

Note: Previous Course Outline

GSWS 3440F – Gendered Blood: Critical Menstrual Studies

**The University of Western Ontario (Western University)
London Canada
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies**

Instructor: Professor Cayen

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Class:

Room:

The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples.

Course Description

This course takes an interdisciplinary, intersectional, and cross-cultural approach to menstruation and menstrual equity movements, foregrounding the work of academics, artists, and activists in their efforts to challenge the stigma and silence concerning periods. Throughout, students will deconstruct essentialist narratives and include gender non-binary menstruators in their theorizing of menstruation as a physiological bodily function. Topics may include menstrual leave debates, the environmental impact of disposable products, privacy concerns about period-tracking apps and other menstrual management technologies, and the reduction in period poverty through the provision of free or tax-free menstrual hygiene products.

Learning Objectives

- Deconstruct essentialist discourses around menstruation and gender identity
- Analyze global and cross-cultural narratives about menstruation
- Assess the political and technological regulation of “private” bodily functions
- Evaluate a range of disciplinary issues and theoretical approaches to menstruation, including through critical health studies, sexuality studies, queer theory, and more.
- Gain experience in participatory research methods

Evaluations and Assignments

(Reflects potential changes for 2025-2026):

Biopedagogy and Body Literacy: Screenshot Elicitation	20%
Tracking Journals	10%
Roundtable	10%

We Other Menstruators: Interviews and Analysis	25%
Participation	15%
Short Essay: Pop Periods or Global Narratives	20%
Menstrual Equity Analysis	20%

Biopedagogy and Body Literacy: Screenshot Elicitation: In this assignment, students will select a mobile app that facilitates self-tracking of a passive and ‘natural’ bodily process, including but not limited to menstruation, sleep, steps, or mood. Throughout the semester, you will take screenshots of your engagement with the app and journal your progress, then participate in a ‘roundtable’ discussion with your peers about how self-tracking enables you to think about your relationship with technology, your body, and course concepts. On-going deadlines throughout the course.

We Other Menstruators: Interviews and Analysis: In this assignment, students will collectively conduct qualitative research, beginning with an interview guide that reflects the questions we want to ask people about their experiences with menstruation. We will draft ethics applications and consent forms, recruit participants, conduct and transcribe interviews, do preliminary coding for themes, and present our findings to each other in class. This project will depend on approval from the Western Research Ethics Board protocol for pedagogical activities.

Participation: Students are expected to arrive to class with materials read and notes taken, ready to contribute to discussion and active learning activities. Ask questions about anything you are unsure of! You will also have the opportunity to contribute to this grade via written reflections, mini presentations on your short essay topics, etc.

Participation includes:

Week 5: Mini presentation on short essay 1

Week 7: Mini presentation/topic discussion on short essay 2

Short Essay 1 (4-5 pages, due Week 5/Oct 5); **choose only one** of the following topics:

- *Pop Periods:* Assess a representation of menstruation in popular culture. Apply themes and concepts from course texts. Prepare a short presentation (<5 mins plus clips!) for delivery in small groups as part of your participation grade, **OR**
- *Global Narratives:* Research a culturally or religiously informed approach to menstruation. How can these practices be contextualized through the theoretical concepts we have studied to date? Prepare a short presentation (<5 mins) for delivery in small groups as part of your participation grade

Short Essay 2: Menstrual Equity Analysis (4-5 pages, due Week 9/Nov 9) What approach(es) to menstrual activism are best/uniquely suited to achieve menstrual equity? Consider art, policy, grassroots movements, medicine, or charity, etc, and assess according to themes from the course.

Readings

Bobel, C., Winkler, I.T., Fahs, B., Hasson, K.A., Kissling, E.A., & Roberts, T.A. (2020). The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies. Singapore: Springer Singapore.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0614-7>

Note: this is a FREE e-book. Paper copies available to purchase from the bookstore if you wish, and a link to download as well: https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2023A&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/GSWS3440F

The e-book and additional articles available via the OWL Course Reading link.

*Trigger warning: a note that many of our readings engage in gender/sex essentialism or cisnormativity in claims that ‘only’ women menstruate. We will read these critically and discuss in our first class how to balance the social and political association of menstruation with femininity with the reality that not only and not all women menstruate.