

# Women's Studies 3362 (DRAFT)

## Toxic Masculinity

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies | Winter 2022

Instructor: Christian Ylagan | [cylagan2@uwo.ca](mailto:cylagan2@uwo.ca)

Class Schedule: Tuesdays, 130PM-430PM (In-Person)

(Please read section below on CLASS DELIVERY for more information)



The concept of “toxic masculinity” has garnered more attention in contemporary times arguably due to the rise of such as phenomena as the #MeToo movement, Time’s Up, and the rise of incelism. However, given the colonial roots of patriarchy all the way to the inception of the mythopoetic men’s movements in the 1980s, the problematic realities that have come to plague and define masculinity precede the recent popularity of this term.

This course aims to provide critical entry points into the questions surrounding toxic masculinity as a concept, beginning from the assumption of the existence of masculinities in the plural, of which certain hegemonic forms become normative ways of expressing male identity and performing manhood. Of particular interest will be the ways that masculinity should be seen not just as intersectional but also relational: that is, masculinity does not exist in a vacuum but is experienced in conjunction with race, class, gender identity, and sexuality. At the heart of this relational conception of masculinity is the conflict between what it means to be a “real” man and what it means to be a “good” man—a conflict that is ultimately enacted within contested contexts such as culture, ideology, institutions, and habitus. This leads to questions such as: are toxicity and masculinity mutually exclusive? Is toxicity an essentially masculine characteristic? Are toxic masculinity and healthy masculinity binary concepts? Toxic masculinity, as this course hypothesizes, thus arises when there is an incongruence or asymmetry between the performative and idealized aspects of men’s experiences of manhood and masculinity.

Through an examination of diverse media sources (literature, film, art, critical journalism, news articles, music, memes, etc.) and their treatment of issues like “guy” culture, honour codes, homosociality, male privilege, violence, patriarchy, work, empire, and sexuality, this course encourages the centrality of critical reflection in understanding the complex and multidimensional aspects of toxic masculinity as an ontological concept that implicates male-identifying individuals, and as a material concept that impacts the everyday experiences of men and all those who engage with them.

### 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 toxic 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 toxic masculinity and male culture;
3. reflect on their personal experiences in dealing with toxic masculinity culture and/or men who demonstrate toxic masculinity, with the view of identifying points of potential intervention;
4. enhance their ability to express themselves both orally (through in-class participation and oral examinations) and in writing (through quizzes, essays, and other written assessments).

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS – (UPDATED)

Class Participation / Attendance:	10%
Reading Briefs:	10% (4 briefs x 250 words each)
Oral Examination:	10%
<b>Seminar Leading:</b>	15% (potential groupwork depending on number of students)
Blitzes (short answer quizzes):	20% (3-4 written quizzes throughout the term)
Critical Essay/Ethnographic Report:	35% (1250-1500 words)
<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. 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, substantive responses to forum questions and discussion board posts, among others.

### **B. Reading Brief**

The Reading Briefs are short (1-page max, more or less 250 words) 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 Reading Briefs throughout the term, typically on weeks when there are no Blitzes scheduled.** Students are expected to share their briefs with their assigned Reading Groups to help encourage active reading and collegial discussions.

### **C. Oral Examination**

The Oral Exam will be a brief virtual discussion between the instructor and group of 3-4 individuals on predetermined topics. 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 lecture point, debating an issue, etc. The Oral Exam schedule will be ongoing throughout the term. Oral Exam sessions may be recorded for assessment review.

### **D. Seminar Leading**

Students are expected to facilitate part of a week’s discussion, either in pairs or small groups based on the number of students in class. On the day of your assigned seminar, expect to lead a class discussion for up to 30 minutes. Presenting a summary of the readings’ main points is NOT facilitation; students must use the assigned readings as their theoretical starting point in order to prepare a set of questions and discussion points that will engage the rest of the class in critical conversation. Students may supplement their facilitation with examples of cultural artifacts (memes, songs, clips, etc.). Students will be marked on matter (the quality of discussion), manner (the way that the class is engaged), and method (the prepared discussion points).

