

# Gender, Women, Sex and Feminism in transnational perspective

History 752 — Fall 2021  
HUMANITIES 5245  
UW Madison  
Tuesdays 3:30-5:25PM  
(3 credits)

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## **Course Description & Learning Outcomes**

This graduate seminar is designed as an introduction to the field of Gender and Women's History—the seminar is not restricted to students affiliated with the History Department's Program in Gender and Women's History. Over the course of the semester, we will pursue at least five learning outcomes. First, we will identify key debates and concepts in the field of Gender and Women's History. What is the difference between women's history and gender history? Are both still relevant to the field today? Where do questions of sexuality appear in these debates? Second, we will analyze how histories of gender, sex and feminism are imbricated in other categories and hierarchies, such as race, class, generation, nation, tribe, and religion and broach the possibilities and limits of feminist historical writing for confronting histories of violence and inequality. Third, we will develop an understanding of gender as shaped by global processes, including imperialism, capitalism, white supremacy. Fourth, we will consider gender and sexuality in relation to the specific methodological challenges faced by historians. What is the relationship between evidence, interpretations, and narratives? To what extent is imagination part of the work of historians, and to what extent are we constrained by what can be proven? How do we, as historians, interpret and create narratives about the lives of people in the past whose categories of gender and sexuality were different from our own? Finally, we will ponder the relationship between feminism and the historian's craft. What does it mean to be a feminist historian?

Our approach is comparative and transnational. We will mix regions of the world, using one region to trouble or rethink another. We will consciously work on understanding the methods and claims of different disciplines, including history, anthropology, literature, and cultural studies, as well as distinct intellectual traditions like post-colonial and feminist theory.

752 is always team-taught by two historians of gender in different geographical regions. The rationale for team-teaching is twofold: first, to demonstrate the comparative and transnational approaches that increasingly shape the field of gender and women's history; and second, to familiarize students with faculty members and intellectual peers across multiple subfields.

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), reading, writing, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

As historians, we recognize that our academic discipline has privileged certain people and excluded others—both in terms of the people who have occupied tenured positions in History Departments, and in terms of the perspectives and experiences that have been deemed worthy of historical inquiry. Indeed, until very recently, the walls of Curti Lounge in Mosse Humanities where we hold department meetings were adorned with the portraits of former department chairs, all of whom (until very recently) were white men. We also acknowledge that the University of Wisconsin-Madison itself occupies the ancestral lands of the Ho-Chunk, a place their nation has called Teejop. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. While we cannot undo all forms of historical injustice in a single seminar, we recognize our ongoing obligation to foster a more just and inclusive discipline of History.

In this seminar, our intention is to create a safe learning environment where all students can participate in open and honest dialogue with one another. We expect all members of the seminar to contribute to a learning atmosphere that is respectful and inclusive, and which recognizes the dignity of each member. We welcome disagreement and varying viewpoints as a productive and necessary part of intellectual inquiry, and we expect seminar members to express disagreement in a respectful way.

**Accessibility:** Everyone is welcome in this seminar, and we are happy to make accommodations, adjustments, alternatives, or whatever we can do to support your engagement. The McBurney Center provides useful documentation and support related to disabilities, but we do not require McBurney documentation to make the course more accessible to you.

**Modality:** Per UW guidelines for in-person instruction during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we are required to wear masks, sanitize our hands, and keep some distance. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

**Readings:** Articles and chapter excerpts are available as pdfs under the "Files" tab on the Canvas site. Books should all be available in print or electronically at UW Libraries, unless you want to purchase them.

## Schedule

### Week 1, September 14. Introductions & the field of Gender and Women's History

Laura Downs. *Writing Gender History* (2004), pp. 1-100 + 182-197. (Scan emailed out)

## MODULE 1: THE POWER OF CATEGORIES

### Week 2, September 21. *Gender as a Category of Analysis?*

Gerda Lerner. Short sections of *The Majority Finds its Past* (1979) and *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987).

Joan Scott, "Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-1075.

Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, ed. *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*. Africa World Press, 2003. Introduction and chapter 3.

Jeanne Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," *Gender & History* 20, no. 3 (2008): 558–583.

### Week 3, September 28. *Gender & Sexuality*

Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005). Read pp. 1-96, 132-80, 207-244 (skim the rest)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. (Columbia University Press, 1985). Read pp. 1-27.

### Week 4, October 5. *Gender, Performance, Identity?*

Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). Read introduction, chapter 3 (pp. 68-103) and 5 (pp. 137-164), conclusion and epilogue.

