

GSWS 2205G
MAKING MEN: CRITICAL STUDIES IN MASCULINITY



Actors Alex Hibbert and Mahershala Ali in a scene from the film *Moonlight* (2016). Photo by David Bornfriend.

**The Department of Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies,
Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Western University, Winter 2026**

Course Format: In Person

Schedule: **Thursdays, 10:30am-1:30pm**

Location: Arts and Humanities Building (AHB), Room 1B08

Instructor: **Dr. Gary Lee Pelletier** / dpellet6@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Via ZOOM / Contact for appointment

Brightspace Course Site: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/home/155337>

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to gather and learn and work on this land.

Course Description

This course helps students to investigate the gendered and intersectional subjectivities of men. It wonders, who are men? Why? Who do they want to be? Why? And who do we want them to be? Why? To aid in answering these questions, critical masculinity studies is unpacked and identified as a composite of feminist studies, gender studies, sexuality studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, and disability studies. GSWS 2205 defines and analyzes masculinity as a relational and flexible concept of gender in the first half of the course, and then draws from cultural artifacts and students' own lived experiences in its survey of a diversity of men's experiences and theories of masculinity in the second half. While many critiques of gender, sexuality, race, class, and disability are explored, the ultimate aim of the course is to reveal the transformative potential and agency that lives within the social (re)construction of men, manhood, and masculinity.

In emphasizing the social construction of men, manhood, and masculinity as constitutive of the enormous capital they command, this course [also] aims to advance a more critical view whereby such concepts are seen not as impenetrable bastions of historically oppressive power, but as privileged nodes that have been instrumentalized within discursive ideological networks. Through an examination of diverse media sources (literature, film, art, critical journalism, news articles, music, memes, etc.) and their treatment of issues like “guy” culture, male body image, homosociality, aggression, family, success, and male sexuality, this course encourages the centrality of critical reflection in understanding the oftentimes violent negotiation of masculinity across various intersectional sites, and the refraction of those dynamics in men's relationships with themselves, other men, women, and institutions (from C. Ylagan's 2024 Syllabus).

In other (simpler and probably more effective) words, **men are more than static, unmalleable conduits of patriarchal power.** They are gendered subjects with a lot to lose and a lot to gain in this contentious and hotly politicized here and now.



Learning Objectives

Together, we will:

- deepen our proficiency with concepts and themes in critical masculinity studies,
- think critically about the construction of masculinity across various intersectional, historical, and personal contexts,
- practice analyzing cultural artifacts through a variety of theoretical lenses,
- resist hierarchical modes of knowledge production by embracing anti-racist, feminist, and queer generous/generative ways of relating and thinking,
- bridge the gap between “theory” and “me” by analyzing personal experience via scholarship,
- and, finally, advance our overall understanding of gender, sexuality, and women’s studies.

Expectations

Your responsibilities as students include:

- attending all classes,
- actively reading assigned texts in advance of class,
- completing all assignments on time,
- treating your peers and instructors with care and respect,
- engaging in class discussions and activities,
- and attending office hours or scheduling appointments when in need of help.

Course Texts and Other Materials

You do not need to purchase, forage for, or steal any textbooks for this course. All assigned readings and other course content will be available to you on Brightspace.

Format & Delivery

This is an **in-person** course that is partly facilitated online via the Brightspace course page, which can be accessed here: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/home/155337>. All course content (assigned readings, assignment instructions and deadlines, announcements, the syllabus, etc.) can be found on the Brightspace site. Lectures will not be recorded, nor posted online. Attending class and participating in group discussion is a mandatory component of this course, and thus accommodations cannot be organized for those who cannot attend in person. However, the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies here at Western is offering multiple remote-learning courses this semester, so I encourage you to get in touch with the department if these are the types of courses you require.

To get in touch with me you can either message me through the Brightspace site or email me (contact information on page 1). If contacted during the work week (Monday-Friday) I'll always respond within 24 hours. Please do your best to match me in this practice.

