This seminar explores gendered identities, relationships, and meanings in a range of cultures. It also provides a sense of the development of anthropological gender studies over the past 40 years. How have anthropological data been used in arguments about the universality or historical specificity of sexual inequality? How might an exploration of theories about human nature and about cultural structures, power, and agency help us evaluate alternative strategies for representing “maleness” and “femaleness” cross-culturally? Finally, considering the relationship between gender and other relations of difference and inequality, what is the future of gender studies in anthropology?

FOR PURCHASE AT THE UNIVERSITY STORE:
Aretxaga  *Shattering Silence*
Herdt  *The Sambia*
Nanda  *Neither Man nor Woman*
Reiter, ed.  *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (TAW in “Reading”, below)

Readings not included in the books above are available on e-reserves: go to the ANT 441 Blackboard website main page.

**ASSIGNMENTS (Please see “Assignments” appendix to this syllabus for details)**

1. **Informed participation:** You are expected to complete the readings on time, to think about them, and come to class ready for discussion. Confusions, questions, criticisms and enthusiasms are all welcome. Prepare for class by thinking about the main points of each of the assigned readings and about how the readings relate to one another (and/or to previous ones); then develop one or two questions or points to raise in class.

2. **Oral class presentations:** Students will make brief presentations related to the readings (to be organized on the first day of class). Additionally, the final class meeting will be devoted to presentations related to students’ final essay.

3. **Papers:** A 3-5 pp. discussion of the readings relevant to your oral presentation is due one week after your presentation date; no write-up is expected for your final class meeting presentation; a 12 pp. final essay due on “Dean’s Date” (Tuesday, May 16); a 3 pp. proposal for your final paper is due Wednesday, April 5 (no extensions).
Discussion Topics and Reading Assignments
Please consider this syllabus itself as one of your course readings. The issues and questions introducing each set of assigned readings provide you with an initial entrée into the set's relevance to our on-going class discussion. They aim to prompt you to develop connections and questions of your own (whether complementary or critical).

Weekly reading assignments are listed in their recommended reading order. They are all required, and the ones listed last in any week are by no means the least important. Please see me for suggestions for further reading if you would like to develop any of our weekly topics as a focus for your own research.

CAUSES AND CONDITIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY
Among the disciplines, anthropology has classically been consulted for answers to queries about human universals (“have people always... everywhere...?”). The question of whether or not gendered inequality or stratification—the dominance of men over women—is universal among human societies past and present motivated much ethnographic and historical work during the late 1960s and the 1970s. While the work of feminist anthropologists was also mainstream in ways we will discuss, it forced a reevaluation of older work by exposing implicit “male bias”.

Week 1 (2/8): Introductory Meeting. An overview of course themes and assignments. Initial discussion of anthropological approaches to cultural meaning and to the contexts and uses of cross-cultural comparison and translation. Come to class prepared to discuss your expectations and questions.

Week 2 (2/15): Has Sexual Equality Ever Existed Anywhere? Consider these ethnographic and/or historical accounts of gender roles and relationships: what are each author’s criteria for sexual equality? What sociocultural circumstances do they argue favor equality between men and women? What presuppositions (e.g., about power, social and economic structures, cultural values and beliefs) underlie their respective analyses? Pay careful attention to Slocum’s and especially Sacks’s critical points about interpretive biases: “mindsets” that shape how we make sense of our observations.

READING:
1. Slocum (1975) “Woman the gatherer: male bias in anthropology” (TAW)
2. Brown (1975) “Iroquois women: an ethnohistorical note” (TAW)
4. Draper (1975) “!Kung women: contrasts in sexual egalitarianism in foraging and sedentary contexts” (TAW)
5. Schlegel (1977) “Male and female in Hopi thought and action” (packet, and in

We discuss five key texts in an emergent “anthropology of women”.  Three offer theories accounting for female subordination as an historically specific (not universal) function of the economic arrangements of society; two offer theories accounting for the universality of male dominance in sociocultural terms, couched as a critique of essentializing naturalism (that is, biological determinism).  Consider what sexual inequality comes down to in each case.

READING:
2.  Sacks  (1975)  “Engles revisited: women, the organization of production, and private property” (TAW)
5.  Ortner  (1974)  “Is female to male as nature is to culture?” (packet, and ditto)

Gendered Inequality Reconsidered

“Objectivist” approaches like those we have been considering over the past two weeks were being questioned even as they created a place for gender studies within and outside of anthropology.  The 1980s and 1990s saw increasing skepticism concerning the applicability of the key distinctions upon which global theories about sexual stratification were based:  domestic/political and natural/cultural.

Week 4 (3/1).  Thinking Through the Domestic/Political Distinction.  We discuss several ethnographic cases which cast doubt on the usefulness of a gendered, ranked distinction between “domestic” (private) and “political” (public) domains in the explanation of gendered inequality (recall Rosaldo’s argument last week, and compare with all of the first week’s readings).  We consider cases in which the distinction does not easily translate, and ones in which it may translate a bit too easily.

