

ANTHROPOLOGY 255
GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE
COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

This cultural anthropology course asks students to critically explore some of the contemporary social scientific scholarship on gendered social worlds and ways of imagining sexualities and the sexual and reproductive body, across diverse cultures. You'll be reading and writing about intriguing book-length studies, professional journal articles, and anthology chapters dealing with the various ways that societies in places like Indonesia, Japan, Brazil and beyond have conceptualized gender, human personhood, social hierarchy, and the sexual. We'll be considering issues of power and resistance, throughout all of our case studies.

Throughout the course we'll be asking questions such as the following: What is the feminine, and the masculine? In what ways are these culture-bound terms, not 'human universals' at all? Why are human social worlds so pervasively gendered, with 'feminine' and 'masculine' traits assigned to actions, states of mind, 'talents,' objects, colors, and so on? How is power being exercised, in such conceptual schemas and constructions of 'the natural'? Most crucially, how do these systems of ideas relate to social hierarchy? How do gender regimes relate to family structure? To religions? To nationhood? Why do many cultures around the world posit more than two genders? What are the patterns here, in terms of institutional structure and ideological form? How has the sexual body been imagined, in various cultural worlds? How have group power dynamics been wielded, through such visions of sexuality?

Throughout the course we'll also be dealing with some important methodological issues, asking ourselves at many turns: How can cultural anthropologists best study and make social scientific sense of the wide range of genders and sexualities imagined and enacted by human communities today and in the past (imagined landscapes of society and self and world that are sometimes far different from middle class American assumptions)?

Our course counts as an elective in anthropology, for Cross-Cultural or Social Sciences in the Common Areas, and as an elective for the Concentration in Women's and Gender Studies (as a cross-cultural course).