

ANTH 144A: Anthropology of Gender



Kehinde Wiley, "The nap", 2019, huile sur lin © Diane Arques

Class Schedule: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday: 11:10 AM – 1:40 PM

Instructor: Syed Taha Kaleem (he/him), email: tahakaleem@brandeis.edu

Office Hours: By email

The syllabus is subject to change, and students will be informed in advance about the changes

Course Description:

How do people across the world experience, construct, and perform gender? How have notions of gender been shaped by cultural, economic, political, and social forces? In this undergraduate course on the Anthropology of Gender, we will explore how anthropologists analyze and understand the diverse ways gender manifests in human life, both historically and in contemporary societies.

We begin by examining foundational anthropological concepts of gender, sex, and sexuality, asking critical questions about how these categories are defined and used. What distinguishes sex from gender? How does gender intersect with race, class, religion, and nationhood? By interrogating these concepts, we challenge Western, binary understandings of gender and open space for a more inclusive, global exploration of the topic. Students will be introduced to feminist, queer, and decolonial theories, providing multiple perspectives for analyzing gender as a social structure and lived experience.

The course will then examine ethnographic case studies from diverse regions, highlighting how gender is constructed and performed in different sociocultural contexts. Topics include rituals of gender transition in Indigenous cultures, third-gender roles in South Asia (such as hijras), the fluidity of gender categories in Polynesia, and state regulation of bodies and identities. Special attention will be given to how colonialism, globalization, and neoliberal capitalism have shaped gendered experiences and practices across the world.

We will also explore key debates in feminist and queer anthropology, such as the universality (or lack thereof) of patriarchy, gendered violence and resistance, reproductive rights, and the politics of visibility. How do structures of power maintain or challenge gender norms? How have individuals and communities resisted gender-based oppression? The course will highlight the role of activism, performance, and art in contesting and transforming dominant ideas about gender.

Students will be encouraged to think critically about how anthropological approaches to gender are relevant in everyday life. We will explore the gendered dynamics of work, politics, education, healthcare, and media, examining how cultural assumptions about masculinity and femininity are embedded in these spheres. The course will also address the role of gender in social movements, both historical and contemporary, such as feminist movements, LGBTQ+ activism, and global campaigns for gender justice.

As a Writing Intensive (WI) course, students will build essential skills in critical thinking, argumentation, and academic writing. Readings will span ethnographic studies, theoretical essays, and multimedia sources, offering diverse examples of how anthropologists study and write about gender. Students will engage in writing workshops, peer reviews, and structured feedback sessions to develop their analytical and communication skills. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to conduct their own ethnographic research on a gender-related topic, applying course concepts to real-world observations or interviews.

No prior background in anthropology or gender studies is required. By the end of the course, students will have a nuanced understanding of the complexities of gender and the tools to analyze how it shapes human experience across time and space. This course fulfills requirements for majors and minors in Anthropology, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGS), and Sexuality and Queer Studies (SQS).

The central learning goals of the course are to:

- Distinguish between sex, gender, and sexuality, and understand how these categories are socially and culturally constructed.
- Examine how gender intersects with race, class, religion, and nationhood in various societies.
- Critically assess the impact of Western, binary understandings of gender on diverse global perspectives.
- Investigate ethnographic case studies to understand how gender is performed and constructed across different societies.
- Assess the influence of colonialism, globalization, and neoliberal capitalism on gendered experiences.
- Analyze the role of state policies, economic systems, and social institutions in shaping gender norms.
- Engage in writing-intensive activities, including analytical essays, ethnographic reflections, and peer reviews.
- Conduct independent ethnographic research on a gender-related topic, applying course concepts to real-world observations or interviews.

Through these objectives, students will cultivate a nuanced understanding of gender as a complex and dynamic aspect of human life, while also honing their critical thinking and academic writing skills.

Required readings

All readings will be uploaded to LATTE. Readings will amount to approximately 50-100 pages per week. **Please complete the reading *on or before* the class date listed in the syllabus.**

“Recommended” readings are optional if you are interested or need help with a particular paper topic.

Required Books:

- Nash, Jennifer C. *Black feminism reimagined: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press, 2018. (Selections)

Course Requirements

1. **Discussion Posts: 20%**
2. **Class Participation and Attendance: 20%**
3. **Mini Papers (1000 words): 40%**
4. **Final Paper (3000 words): 20%**

Discussion Posts

- You are required to make **10** discussion posts of a minimum of 100 words before or after every class throughout the course duration. You are also required to respond to one of your peers' posts to earn a full score. You can pick any 10 classes to write your discussion posts on.