All graded assignments will be returned to students with feedback within two of the submission date, via Brightspace.

Assignments

Attendance (10%) + Participation (10%) = 20%

Due: Ongoing

Students must actively participate in class discussions. Keep in mind that there are various ways to productively participate in classrooms. Supportive and listening, engaging with your instructors and your peers in dialogue, asking questions, and exhibiting generosity and kindness are some of the most important means to participate. Productive participation sometimes means holding space for others and giving them a chance to respond. **As with attendance, participation cannot be made up retroactively or substituted for other work.** Your participation also includes checking the Brightspace course site regularly to stay looped into course announcements and deadlines. Your participation grade will be assessed at the end of the course in April.

Short In-Class Writing Reflections (4 @ 5% each) = 20%

Due: Reflection #1, written and submitted in class on **January 8**.

Reflection #2, written and submitted in class on **January 29**.

Reflection #3, written and submitted in class on **March 12**.

Reflection #4, written and submitted in class on **April 2**.

These writing reflections must be completed in class on the specified dates and cannot be made up. Expectations and specifications for these short exercises will be discussed in class on **January 8**.

Cultural Artifact Presentation = **15%**

Due: Students must present **one time** throughout the semester.

Instructions for this assignment, as well as a presentation sign-up schedule, will be circulated in class on **January 8**.

Midterm = **20%**

Due: To be completed in class on **February 12**.

A review session for this exam will take place in class on **January 29**.

Course Essay Assignment = **25%**

Due: Must be uploaded to Brightspace by **April 9**.

Instructions for this assignment will be distributed in class on **March 5**.

Grade Values

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com.
(<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/courseoutlines.pdf>)

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Extensions and Accommodations

If you are not already in touch with the university regarding accommodations and you require them, please contact me for assistance or reach out to Accessible Education (AE) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation or to review their policies.

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/academic_accomodation.html.

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. For UWO Policies around academic consideration and accommodations you can check out:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html AND

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf.

There will be no deadline extensions granted or other accommodations made in this course outside the policy described above and the formal accommodations procedures handled by university administration. Students who submit an assignment after the due date will lose 5% of the assignment mark for each late day. If the assignment has not been submitted within seven days after the due date has passed, the student will receive a zero on said assignment.

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, here. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

On Generative AI

Students are not permitted to use artificial intelligence tools when completing any assignments in this course. All submissions **must be original work** produced by the individual student alone. Please note that I reserve the right to schedule a meeting for you to explain any part of your assignments. Don't hesitate to get in touch with me to discuss further should you have any questions or concerns regarding this type of technology. Additionally, if you require the use of a language translator to complete any of your assignments this must be disclosed to me via email within the first week of the course.

Don't Be A Crook

Thanks to the wings of WIFI, syllabi travel far and wide. If you are not a student that is currently enrolled in GSWS 2205, a course that I designed for the 2026 Winter semester at Western University, but rather you are teaching a different iteration of this course or a similar course elsewhere, and are here on reconnaissance, please do not plunder this syllabus. **If you use any of my words, ideas, or course scaffolding, you should cite me, pay me, and/or build a monument in my honour.**

Although course design is an underrecognized and underpaid professorial task, doing it well is fundamental to running successful university courses. To design dynamic learning experiences within a particular academic discipline or theoretical field, one must know said discipline or field intimately in the present tense. Thus, a course syllabus is highly reflective of its curator's dynamic proficiency in the research that the course is guiding students to explore. Careful course design is essential for preventing pedagogy from going stale. Additionally, it's an effective way of promoting diversity in the classroom, a helpful tactic for preemptively weeding out some of the bigotry that can crop up in learning environments, and a clear declaration of a teacher's commitment to one's students, one's research, and one's integrity. Please keep in mind that I pumped a lot of love and a lot of time into this syllabus. **It's here for the citing, not the taking.**

Thanks for coming to my Ted talk!



