, adapted from UBC's Statement on Respectful Environment: "On my honour, as a Western University student, I commit to exercise responsibly my freedom of expression and freedom of inquiry, in ways that recognize and respect the dignity of others, and with careful regard to the dynamics of different relationships within the university environment, in order to uphold a respectful environment where the human dignity of each individual is valued, and the diverse perspectives, ideas and experiences of all members of the community are able to flourish."

#### F. A Note on Sensitive Content

The content and discussions in this course will necessarily engage with some topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will do my best to flag especially graphic or intense content as a warning prior to any viewing or discussion, and to moderate exchanges of ideas in the spirit of constructive dialogue and empathy.

#### G. Recognition of First Nations Territory

The instructor would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples, and acknowledge the longstanding relationships of the three local First Nations groups of this land and place in Southwestern Ontario.

\*\* Image from *Tiger King* (Netflix, 2019) and *Hollywood* (Netflix, 2020)