



File:Bannière femmes sans pagEs 1.svg - Wikimedia Commons

# Women, Men and Culture

GENA 2192      Spring 2025  
Tuesday 10:30pm—12:15pm  
NAH 114

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## Course description

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In her book *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir famously wrote: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” What did she mean? Aren’t you born a woman or a man? Isn’t it given? Or do you *become* a woman and a man as guided by the culture you are part of? If, indeed, culture plays a guiding role, then can you be somebody other than a man or a woman?

In this course, we will combine anthropological and interdisciplinary approaches with rich ethnographic examples to understand the category of gender. Gender describes how we identify ourselves and categorize others as “men,” “women” or belonging to other gender, and how these categories have implications for social interactions, power relations, the organization of labor, and other aspects of life. We will question what it means to be masculine, feminine, or gender nonconforming as related to ways of living, speaking, maintaining health, eating, and decorating our bodies. We will learn how biological and sexual differences are interpreted and acted upon in different societies. By doing so, we will also develop a better understanding of our own gender assumptions and expectations.

The course will illuminate the experiences of women, men, and differently gendered individuals across different societies: in the Americas, Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Pacific. Based on a series of captivating articles, documentaries, YouTube videos, games, and other class activities, this course will invite you to reflect on gendered aspects of beauty, sexuality, health, money, inheritance, political power, knowledge, kinship, and technology. We will also debate about how gender intersects with other collective categories such as race, social class, religion, and citizenship. Students are expected to participate actively in the lecture.

## Course objectives

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By the end of this course, students will

- Understand the concept of gender and the cross-cultural variations of gender categories
- Develop a critical awareness to gender inequality locally and globally

- Critically evaluate and/or compare the experiences of men and women as related to their social class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and citizenship

## Required readings

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Some lectures and one written assignment will rely on the following book:

Nancy Bonvillain (2021) *Women and Men: Cultural Constructs of Gender*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Other readings are posted on Blackboard. Keep in mind that some readings may be changed during the semester. Please, make sure to consult Blackboard before each class.

## Assessment

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### Position paper: “If Hong Kong could take one thing from another culture” – 40%

This is a one-page argument paper on an imaginary situation where the Hong Kong society adopts one feature of gender relations from another cultural group mentioned in our textbook, such as Inuit, Navajo, Nuer, Yanomamo, Haida, Tonga, etc. You should briefly describe this group and one interesting aspect of their gender relations, then hypothesize how the Hong Kong society would have been different if it had those relations. For example, what would happen if Hongkongers become like Inuit people who have permissive attitudes toward premarital sexuality among both boys and girls (Bonvillain 2021, 52)?

Details: 500 words, with citations from the textbook

Due: March 25 in class

### Photo-ethnography – 60%

This is a locally based mini-ethnographic project that uses photography as a means of delivery. Chose a research question related to the readings and topics discussed in this course and pertinent to Hong Kong.

Your main method will be observation and photo-documentation, including at least one full hour of careful observations. Places you can observe:

- a physical place: a grocery store, a bus, a coffee shop, a community center, etc.
- an event: a concert, a mass, a sports event, a birthday party, etc.
- a museum exhibition or art installation

This project is not a simple description of your observations but should also include analysis. Your main goal is to demonstrate the ability to apply anthropological concepts and approaches to a discussion of gender issues in Hong Kong. You should provide a nuanced, critical, comprehensive analysis that is free from ethnocentric biases and supported by academic evidence. Your project should be based on your original work (photos taken by you, observations conducted by you, arguments developed by you).

There should be at least 10 meaningful photos supplemented by 150–200-word captions per photo with a longer introduction and conclusion (450–500 words each).