Artist credit: Sofie Birkin

COURSE OUTLINE

CLASS 1 – JANUARY 8: COURSE INTRODUCTION

Lecture: “Who’s Da Man?: On Gendered Subjectivity, Identity, Masculinity, and Men”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) What’s this course all about?
- 2) Who am I?
- 3) Who are you?
- 4) How will this course function this semester?
- 5) Considering Judith Butler’s scholarship, “whose afraid of gender,” and why?

Readings Due: None

CLASS 2 – JANUARY 15: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Lecture: “A REAL Man Is Hard to Find”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) Who are men?
- 2) What are masculinities?
- 3) What’s the gender binary and how does it influence society?
- 4) In what ways are masculinities “relational” concepts?
- 5) What is gender essentialism?

Readings Due:

- 1) “The institutionalization of (critical) studies on men and masculinities: geopolitical perspectives” by Jeff Hearn and Richard Howson
- 2) “Theorizing Masculinity” by Todd Reeser

CLASS 3 – JANUARY 22: FEMINIST CRITIQUES

Lecture: “What’s Feminism Got To Do With It?”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) What is critical masculinity studies?

- 2) How does Raewyn Connel conceptualize “hegemonic masculinity”?
- 3) How can we describe feminism’s relationship to men and masculinities?
- 4) Why are men and masculinities often deemed to be in “crisis”?
- 5) How have pornography discourses historically (as well as in the present) affected the relationship of feminism and theories of masculinity?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Men and masculinities: a continuing debate on change” by Andria Christofidou
- 2) “Feminism and men/masculinities scholarship: connections, disjunctions and possibilities” by Chris Beasley.
- 3) “Sexual affects: masculinity and online pornographies” by Steve Garlick

CLASS 4 – JANUARY 29: AGGRIEVED ENTITLEMENT

Lecture: “How To Talk To One’s Grandfather”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How does Michael Kimmel theorize “aggrieved entitlement”?
- 2) How can we incorporate Audre Lorde’s concept of the “mythical norm” into this discussion about men and privilege?
- 3) What do recent political developments in Canada, the United States, and around the world illuminate about patriarchy in 2026?
- 4) How should we consider the concerns that contemporary Men’s Rights Activists identify?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Manufacturing Rage: The Cultural Construction of Aggrieved Entitlement” by Michael Kimmel
- 2) TBD

CLASS 5 – FEBRUARY 5: CARING MASCULINITIES

Lecture: “Who Cares? On Men & Gendered Values of Care, Love, and Nurturance

Guiding Questions:

- 1) Is the subject position of “breadwinner” still relevant to men’s experience today?
- 2) Are parenting practices today still governed by the gender binary?
- 3) In what ways has “care” been a historically and oppressively gendered concept?
- 4) How should we conceptualize and distinguish motherwork, fatherwork, and carework?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Chapter 3 – Work, Caring Masculinities and the Work of Fatherhood” by Catherine Gallais
- 2) “Chapter 4 – Practices of Care: The Embodiment of Fatherhood” by Catherine Gallais

CLASS 6 – FEBRUARY 12: MIDTERM

Readings Due: None.

You’ve arrived at the halfway point of the course. Congrats!

Midterm grades and feedback will be posted via Brightspace by February 26.

-----**READING WEEK: FEBRUARY 16-22**-----



ENJOY YOUR BREAK!

CLASS 7 – FEBRUARY 26: PHALLOCENTRISM

Lecture: “All About The Dick”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How have feminist scholars and activists critiqued phallocentric societies?
- 2) What do certain sexual fetishes (such as BBC) reveal about men, masculinity, race, and sexual desire?
- 3) Drawing from psychoanalysis, how can we distinguished the “phallus” from the dick?
- 4) How do this week’s authors theorize dick pics as cultural phenonema?
- 5) What insights do critical disability studies scholars and activists add to this discussion around men, masculinity, and embodiment?