C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Read preface, introduction, chapter 2 and chapter 4.

Due Friday: Paper #1

## MODULE 2: GENDER AND TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY

### Week 5, October 12: *Reproduction, Power, Race*

Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (University of California Press, 2003). Read intro., chapters 3 and 4, and conclusion.

Françoise Verges, *The Wombs of Women: Race, Capital, Feminism* (Duke, 2020) Introduction and chapter 1.

Françoise Verges, "On Women and their Wombs: Capitalization, Racialization, Feminism," *Critical Times* 1, no. 1 (2018): 263-267.

Week 6, October 19: *Beauty, Gender, Colonialism*

Lynn M. Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: a Transnational History of Skin Lighteners* (Duke 2020).

Jaqueline Mougoue, "Over-making Nyanga: mastering "Natural" Beauty and Disciplining Excessive Bodily Practices in Metropolitan Cameroon," *African Studies Review* 62, no. 2 (2019): 175-198.

Week 7, October 26: *International Feminism*

Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Due Friday: Paper #2

MODULE 3: LIVES, ARCHIVES, GENDER AND THE HISTORIAN'S CRAFT

Week 8, November 2:

Amy Stanley, *Stranger in the Shogun City: A Japanese Woman and her World* (Scribner 2020).

Week 9, November 9:

Saidiyya Hartmann, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals* (Norton, 2018).

Annette Gordon-Reed, "Rebellious History: How should historians construct a more complete and truthful version of the past?" *New York Review of Books*, October 22, 2020.

Week 10, November 16:

Imani Perry, *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry*, (Beacon Press: 2019).

Week 11, November 23: No class meeting (Thanksgiving)

Week 12, November 30: Current UW Historians on Gender and Women

Ashley Brown, "Uncomplimentary Things: Tennis Player Althea Gibson, Sexism, Homophobia and Anti-Queerness in the Black Media," *Journal of African American History*, 106, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 249-277.

Claire Taylor, "Women's social networks and female friendship in the ancient Greek world," *Gender & History* 23, no. 3 (2011): 704-21.

Further reading TBD

Week 13: Flash panel on sources or objects. Details to follow

Week 14: Final discussion, meet to debrief and evaluate.

Due Wednesday December 15: Paper #3

### **Requirements & assignments**

**Active participation** is required—this does not always mean speaking a lot, but it does mean listening to and engaging other people's ideas and comments and being willing to risk asking a "stupid" question in order to move the discussion forward. The seminar's success depends on it!

**Weekly written responses** are designed to provide us with some of your thoughts on the readings when we plan seminar discussion. Discussion prompts will ask for different things each week—sometimes a question, sometimes a response to the reading, sometimes a favorite quote from the reading, etc. Your responses are limited to 250 words and should include one well-crafted question that you can draw on in our discussion. Posts are due on Canvas in the weekly discussion tab Monday evening before the seminar on Tuesday at 3:30.

**Three seminar papers** due by noon on the dates listed on the syllabus. These papers are meant to bring the readings from different weeks into conversation with each other. In addition, we are happy to work with you on how you can engage with readings, topics and questions related to your own fields and geographical regions of study. All papers should be about 6-8 pages, double spaced, margins 1.

*Paper #1: Gender as category, practice, or identity: what is at stake?*

Engaging with the readings from the first module, make an argument assessing a debate about gender and what is at stake. Do not try to discuss all the readings. Instead, focus on one or two readings that can help you formulate an interesting argument, perhaps comparing with and pulling in other readings as needed.

*Paper #2: Gender as a Transnational History: What do we gain by shifting our geographic horizons beyond national boundaries and considering how gender and sexuality operates transnationally? Compare and contrast how the historians we have considered in this module approach gender as a transnational history and make your own argument about pros or cons of writing transnational histories about gender and sexuality.*

*Paper #3: Lives and Archives: How do historians write about gender, sex, and sexuality in the past? Consider the approaches of the historians we have read this semester, paying particular attention to how they situate themselves in relation to archives. What kinds of categories do they use—ones drawn from the present, or ones that the people they are writing about would have used? How closely do they adhere to empirical evidence, and how much license do they allow themselves to imagine the worlds of their subjects? What assumptions do they feel they can make or not make? Consider and compare at least 4 of the authors we've read together.*

**Grades** are weighed as follows: 10 weekly discussion posts 30%, 3 papers each 15%, and participation in seminar 25%.