History 301 The Politics of Gender in Medieval and Early Modern Europe
Spring 2010

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Class meets Wed 2:30-4:50
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Course Description:
In 1986, historian Joan Scott published a now-famous article that questioned natural sex categories and
called attention to the systems of power that are constructed on the perceived differences between men
and women. It was an important turning point in history as a discipline. Gender has since transformed
historical analysis, moving out from women’s history to complicate fields where most women were
absent or silent. Arguably, nowhere has this transformation and its political implications been more
apparent than in medieval and early modern European history, whose fluid gender categories have often
been used to destabilize our own.

This colloquium has two aims: to examine how and in what ways gender shaped medieval and early
modern Europeans’ identities, experiences, imaginations and ideology, and also to consider the ways in
which gender studies have transformed the doing of history. We will try to answer Joan Scott’s question
for ourselves: is gender still a useful category of analysis for the medieval and early modern periods?
Does gender tell us something fundamental about pre-modern people’s lives, both men and women? What
have we gained by moving from women’s history to gender studies, and what have we lost? To this end
we will analyze historians’ work on the topics of sexuality, power and class, spirituality, the family,
political authority, economic production and scientific enquiry for the period ranging from 1000 to 1700.
Moreover, I also hope you will not only gain insight into some of the key historiographic debates about
gender in this period but also acquire some of the important tools of the historian. Through active
discussion and written analysis of a number of articles and monographs, we will see how historians
identify good questions, deploy various methodologies, analyze evidence and construct their arguments.
Above all, I hope you will think of this course as just the beginning in your pursuit of new and exciting
directions of thought, historical or otherwise.

This course also counts towards the GSFS major!

Required texts:
Except for these texts, all readings will be available on Blackboard under Reading Assignments; some are
available as e-resources through OBIS (will have a +) These texts will be on print reserve in the library.

Judith Bennett, History Matters (2006)
Katherine Park, Secrets of Women (2006)
Isabell Hull, Sexuality, State and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815 (1996)

This course welcomes different perspectives and backgrounds from within the discipline of history and
also outside it. For those without a background in European history (and even those with one!) I would
recommend having a good textbook on hand for those moments of diachronic or synchronic confusion.
Lynn Hunt et. al., The Making of the West (concise 2nd edition or 3rd edition) vol. I or Chambers and
Hanawalt, The Western Experience Vol. B The Early Modern Era, are two reliable ones.

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Requirements:
All work must be turned in to receive credit for the course. The breakdown of grades is as follows:
- Attendance and Participation in Weekly Discussion (incl. taking notes one session) 20%
- Weekly Response Papers 20%
- Two 5 Page Papers (15% each) 30%
- One 7-9 Page Paper 30%

Grading based on the following: A+ 100-97; A 96-93; A- 92-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 82-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 72-70; D 65-69, F below 65.

Details:
1. Readings must be completed before class and brought to class, and participation in class discussions counts heavily in the final course grade. Even if you are writing a paper for that class on a particular reading, you should prepare all the reading and be ready to discuss it. Because there is writing involved for every class session, it will not work to put off reading until the night before—it will take you all week to get through everything, take notes, process and write up your thoughts.

2. Written Assignments
   a. For credit, no grade.
      1. Unless there are other writing assignments due, you will be responsible for weekly 2 page (500 word) responses to the readings. They should be posted on Blackboard by Monday at 5PM. These are informal writing assignments for the purpose of generating discussion in class and will not be graded individually (i.e. you will receive full credit if you do all the assignments)
      2. One week during the semester you will be in charge of taking notes for the group and then posting them on Blackboard.

   b. Graded.
      1. 5 page paper on the nature of the medieval household and the implications of its arrangements. Details to follow. Due Friday, March 12 at 4PM

      3. 5 page book review on any of the starred books in the syllabus. These are all available on reserve in the library, but you may want to coordinate among you so you can find the book you want. For a book review you must read the whole book, even if not all the book is assigned on the reading list. The book review must begin with a clear statement of the book’s argument, followed by a clear statement of the book’s method. In your evaluation, include what the author is trying to achieve and how it fits into the historiography of that topic. Due Friday, April 17 at 4PM

      5. Final writing assignment. 6-8 page paper creating an imagined 14th century class for this course. It could be inserted anywhere in the syllabus (you are not restricted chronologically except by the boundaries of the course). In your paper, make the pitch. You should describe the topic and explain why it is something that fits into this course syllabus and is worthy of inclusion. Then, discuss the state of the field. What kinds of historical work has been done on it, and what readings would you choose to go with it? What are the strengths of those readings, and limitations? Due Friday, May 21 at 4PM

Guidelines for all written work: There are only a few simple rules. 1. Be clear in your writing, specific rather than general in your claims, and faithful to the sources themselves. 2. Proofread! 3. Please, please, please number your pages! 4. Papers should be one and a half or double-spaced, with at least 1” margins
but not more. 5. When you are using primary sources and other historians’ work, you
will need to include footnotes and a bibliography. To do this, refer to some of the reference
guides from the Oberlin History
Department that I have posted on Blackboard. When in doubt, get in touch with me.