Readings Due:

- 1) “The Dick Pic: Harassment, Curation, and Desire” by Susanna Paasonen, Ben Light, and Kylie Jarrett
- 2) “Disability, embodiment, and masculinities: a complex matrix” by Steve Robertson, Lee Monaghan, and Kris Southby
- 3) “‘You Lot Are So Hot’: Race, Black Men and Commodity Fantasies” by Chris Haywood

CLASS 8 – MARCH 5: HOMOSOCIALITY & HOMOPHOBIA

Lecture: “The Heteronormative and White Supremacist Qualities of Bro-Bonding”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How can we theorize homophobia as a patriarchal tool?
- 2) What does Jane Ward claim about about homosociality, homophobia, and whiteness in her research?
- 3) How can we apply this discussion at the level of our institutions: government, religion, the military, the family, etc.?
- 4) What does contemporary sport culture signal about contemporary masculinities?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Haze Him!: White Masculinity, Anal Resilience, and the Erotic Spectacle of Repulsion” by Jane Ward
- 2) “The ‘male preserve’ thesis, sporting culture, and men’s power” by Christopher R. Matthews and Alex Channon

CLASS 9 – MARCH 12: QUEER & TRANS MASCULINITIES

Lecture: “Resistance Via Existence: Alternative Scripts for Men and Masculinities”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How should we take up neoliberal consumer masculinities?
- 2) How do the three queens’ methods of supporting one another reject hegemonic masculine values?
- 3) What can queer theory teach us about care, love, sex, and masculinity?
- 4) What are the unique challenges that trans people face when enacting and embodying their gendered subjectivities?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Is the Rectum a Gold Mine? Queer Theory, Consumer Masculinities, and Capital Pleasures” by Tommaso M. Milani
- 2) “We Three Queens” by Gary Lee Pelletier and Michael Young
- 3) “Trans masculinities” by Miriam J. Abelson and Tristen Kade

CLASS 10 – MARCH 19: RACIALIZED MASCULINITIES

Lecture: “The Discursive Power of Race Within Social (Re)Constructions of Men and Masculinities”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) How can we put the theory of hegemonic masculinity into discussion with the construction of racialized masculinities?
- 2) How do BIPOC men navigate the difficulties of enacting their gendered subjectivities within white supremacist societies?
- 3) In what ways have white masculinities evolved? Or, why haven’t they?

Readings Due:

- 1) “African and black men and masculinities” by Kopano Ratele
- 2) “White masculinity” by Tobias Hubinette
- 3) “Men and masculinities in contemporary East Asia: continuities, changes, and challenges” by Mario Liong and Lih Shing Chan

CLASS 11 – MARCH 26: THE MANOSPHERE

Lecture: “Popular Misogyny and Those Who Pedal It”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) What is the “manosphere” and what does it reflect about contemporary masculinities?
- 2) Who are incels and what is their origin story?
- 3) What does incel culture illuminate about contemporary feminism?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Failure to thrive: incels, boys and feminism” by Grace Sharkey
- 2) “Mapping the Neo-Manosphere(s): New Directions for Research” by Vivian Gerrand, Debbie Ging, and Michael Flood

CLASS 12 – APRIL 2: MEN, MASCULINITIES, & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Lecture: “So...What’s a Good Guy To Do?”

Guiding Questions:

- 1) Where has this course landed? How are you feeling?
- 2) What are significant issues on the agenda for critical masculinity scholars and activities in 2026?
- 3) Given the present gender panic that is ubiquitous throughout Canadian and American society (as well as in societies around the globe), how might gendered subjectivities shift in shape and relevance?
- 4) What’s the status of the gender binary within contemporary human existence?
- 5) What do you want **for** men and what do you want **from** them?

Readings Due:

- 1) “Trends and trajectories in engaging men for gender justice” by Tal Peretz
- 2) “Masculinities, war and militarism” by Claire Duncanson
- 3) “Ecological masculinities: a response to the Manthropocene question” by Martin Hultman and Paul Pule