

## **ANTH 110 Thesis Statements Cultural Relativism Paper F2013**

Cultural relativism, a core component of anthropology, is put to the test when considering female genital modification (FGM), a cultural practice common in many traditional African contexts. Interestingly, we seem more comfortable discussing male circumcision, which shares some interesting similarities with FGM; this clearly highlights the cultural aspects of this complex issue. While we will discuss FGM in the context of gender violence, it is much more complicated, and not black and white. Should the practice be abolished? Do we, as anthropologists and outsiders, have the right to pass judgment on such cultural practices and lobby for government intervention? What are the consequences of NOT participating in what is often a rite of passage and an essential identifier of group affiliation and adulthood?

Students will write a short, concise paper (5-7 pages long, double spaced, 12 point font) applying a balanced, anthropological perspective to consider this complicated debate. I have posted some information about how to structure an argument brief; essentially it is like a lawyer's arguments in court. You want to convince the jury of your position, using solid information, balanced perspective, and a direct, concise communication style.

Please choose one of the following as a thesis statement. Do not be fooled, it is just as challenging to apply cultural relativism to statements like #3 as it is to craft an argument to support #1. I have included male circumcision here because of the way this conversation plays out here in our own communities; evaluating this potential hypocrisy may be of interest to some of you!

1. FGM is part of culturally important initiation ceremonies.
2. Male circumcision is part of culturally important initiation ceremonies.
3. FGM poses serious health concerns (physically, emotionally, and psychologically).
4. Male circumcision poses serious health concerns.
5. There are documented health benefits to male circumcision.
6. FGM is done to control women, and keep them subordinate to men.
7. Despite prevailing stereotypes, FGM doesn't necessarily obliterate the potential for female sexual pleasure.
8. FGM and male circumcision are justified through religion.
9. It is a parent's right to raise their children in accordance with their traditions and beliefs.
10. Because most forms of circumcision occur when a child is fairly young (a minor) they have no choice in the matter. This is a form of child abuse and a violation of basic human rights.
11. To dictate what are acceptable cultural practices in another country is ethnocentric and a form of neocolonialism. (If you choose this one, please be sure to consider FGM here, as a case study to evaluate the broader argument).