Disabilities: If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require
accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be
appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to Jane Boomer in the

Lateness: Unexcused late assignments will be penalized by dropping 3 points from your grade every day a
paper is late.

Plagiarism: All work turned in for this course must be your own. The College requires that students sign
an "Honor Code" for all assignments. This pledge states: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code
in this assignment." For further information, see the student Honor Code which you can access via
Blackboard>Lookup/Directories>Honor Code. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism,
especially in the context of group assignments, please see me or raise it in class.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments
(not all the class sessions have discussion questions yet-more will follow)

February 10: Introduction
Are we still leaving sex unquestioned? By saying that gender (perceived differences on which hierarchies
of authority are based) shapes both women’s and now men’s experiences, are we leaving women and men
as categories unquestioned?

Readings:
Joan Scott, “Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” The American Historical Review vol. 91
http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2000/0010/0010vie1.cfm

February 17: History, Feminism and Patriarchy
How has the agenda of medieval women’s history changed since 1970? Feminist history? What are the
key issues to consider, according to these authors- power, sexuality, patriarchy, economics? Is history still
the history of men?

Readings:
Judith Bennett, History Matters (2006), Introduction, Chapters 1-4, Chapter 7 to p. 137 and Conclusion
1390-1403 (handout)
Ruth Mazo Karras, From Boys to Men, Chapter 1, pp. 1-12, Chapter 5

February 24: The Sex/Gender Problem
Questions: How did people understand sex difference in the Middle Ages? Was gender a fluid category?

Readings:
Skim Thomas Laqueur, “Of Language and the Flesh” and “Destiny is Anatomy,” in Making Sex, Body
and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, 1990), 1-62
Caroline Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian
Writing” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (1982), 110-169

Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?" in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Lisa Bitel and Felice Lifschitz (2008), 34-51

Recommended:
*Joan Cadden, Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture (1993)*


March 3: **Power, Property and Reputation**
Questions: What do these authors see as the basis of authority in the High Middle Ages and how did people demonstrate they had it? Was there ever a period in which elite women’s power equaled men’s, and if so, why did it change? Under what circumstances and by what means were women able to access power, and how was their ability to wield it affected by prevailing gender norms?

Readings:

Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, Chapter 2


Recommended:
*Theodore Evergates, Aristocratic Women in Medieval France (1999)*
*Erin Jordan, Women, Power and Religious Patronage in the Middle Ages (2006)*


March 8: **Movie night! The Return of Martin Guerre** Time and Place TBA

March 10: **The Household**
Questions: What is Hartman’s argument about the patterns of marriage and the nature of households in medieval and early modern Europe? Does Hartman convince you that re-imagining the importance of the household enables us to re-imagine central trends in European history? Do you think her global perspective works here?

Readings:


Recommended:

Diana Owen Hughes, “From Brideprice to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe” (1978) SCAN


Due: Friday, March 12 4PM 5 page paper on the household and marriage. Details to follow.

March 17: Learning and Creativity

Questions: How were men’s and women’s learning experiences different in this period? Can we answer the famous question of who had a renaissance, or is that the wrong question?

Readings:
Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, Chapter 3


Recommended:
* Joan Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex* (1997)

March 24: Late Medieval Spirituality

Reading:
Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* (1987), Chapter 1, Chapters 4-10

Find 2-3 book reviews of Dyan Elliott’s *Fallen Bodies*, read them and bring them to class

Recommended:


* Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (1999) and

* Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (2004)

March 31 Spring Break!

April 7: Crossing Boundaries
Readings:
David Cressy, “Gender Trouble and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England,”
Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975), 124-151

Recommended:
Michael Shank, “A Female University Student in Late Medieval Krakow,” in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bennett et al. (1989), 190-197.

April 14: Reformation and Restoration
Questions: Did the reformation radically destabilize the medieval gender system constructed between 1100-1300? What were the effects on households, patriarchy, holiness?

Natalie Z. Davis, “City Women and Religious Change,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975), 65-96

Due Friday April 16 at 4PM 5 page book review

April 21 Work and the Household Economy
Questions: What was women’s labor status at the end of the Middle Ages? Why? (advent of capitalism, demographic changes, marriage patterns, etc.) Was it marked by continuity or crises? Too diverse to categorize? Was there ever a golden age?

Readings:
Judith Bennett, *History Matters*, Chapter 5
Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, Chapter 4
Martha Howell, *Women, Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*, (selections)

Recommended: Merry Wiesner, “Spinning out Capital: Women’s Work in Preindustrial Europe, 1350-1750 in Becoming Visible, 203-231

*Barbara Hanawalt, Ties that Bound: peasant families in medieval England (1986)
*Judith Bennett, Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England, 1300-1600 (1996)
*Clare Crowston, Fabricating Women: the seamstresses of old regime France, 1675-1791 (2001)

April 28: Scientific Revolution
Reading:

Recommended:
*La Dame d’Esprit, A Biography of the Marquise de Chatelet (2006)

May 5: Witchcraft and Sexuality
Readings:

May 12: Gendering the state Wrap-up and Lunch out!

Readings:
Isabel Hull, Sexuality, State and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815, Intro., Chapters 2-5,8 (this is a lot)

*Recommended

Due Friday May 21 at 4PM final 6-8 page paper.