**E. Blitzes**

Blitzes are short-answer response quizzes structured accordingly: one question worth ten points and to be answered in ten lines. 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 six Blitzes throughout the term, with your lowest score dropped. **Blitz questions will be given at the beginning of class (130PM) and must be submitted before the virtual plenary discussion begins (sometime around 3PM-330PM). No Blitz will be given until the previous week’s quiz has been returned.**

**F. Critical Essay / Ethnographic Report (Field research subject to Covid restrictions)**

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 (1250-1500 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.

**E. 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	+ 3 points
A	85-89	+ 2 points
	80-84	+ 1.5 points
B	75-79	+ 1.5 points
	70-74	+ 1 point
C	65-69	NO POINTS ADDED
	60-64	
D	50-59	

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

### **REQUIRED READINGS / COURSE CALENDAR**

(please refer to the separate Course Calendar document)

- 1) Kimmel, Michael and Messner, Michael. *Men's Lives*. Tenth edition. Oxford University Press, 2019.
- 2) Kang, Han. *The Vegetarian* (novel). Trans. Deborah Smith. Portobello Books, 2016 **OR** Purnell, Brontez. *100 Boyfriends* (short story anthology). MCD x FSG Originals, 2021.
- 3) Additional readings to be posted on OWL (in PDF form or links to online articles)

### **REQUIRED SOFTWARE**

(Your Western login credentials provide you access to these software via OWL.

Please contact WTS if you have any issues with access)

- 1) Zoom for office hours, meetings, Oral Exams, etc.

### **HELPFUL TO HAVE BUT NOT REQUIRED**

- 1) A Netflix subscription

### **COURSE CALENDAR**

**The course calendar will be posted on OWL, alongside weekly readings, by the first day of class.** Note that materials labeled as Supplementary Readings are just that: to help enrich your understanding of the topics discussed. They may also be used as references in your Critical Essay.

### **CLASS DELIVERY**

Please expect for this course to be delivered **in person** for the upcoming term. However, there is a possibility that this might change to a hybrid or fully online setup depending on the developments around the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a change will be announced by the department / university closer to the beginning of term.

### **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 TO MY AND THE TA'S EMAILS 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> <sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

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. (Virtual) Classroom Behaviour and Netiquette—AS NEEDED.

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).

### Other things to take note of:

1. **Sign in with FULL first name and last name as listed on the roster.** Do not use a nickname or pseudonym as this will prevent accurate attendance checks. Using your full name will also make sorting into groups more expedient. If you have changed your name since enrolling in class to better reflect your gender identity, please send me an email so the change can be noted (you may then use your current name when logging on to the virtual class). **You will NOT be admitted to class if you do not provide your full name.**
2. **Try to log-in to our virtual class from a quiet, distraction-free environment whenever possible.** We have limited face-to-face time so let's maximize it!
3. **Access.** If you do not have access to a computer or smartphone with internet access, the option to call a landline will be kept open. However, please note that this is not an optimal setup. If you are having technical issues, you may contact Western Technology Services at 519-661-3800.
4. **Turn on your VIDEO whenever possible.** It is helpful to see each other, even if it is an online class. If you have limited internet bandwidth, no webcam, or otherwise unable to find an environment without a lot of visual distraction, you may opt to keep your video turned off. If you do decide to turn on your video, remember to share only what you would otherwise also share in a regular classroom (i.e., keep things clean!)
5. **Mute your AUDIO when you are not talking.** This helps minimize background noise, and we can focus on having clear lines of communication. While not required, using a headset will also help improve audio quality.
6. **Use the CHAT function responsibly.** Use this medium for relevant class communication only.
7. **Recording.** All of the remote learning sessions for this course will be recorded. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat logs, and personal identifiers (name displayed on screen). The recordings will be used for education purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals participating in the course for their private or group study purposes. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings.

Participants in this course are not permitted to record sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. While class recordings may be made available for those who may be absent, it is your responsibility to take down notes for every session.

**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.

\*\* Front images from Nicholas Ray (Facebook) and Daniel Sloss X (HBO, 2019)