READING:
2.  Reiter  (1975)  “Men and women in the south of France: public and private domains” (TAW)
3.  Friedl  (1967/86)  “The position of women: appearance and reality” (packet and in
Week 5 (3/8). *Nature, Culture, and Gender*. Following critically from Ortner’s argument (Week 3), we consider how sex and gender have been culturally constructed as “natural” facts in EuroAmerican cultures. Thinking about the historical and cultural particularity of the gendered, ranked distinction between nature and culture, we’ll discuss its implications for cross-cultural comparison (that is to say, for the translation of cultural experience).

**READING:**

Week 6 (3/15). *Nature, Culture, and Gender*: Hijras. An ethnographic case challenging familiar ideas about the binary character of sex and gender: in what senses are hijras “neither man nor woman”? Think about the strengths and weaknesses of Serena Nanda’s strategies of translation and ethnographic contextualization: what else do you want to know (about hijras? About local gender constructs? Etc.) in order to evaluate her argument or to construct an alternative?

**READING:**
1. Gilbert (1997) “Boys will be girls: taking the guesswork out of being trans” (packet and *Village Voice* 8/19/97)
2. Nanda (1990) *Neither Man Nor Woman*
**Week 7 (3/29). Nature, Culture, and Gender:** Sambia Male Cults. An ethnographic case poised to challenge familiar ideas about masculinity and about sexual preference. Think about the strengths and weaknesses of Gilbert Herdt's strategies of translation and ethnographic contextualization. Roger Keesing provides a comparative and theoretical overview on initiation, and Terry and Patricia Hays' article provides a contrastive case and approach.

**READING:**
3. Herdt (1987) *The Sambia*

Reminder: a 3 pp. proposal is due on April 5. Your proposal should include 1) a brief statement of theme or focus, including a sense of how your topic connects with the semester’s readings and discussions, and 2) a preliminary bibliography.

See “Assignments” appendix to the syllabus for details.

**THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION**

With the decline of objectivist approaches, global theories about sexual inequality gave way to an analytical focus on translation, representation and “voice” that locates the observer and the objects of study explicitly within a common frame of reference. The deepening of ethnographic reflexivity inspired by feminist anthropology did not, however, signal either an avoidance of questions about power and transnational realities like colonialism (on the one hand) or the abandonment of attention to cultural difference (on the other). On the contrary: it deepened the insight that the “cultural” (meaning, value, belief) is itself “political” (embodied, located, engaged).

**Week 8-9. “Double Consciousness”, “Muting”, Voice and Access.** Can cultural biases – gendered or otherwise – be eliminated? Are complete or incontestably true accounts of cultures possible? How, exactly, are explicitly woman-centered ethnographies better than conventional, tacitly male-centered ones? Is there something special about women’s perspectives?

For example, do women (and other subordinated people) have privileged insight into the workings of stratified societies, compared with men (and other dominant people)? Or, at least, do female (male) anthropologists have special access to, and share the perspectives of, women (men) in other cultures?

Alternatively, is the experience of women and other subordinated people especially incomplete or partial? Are women’s modes of expression “muted” (in the sense that they bear the burden of translation vis-à-vis culturally dominant discursive
styles)? And what about change: what does it take to get “heard” on one’s own terms (neither co-opted nor ghettoized)? What does it take to “hear” what “others” are saying?

READING (4/5):
1. Rohrlich-Leavitt et al. (1975) “Aboriginal women: male and female anthropological perspectives” (TAW)

READING (4/12):

SITUATING “GENDER”
Over the past 15 years or so, it has become increasingly difficult for anthropologists to separate sex and gender from other culturally constructed identities and relations of difference like class, race, and nationality, either analytically (i.e., for interpretive or explanatory purposes) or strategically (i.e., for political purposes). At the same time, as we have already seen, the project of understanding human experience in terms of multiple “relations of difference” casts doubt on what women (or men), as such, share. What is at stake here?

Week 10 (4/19). Gender in Context: Partial Connections. What arguments can be made for and against abstracting “gender” from its “situations”? These readings (together with others we have read this semester) trace the conjunction of race, class, and gender, and their mutual constitution in and through one another. To what extent does “gender” remain a useful analytical category?

READING:
Week 11 (4/26). Dialectics of Commitment and Critique. The debate about clitoridectomy focuses with particular intensity many of the themes we have been pursuing this semester. Additionally, it forces us to clarify our ideas about anthropological “relativism”: about commitment (“belief”) and critique (“distance”); about the experience and accountability of “insiders” and “outsiders”; and about cultural difference, comparison, translation, and engagement. Our readings illustrate how what we might call the anthropological imagination is moved by arguments over such ideas. They invite us to consider the not-strictly-academic import of disciplined, reflexive cultural analysis.

READING:
2. Gordon (1991) “Female circumcision and genital operations in Egypt and the Sudan: a dilemma for medical anthropology” (and commentaries by various authors following that article – in packet)
[Recall earlier readings on male initiations.]

