

# **Anthropology of Gender and Sex Differences**

**In cross-cultural perspective  
ANTH 365/465, WGST 365  
August 26, 2019**

# **Introductions in the room**

- Your name?
- What do you want to learn in this class?

# **Who am I, the instructor?**

*(Dr.) Eli Thorkelson*

**Why study gender and sexuality?**

**What are things that you find  
puzzling about gender and  
sexuality?**

*Masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition.*

**— R. W. Connell**

# Why should we study gender through labor and reproduction?

- We are studying less gender *identities* than gendered *social processes*.
- In the background: How do contemporary societies keep functioning?
- It takes *work* to keep a society going. Work is very often gendered.
- It also demands more or less successful processes of *social reproduction* over time.
- Reproduction is often a tenuous process.

# **Why explore gender ethnographically?**

- The personal is (socio)political.
- The readings take us far from here, but gender is already around us.
- We're trying to hone our senses, our abilities to observe, to write.



# **Key claims of the course**

## **Part 1: Basic concepts in gender, culture, and power**

- Gender is a 'social construct'
- Gender interacts with race, class and other social processes
- Gender is organized around (hetero)sexuality
- Gender is political
- Gender organizes social space
- Gender fixates on the body
- Identities shift, and become hybrid, as they move through the world

## **Part 2: Gender, sexuality and reproduction**

- The way we see biology is cultural
- Reproduction is racialized
- Pregnancy has politics
- Reproduction is a pedagogical project
- Parental roles are (often) ambivalent
- As norms shift, reproduction becomes a problem
- While formal education remains a key scene of gender policing

# Part 3: Gender and labor

- Gender and class emerge together
- Emotions are work
- Cleaning a house is also work
- Feminized workplaces are sites of gender discipline and agency
- Workplace gender discipline is also sexual discipline
- It takes work to hide the work
- Work (often) can't hold up the world
- "People do things however they can" (in changing sexual economies)
- Work can reorganize the (sex) worker's self
- Although (sex) workers can also self-organize

# **Syllabus review**

- Units & readings
- Requirements & grading
- Policy issues

# For next time

- Read the first reading, by Lorber
- Post your first reading question on Canvas (by 11am Thursday)
- Be ready to talk about your question in class
- Make a Medium.com account
- Think about sites around you that pose interesting gender issues, where you might want to conduct your fieldwork exercises