For examples of photo-ethnographic essays, see *Writing with Light* series at <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/editors-forum/writing-with-light>

Topic description due: April 8

Essay due: May 6, 23:59

## Grading scale and criteria

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Grade	Written assignments
A	<p>your essay demonstrates a nuanced understanding of class material and concepts; information is accurate, the data is relevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are original, of a required length and format, and submitted on time</p>
A -	<p>Your essay demonstrates a nuanced understanding of class material and almost all concepts; information is factually accurate; arguments are convincing, even if occasionally contain minor errors; the data is relevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are original, of a required length and format, and submitted on time</p>
B+	<p>Your essay demonstrates an overall good understanding of class material but may lack clarity, contain several minor errors, and / or slightly deviate from required length and format. The data is somewhat relevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are original and submitted on time.</p>
B	<p>Your essay demonstrates an overall good understanding of class material but may lack clarity, contain many minor errors, and / or deviate from required length and format. The data is somewhat relevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are submitted on time. They are original, although there might be minor problems with citations and attribution</p>
B -	<p>Your essay demonstrates an overall good understanding of class material but lack clarity, contain minor errors and a few major logical flaws, and / or deviate from required length and format. The data is somewhat relevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are submitted on time. They are original, although there might be minor problems with citations and attribution</p>
C +	<p>Your essay demonstrates an acceptable level of understanding of class material but it lacks clarity, contains many major factual errors and logical flaws, and/or often deviate from required length and format. The data is not clear and a bit irrelevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are submitted on time or a day late. They are original, although there are major problems with citations and attribution</p>
C	<p>Your essay demonstrates an acceptable level of understanding of class material but it lacks clarity, contains many major factual errors and logical flaws. Your work does not follow the required length and format. The data is not clear and a bit irrelevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are submitted on time or a day late. They are original, although there are major problems with citations and attribution</p>
C -	<p>Your essay demonstrates an acceptable level of understanding of class material but it lacks clarity, contains many major factual errors and logical flaws. Your work does not follow the required length and format. The data is not clear and a bit irrelevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are submitted a day or two late. They are original, although there are major problems with citations and attribution</p>

D +	<p>Your essay demonstrates minimal understanding of class material. It lacks effort, hard to read and understand, contains major errors, flaws, and biased viewpoints. The data is not clear and irrelevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are original, but citations are absent. The writing considerably deviates from the required length and format (answers are too short), and/or is submitted a few days late.</p>
D	<p>Your essay demonstrates minimal understanding of class material. It lacks effort, hard to read and understand, contains major errors, flaws, and biased viewpoints. The data is not clear and irrelevant</p> <p>The photographs and texts are original, but citations are absent. The writing considerably deviates from the required length and format (answers are too short), and is submitted many days late.</p>
F	<p>The essay is submitted more than a week late without an excuse or not submitted at all. It is extremely short, factually incorrect, biased, and/or contain instances of plagiarism.</p>

## Weekly Schedule

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Week 1: January 7 Introduction to the course

Week 2: January 14 Is being a woman or a man our only option?

- BBC (2016) Do we need more than two genders? <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-35242180>
- Agustín Fuentes (2022) Biological Science Rejects the Sex Binary, and That's Good for Humanity <https://www.sapiens.org/biology/biological-science-rejects-the-sex-binary-and-thats-good-for-humanity>

Optional:

- A map of gender-diverse cultures. Click and explore on your own. In PBS, 2015 [https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits\\_map-html/](https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/)

Week 3: January 21 Have men and women equally contributed to human evolution?

- Vivek Venkataraman, The Conversation (2021) Ancient men were hunters and women were gatherers. Right? Wrong. In Scroll.in <https://scroll.in/article/989275/ancient-men-were-hunters-and-women-were-gatherers-right-wrong>
- Michael Greshko (2017) Famous Viking Warrior Was a Woman, DNA Reveals. In National Geographic <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/viking-warrior-woman-archaeology-spd>

Optional:

- Maria Fernanda Ugalda (2020) What Ancient Gender Fluidity Taught Me About Modern Patriarchy <https://www.sapiens.org/archaeology/archaeology-biases/>

January 28. No class. Lunar New Year

Week 4: February 4 Are men and women's brains wired differently? Do they have different talents and preferences?

