

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES
GSWS 2205G: Making Men: Critical Studies in Masculinity
Winter 2027

(Preliminary Outline, subject to change)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines masculinity as a social, cultural, bodily, and political formation. We will consider how ideas about “real” manhood are learned, performed, regulated, desired, and contested across everyday life, popular culture, institutions, and digital media. The course asks how masculinity organizes power and vulnerability at the same time. How can masculinity offer belonging, status, pleasure, and identity, but also produce violence, loneliness, exclusion, and harm? Topics include boys and schooling, male loneliness, the body, sport, racialized masculinities, coloniality, the manosphere, trans and queer masculinities, sex and entitlement, consent, accountability, and alternative ways of imagining masculinity. Readings will be paired with films, documentaries, social media, and contemporary examples that invite students to think critically about how masculinity shapes intimacy, politics, identity, and social life.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand key concepts in masculinity studies, gender studies, and feminist theory.
- Analyze masculinity as a social, historical, and political formation.
- Examine how masculinities are shaped through institutions, media, bodies, relationships, and everyday practices.
- Consider how masculinity intersects with race, sexuality, colonialism, class, gender identity, and embodiment.
- Critically assess contemporary debates about male loneliness, the manosphere, consent, accountability, and gendered harm.
- Apply course concepts to scholarly texts, films, digital media, and contemporary case studies.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Define and apply key concepts used in the study of masculinities.
- Analyze scholarly and media texts related to masculinity, power, vulnerability, and social life.
- Explain how masculinities are produced through social norms, institutions, bodies, and cultural practices.
- Compare different forms of masculinity across racial, sexual, colonial, and gendered contexts.
- Develop focused arguments about contemporary examples of masculinity in media, politics, sport, online culture, or everyday life.
- Communicate analysis clearly in discussion, in-class writing, and written assignments.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Students are not required to purchase any texts for this course. All assigned readings will be available through Western's Course Readings platform.

ASSESSMENTS

1. Participation and In-Class Engagement — 15%

Students are expected to engage consistently and thoughtfully with course materials, class discussions, lectures, films, in-class activities, and group work. Participation may include contributing to discussion, asking questions, participating in small groups, listening attentively, completing informal in-class writing activities, building on peers' ideas, and making connections between readings, lectures, media, and everyday examples. Students do not need to speak in every class to participate meaningfully, but they are expected to be regularly present, prepared, and actively engaged in the intellectual work of the course.

2. In-Class Midterm — 25%

Students will complete an in-class midterm that assesses their understanding of key concepts, readings, and themes from the first half of the course. The midterm may include short definitions, short-answer questions, passage or media analysis, and/or a brief written response. This assignment is designed to support careful reading and conceptual understanding before students move into longer independent analysis. Students will be expected to define and apply course concepts, explain connections between readings and lectures, and analyze examples of masculinity as a social, cultural, bodily, racial, sexual, and political formation.

3. Masculinity in the Wild: Media/Film Analysis — 25%

Students will write a 1,000- to 1,200-word analysis of one media object related to masculinity. Students may choose one of the assigned films or documentaries, or they may select a contemporary media object such as a television episode, film scene, music video, advertisement, podcast episode, TikTok trend, YouTube clip, sports media text, celebrity interview, dating-app discourse, political speech, influencer account, or other approved example. The analysis should make a clear argument about how masculinity is being produced, performed, defended, desired, disciplined, marketed, mocked, or contested in the chosen example. Strong assignments will move beyond summary and use course concepts to explain why the example matters. Students must draw on at least two scholarly readings.

4. Final Case Study: Masculinity in Context — 35%

Students will write a 1,600-to 2,000-word final case study analyzing a focused contemporary or historical case related to masculinity. Cases may be drawn from media, sport, politics, education, health, online culture, film and television, music, public policy, social movements, celebrity culture, campus life, or everyday social practices. The case study should have a clear central argument and should use course concepts to analyze how masculinity is produced/contested/transformed in a specific context. Final case studies must draw on at least four scholarly readings.

WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

Week 1, How to Build a Man

Week 2, Boys Will Be Boys?

Week 3, Man Up

Week 4, Size Matters?

Week 5, Balls, Bodies, and Brotherhood

Week 6, A Band of Suspects

Week 7, The Algorithm Made Me Do It

Week 8, Midterm

Week 9, The Gender of Empire

Week 10, Masculinity Beyond Men

Week 11, The Right to Sex?

Week 12, Masculinity Otherwise