Class Participation and Attendance

Summer 2026

- Since this class meets over Zoom, you are required to keep your cameras always open. If you are unable to do this, please reach out to me.
- Attendance is taken seriously. Each class builds on the next, so if you miss a class your comprehension of the material will suffer. Full attendance is also essential for establishing a productive learning community and class dynamic. For the final exam, you will be responsible for the material discussed in lectures but not appearing in the readings.
- However, we understand that things come up during the semester that can prevent you from coming to class (family emergencies, delayed flights, illness, job interviews, etc.). As a result, you may miss two classes (which include sections, so missing one lecture and one section equals two absences) without affecting your grade. However, *for each additional class that you miss, the attendance portion of your participation grade will be reduced by five points.*
- Please note: Since we give you two freebies, this class does not have a system of “excused” or “unexcused” absences, so please refrain from contacting the professor about reasons for missing class (other than a major medical emergency requiring an extended absence from the university).

Mini Papers

- For this course, students will write a series of **mini-papers** (1000 words each) that critically engage with course themes. These short papers will allow students to apply key anthropological concepts, analyze ethnographic case studies, and reflect on the intersection of culture, power, and identity. Each mini-paper should incorporate **at least two course readings** and provide **critical reflections** rather than mere summaries.

Final Paper

- You will be required to write a 3000-word essay on one of the topics from a list provided to you by the instructor.
- I am happy to meet you over Zoom to discuss paper outlines. However, I won't be able to read a full draft of the paper.

Grading

All assignments are graded on a 100-point scale (which allows for finer distinctions than letter grades), and a grading rubric will be distributed in advance for the written assignments and tests. At the end of the semester, final grades (out of 100) will be calculated according to the weight of each assignment (e.g., if you get an 88 on one of the written assignments, it will be recorded as an 8.8 in the final grade -- 10% of 80).

The conversion of numerical to letter grades will be according to the following scale:

| | |
|-----------|----|
| 97-100 | A+ |
| 93.5-96.9 | A |
| 90-93.4 | A- |
| 87-89.9 | B+ |
| 83.5-86.9 | B |
| 80-83.4 | B- |

| | |
|-----------|----|
| 77-79.9 | C+ |
| 73.5-76.9 | C |
| 70-73.4 | C- |
| 67-69.9 | D+ |
| 63.5-66.9 | D |
| 60-63.4 | D- |
| 0-60 | E |

The Writing Center:

The University Writing Center provides free one-on-one sessions to help with your papers. It is located in Goldfarb 232 on the Mezzanine Level of the library, and virtual appointments are also available. You are encouraged to take advantage of this service. Please find more information and schedule an appointment online:

<https://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/scheduleanappointment.html>

Academic Integrity:

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity (see section 4: “Maintenance of Academic Integrity”--

http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rr/RR14_15version11.4.pdf). Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Remember, you must indicate through quotations and citations when quoting from any outside source (internet, AI, or print).

Note: Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to produce content, when an assignment does not explicitly call or allow for it, is plagiarism—the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own. This is an actionable Academic Integrity offense at Brandeis.

“A student’s name on any written exercise ... constitutes a representation that the work is the result of that student’s own thought and study.” --

<https://www.brandeis.edu/student-rights-community-standards/rights-responsibilities/current/section-4.html>

Accommodations:

Brandeis seeks to create a learning environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all students, and I want to support you in your learning. If you think you may require disability accommodations, you will need to work with Student Accessibility Support (SAS) (781-736-3470, access@brandeis.edu).

Summer 2026

You can find helpful student FAQs and other resources on the [SAS website](#), including guidance on how to know whether you might be eligible for support from SAS. If you already have an accommodation letter from SAS, please provide me with a copy as soon as you can so that I can ensure the effective implementation of accommodations for this class. In order to coordinate exam accommodations, ideally you should provide the accommodation letter at least 48 hours before an exam.

Brandeis also has some resources available in an emergency for assisting in purchasing technology and books, to assist students in need. The form is here:

<https://www.brandeis.edu/student-financialservices/financial-aid/emergency-funding.html> and the email is emergencyfund@brandeis.edu.