- Lise Eliot (2019) Neurosexism: the myth that men and women have different brains. In *Nature* <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00677-x>
- Let Clothes Be Clothes <https://www.letclothesbeclothes.co.uk/>

Week 5: February 11 Do women and men talk differently?

- Deborah Cameron: Speak up, I can't hear you. In *The Guardian*, October 2, 2007 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/oct/02/gender.familyandrelationships>
- Alisha Gupta (2020) It's Not Just You: In Online Meetings, Many Women Can't Get a Word In. In *New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/zoom-meetings-gender.html>

Week 6: February 18 Why are women paid less? Is gender equality achievable?

- Gregory Warner (2018) Rwanda Ranks In The Top 5 For Gender Equity. Do Its Teen Girls Agree? <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/01/10/577018509/rwanda-ranks-in-the-top-5-for-gender-equity-do-its-teen-girls-agree>
- Alina Dizik (2016) Where are all the expat women? <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20160929-where-are-all-the-expat-women>

Week 7: February 25 Do all women have maternal instinct? What about men?

- Sarah Gibbens (2018) Is Maternal Instinct Only for Moms? Here's the Science. In *National Geographic* <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/mothers-day-2018-maternal-instinct-oxytocin-babies-science>
- Ignacio Pereyra (2024) Can Men Breastfeed? Parenting Insights From A Central African Tribe. In *Worldcrunch* <https://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/men-breastfeeding-parenting>

Optional:

- Barry Hewlett (2005) Are the men of the African Aka tribe the best fathers in the world In *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2005/jun/15/childrensservices.familyandrelationships>

March 4. No class

Reading week

### Week 8: March 11. Do women and men have different sexuality?

- Brandon Ambrosino (2017) The invention of 'heterosexuality.' In *BBC* <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170315-the-invention-of-heterosexuality>
- Joanna Moorhead (2018) A strong libido and bored by monogamy: the truth about women and sex. In *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/oct/13/a-strong-libido-and-bored-by-monogamy-the-truth-about-women-and-sex>

Optional:

- Tony Silva (2021) Why some straight men have sex with other men. In *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/why-some-straight-men-have-sex-with-other-men-160140>

### Week 9: March 18 Are diseases gender-specific or gendered?

- Patti Neighmond (2016) When Men Get Breast Cancer, They Enter A World Of Pink. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/02/08/465578231/when-men-get-breast-cancer-they-enter-a-world-of-pink>
- Laura Beil (2016) More men are developing eating disorders. Why are we treating it as only a women's disease? <https://www.statnews.com/2016/12/28/male-eating-disorders>

### Week 10: March 25. Should women be beautiful and men be strong?

- Rachel Lubitz (2016) Makeup isn't suddenly genderless. It always has been. In *Mic* <https://www.mic.com/articles/160407/makeup-isn-t-suddenly-genderless-it-always-has-been>
- Jamilla Rosdahl (2014) Why do we find muscular women wildly perplexing? In *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/why-do-we-find-muscular-women-wildly-perplexing-21846>

### Week 11: April 1 Have colonization and globalization affected women and men in the same way?

- The Indian Express (2017) Indigenous tribes embraced gender fluidity prior to colonisation, but Europeans enforced specific gender roles <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/indigenous-tribes-embraced-gender-fluidity-prior-to-colonisation-but-europeans-enforced-specific-gender-roles>

- TBD

Optional:

- Indrees Kahloon: What's the Matter with Men?

### Week 12: April 8 Do men and women like different foods?

- Eva Wiseman (2010) The truth about men, women and food. In *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/17/gender-eating-men-women>
- Rachel Sugar (2021) The politics of "dude food." In *Vox* <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22178806/diners-dudes-diets-emily-contois>

Week 13. April 15 Methods in the anthropology of gender: How to conduct ethnographic observations and write a photo-essay

- TBD
- TBD