Week 12 (5/3). Themes TBA. This week will be reserved for presentations and discussion of research projects (as discussed earlier in the semester and on "Assignments" appendix).
ASSIGNMENTS

1. Presentations

A. Class presentations: During class, students initiate class discussions by raising questions about the readings. These presentations may be collaborative, and ought to be no more than about 5-10 minutes long (one page of notes is sufficient: outlining what you plan to say helps to keep your comments concise; alternatively, if you’d like to write out your comments, then no more than 2-4 double spaced pages will do it: see 2a below).

Your presentation ought to (1) orient the discussion by means of brief summary of the main points raised in the readings, and (2) set up a question or issue for the class to discuss together. You can do this, for example, by drawing connections between the current week’s readings or between one of those readings and a previous week’s selection. You can take a stand, articulate a confusion or frustration, or explore an implication. Whatever you do, be specific and focus on something that interested you. You are welcome to develop handouts or to use the chalkboard.

B. Final class meeting presentations and discussion: This will be an opportunity to give and receive commentary and advice concerning your final paper project, and to make connections among the class projects. We will work out the format in discussion over the course of the semester, as each of you settles on a final essay topic. You will not need to turn in your final class presentation, so it does not have to be written up; however, writing it up may be helpful as a way to jumpstart your final paper. You are welcome to post some version of your presentation on Blackboard as a way of eliciting comments from classmates; you are also welcome to use all or part of this presentation in your final paper.

2. Papers

A. Class presentation write-up: A commentary on the readings related to your oral presentation is due a week after the presentation itself. This paper should be 3-5 double-spaced pages and can incorporate what you learned from the general discussion that day. In writing up your presentation, you might clarify, modify, or elaborate the questions you raised in class. You can change your mind about the readings, or explore overlooked implications. You will not be expected to do additional research, or to go beyond the class readings for that day.

B. Final essay: Your final paper for this course is due on Dean’s Date (Tuesday, May 16). It ought to be 12 pages, double-spaced (12 pt font and excluding references cited: for format, check any anthropology journal, like American Anthropologist). As noted above, you should feel free to use all or part of your final week presentation in the final essay, if that is helpful. During this semester, we will read and discuss key works and
issues in the history of anthropological gender studies, with special attention to how and why research questions have developed and changed over the past generation. The point of the final assignment is for you pull together and reflect on what you have learned about these trends: all final papers must make serious substantive use of course readings.

There are various ways you can do this:

1. **Review a literature:** You may select one recent (1990s-today) or older contribution to the anthropology of gender (ethnography or edited collection), and discuss and analyze it specifically and explicitly in light of the readings and issues discussed over the course of the semester. This will enable you to treat class meetings as a series of common working-group discussions supporting your research project. Developing your essay, you might also use the book’s bibliography to situate it in its own specialist contexts, whether regional (e.g., Latin America, Africa, US) or topical (economy, sexuality, etc.). As you explore these contexts, ask yourself: to what literatures or conversations is this work a response or intervention? You might find that the reading you have chosen is a response to research and arguments taking place not only within but also outside of the anthropology of gender (or indeed, outside of anthropology or of gender studies). Your paper might consider how these different contexts shape the work, and the effectiveness of the work’s interventions. You might use your contemporary focus to develop a critical perspective on the trends considered in class, or to advocate/speculate on future directions in anthropological gender studies.

2. **Redesign the syllabus:** an argument for the inclusion of a set of readings not (yet) on the syllabus. If you would like to write an essay redesigning the syllabus, you would need to come up with a set of specific readings, discussing their key themes and how they might fit together, and the challenges an instructor might face in helping students to make sense of them. The essay would also need to address questions like: what would be removed to make space for the new additions and why? Where would you place the readings and why? What kinds of difference would the new readings make for our understanding of key issues raised in the course as a whole? Addressing these questions adequately would involve specific and explicit reference to readings and issues discussed over the course of the semester.

3. **Develop a synthesis and critical reflection on an important course theme:** a list of suggestions will be offered in early April.

Finally, your final essay—in any of the above formats—may be oriented around or incorporate informal fieldwork (that is, ethnographic attentiveness to everyday life, focused on journal writing) and/or current media issues. In these (as in all of the other) cases, your paper would still need to engage the syllabus readings in some substantial manner. As above, please consult me in developing your ideas!

**Drawing on these possibilities, a 2-3 pp. proposal for your final paper is due Wednesday, April 5: 1-2 pp. describing your topic and 1 p. list of sources.**
ANT 441: Class Presentation topics

The following is a list of possible presentation topics and dates (consult the syllabus for details).
Please indicate your top three choices.

Name:

[2/8: Introductory meeting]

2/15: Has Sexual Equality Ever Existed Anywhere?


3/1: Thinking Through the Domestic/Political Distinction.


MIDTERM BREAK: no class March 22


4/5: “Double Consciousness” and Cultural Bias

4/12: “Muting”, “Voice” and Access

4/19: Gender in Context: Partial Connections (gender, race, class)

4/26: Dialectics of Commitment and Critique (“female circumcision”)

[5/3: Presentations from everyone]