Week 1: Four W's: Why/What/Where/Who is Gender

- Gill-Peterson, Jules. 2021. "Gender." In *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*, edited by Keywords Feminist Editorial Collective, New York: NYU Press, 2021.
- Judith Butler (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Preface (vii-xxvi; 3-10; 177-180) **DO NOT READ THE WHOLE THING.**

Summer 2026

- Martin, Emily. "The egg and the sperm: How science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16, no. 3 (1991): 485-501.
- Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa. *Erotic Resistance: The Struggle for the Soul of San Francisco*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2024. (Introduction)
- Dankwa, Serena Owusua. "The one who first says I love you": same-sex love and female masculinity in postcolonial Ghana." *Ghana Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 223-264.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1981. (Introduction)
- Abu-Lughod, Lila: "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others" (ACA): pp. 133-139. (and on LATTE)
- Stryker, Susan. 1994. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (3): 237-254.
- Michel Foucault (1990). *The History of Sexuality Vol 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, pp. 3-13; 17-25
- Currah, Paisley. "Sex is as sex does: Governing transgender identity." In *Sex Is as Sex Does*. New York University Press, 2022. (Introduction)

Week 2: Gender and Race

- Nash, Jennifer C. *Black feminism reimaged: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press, 2018. (Introduction)
- Berry, M.J., Argüelles, C.C., Cordis, S., Ihmoud, S., And Estrada, E.V. (2017), *Toward A Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 32: 537-565. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.05>
- Williams, B.C. (2022), *Black Feminist Citational Praxis And Disciplinary Belonging*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 37: 199-205. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca37.2.04>

- Novacich, S.E. (2021), "Masking" Makeup: Cosmetics And Constructions Of Race In Rio De Janeiro. *Cultural Anthropology*, 36: 681-707.
<https://doi.org/10.14506/Ca36.4.10>
- Rogaia Abusharaf; Dark Knuckles: Bleaching in the Khartoum Skin-scape. *Public Culture* 1 January 2025; 37 (1 (105)): 61–83. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-11714167>
- Plemons, Eric. "Gender, ethnicity, and transgender embodiment: interrogating classification in facial feminization surgery." *Body & Society* 25, no. 1 (2019): 3-28
- Ismail Fayed, On queerness and the jargon of authenticity,
<https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/07/22/opinion/u/on-queerness-and-the-jargon-of-authenticity/>
- Mohmed, Tarek Moustafa. Men of Shoubra: Hairdressing, shades of masculinities, and ghosts of sectarianism. 2018. American University in Cairo, Master's Thesis. AUC Knowledge Fountain. <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/465> Chapter 2 and 4.
- Snorton, C. Riley. *Nobody is supposed to know: Black sexuality on the down low*. U of Minnesota Press, 2014. (Transpositions/Introduction)

Week 3: Gender, Sex, Sexuality

- Gayle Rubin (2011). "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Deviations*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 137-181 [READ ONLY 145 – 155]
- Goldstein, Ruth. "Life in traffic: Riddling field notes on the political economy of 'sex' and nature." *Cultural Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (2022): 251-285.
- Mitra, Durba. "Sexuality and the History of Disciplinary Transgression." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 43, no. 6 (2020): 1216-1227.
- Agard-Jones, Vanessa. "What the sands remember." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 2-3 (2012): 325-346.
- Walters, Suzanna Danuta. "From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More like a Fag?)." *Signs* 21, no. 4 (1996): 830–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175026>.
- Carrera, M. V., DePalma, R., & Lameiras, M. (2012). Sex/gender identity: Moving beyond fixed and 'natural' categories. *Sexualities*, 15(8), 995-1016.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712459158> (Original work published 2012)

- Mitra, Durba. "Surplus Woman": Female Sexuality and the Concept of Endogamy." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 1 (2021): 3-26.
- Zengin, A. (2019), The Afterlife Of Gender: Sovereignty, Intimacy, And Muslim Funerals Of Transgender People In Turkey. *Cultural Anthropology*, 34: 78-102.
<https://doi.org/10.14506/Ca34.1.09>
- Saria, Vaibhav. *Hijras, lovers, brothers: Surviving sex and poverty in rural India*. Fordham University Press, 2021. (Introduction)

Week 4: Gender and Queerness

- Abdi, Ali. "The Afghan Murat: A Queer Subject at Transnational Crossroads." *Men and Masculinities* 27, no. 4 (2024): 355-374.
- Sorton, C. Riley. "Gender Trouble in Triton" In *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies* edited by E. Patrick Johnson, 83-94. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373711-007>
- Bailey, Marlon M. "Black gay (raw) sex." *No tea, no shade: New writings in black queer studies* (2016): 239-61.
- Horton, Brian A. "Stylization in the Flesh: Queer Anthropology and Performance." *Unsettling Queer Anthropology: Foundations, Reorientations, and Departures* (2024): 133-51.
- Karakuş, Emrah. "Queer debt: The affective politics of security and intimacy in the sex work economy of Kurdish Turkey." *American Ethnologist* 51, no. 3 (2024): 421-432.
- Al-Qasimi, Noor. "Queerer Than Queer: Anti-Ancestry, Disavowal, and the Emirati Post-Oil Generation." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 26, no. 1 (2020): 63-101.
- Horton, Brian A. "The Queer Turn in South Asian Studies? or "That's Over & Done Queen, On to the Next?." *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 5, no. 3 (2018): 165-180.

Week 5: Gendered Bodies

- Butler, Judith. "Bodies that matter." In *Feminist theory and the body*, pp. 235-245. Routledge, 2017.
- Silver, 56. "Cruising the Jerusalem Light Rail." *Differences (Bloomington, Ind.)* 31, no. 2 (2020): 115-51. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-8662202>.

- Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam; *Who's Afraid of Gender?:* Solidarity, Radical Democracy, and the Global Politics of the Anti–Gender Ideology Movement: A Conversation with Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam. *GLQ* 1 January 2025; 31 (1): 137–158. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-11573873>
- Navarro, T. (2017), But Some of Us Are Broke: Race, Gender, and the Neoliberalization of the Academy. *American Anthropologist*, 119: 506-517. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12888>

WRITING RUBRIC

| CRITERIA | DESCRIPTION | POINTS |
|----------------------|---|--------|
| Analysis | <p>EXCELLENT (12): Excels in responding to the assignment and demonstrates mastery of course concepts and materials. The thesis is clear, focused, & innovative. Recognizes the complexity of the subject matter with counterarguments.</p> <p>GOOD (10): Responds well to the assignment and demonstrates a solid understanding of course concepts. The thesis is clear and focused. Acknowledges the complexity of the subject matter.</p> <p>FAIR (8): Responds to the assignment and demonstrates limited understanding of course concepts. The thesis is present but slightly unfocused or not specific enough.</p> <p>POOR(6): Unsatisfactorily responds to the assignment and demonstrates a poor understanding of course concepts. The thesis is unfocused and unclear.</p> | /12 |
| Clarity | <p>EXCELLENT (12): Paper flows logically to craft a natural argument. Written cues (next, enumeration, etc) to alert the reader to the next steps in the argument. Transitions develop strong connections between ideas.</p> <p>GOOD (10): Generally well-constructed flow of ideas. Points are ordered thoughtfully and relate to a central argument. Transitions create a logical progression between ideas.</p> <p>FAIR (8): The paper jumps from one idea to another and lacks a clear structure. Sparse connections between points. Transitions are based on sequencing only and not the logical progression of ideas.</p> <p>POOR (6): Wanders from idea to idea, making it hard to follow. Minimal connection of ideas between points. Sections of the paper lack a clear point.</p> | /12 |
| Evidence | <p>EXCELLENT (12): Argument thoroughly supported by strong, topical evidence. Evidence is clearly introduced analyzed, and connected to the argument</p> <p>GOOD (10): The argument is supported by evidence, though not always the strongest or best-explained quotations/examples. Analysis of evidence needs further development.</p> <p>FAIR (8): Argument is supported by evidence that is only occasionally relevant. Connections between the argument and evidence is somewhat tenuous.</p> <p>POOR (6): Evidence is insufficient or misconstrued or misrepresented. Unclear links between the evidence and the argument.</p> | /12 |
| Mechanics & Citation | <p>EXCELLENT (10 pts): Almost entirely free of spelling, grammar, & punctuation errors. All sources are cited correctly and completely in the text.</p> <p>GOOD (8 pts): Occasional spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors but do not hinder understanding. Sources cited correctly and completely.</p> <p>FAIR (6 pts): A few spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors that make it difficult to read at times. Some Citation Errors.</p> <p>POOR (4pts): Many spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors that make it difficult to read at times. Incomplete citations.</p> | /10 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| Style | <p><u>EXCELLENT (4):</u> Displays a unique voice that enhances the writing of the paper. Offers innovative and new ways to think about course material. Words and ordering of ideas chosen demonstrate clear and intentioned editing skills.</p> <p><u>GOOD (3):</u> Displays a clear and critical voice. Offers interesting interpretations of course material. Word choices are effective, with some evidence of editing and revision.</p> <p><u>FAIR (2):</u> Critical voice that is bland and generic. Restate course material without much intervention. Word choices at times are confusing and the editing/revision seems adequate but could be better.</p> <p><u>POOR (1):</u> Critical voice is unclear and frustrated by language choices. Simple, awkward, or overly long sentences that obstruct meaning. Poor word choices and editing decisions that obscure meaning.</p> | /4 |
|-------|---|----|