

11 May

*Gendered Work and Gendered Identities*

Speakers: Professor Julie Hardwick, University of Texas, Austin, & Dr. Alexandra Shepard, University of Glasgow.

**Julie Hardwick**

**Gender, Work, and Identity**

My paper explores how we might re-examine the relationship between gender identity and work by integrating evidence from a wide variety of primary sources. Much of our historiographical discussion has been informed by prescriptive literature, by criminal court records, and by guild records, all genres of rich and suggestive material that has helped produce a rich vein of historical writing. This work has mostly suggested that gender powerfully shaped work and sexuality, two key components of identity. If we look at the same issues from other vantage points, however – civil litigation (far more common than criminal prosecution), account books (often kept by women in enterprises “run” by men as well as for female commerce), and a variety of records generated in the course of extramarital pregnancy and abandonment, early modern relations of gender, work, and sexuality appear to have been embedded in a complex and contingent matrix. The faultlines in the topography of work, sexuality and parenthood in lived experience (sometimes at least) may have been less differentiated, or more unpredictably differentiated, by gender than we have often assumed.

**Alexandra Shepard**

**Work, occupational identities, gender and the life-cycle**

Not least because of conventions whereby women were categorised by their marital status and men ranked by socio-occupational titles, it is tempting to assume that women's working lives were of secondary significance to their identities and offered them (at best) a limited source of agency. This paper will question the extent to which early modern gender identities were plotted on a spectrum of difference framed by marital status and sexual honesty at one end and socio-occupational status, provision and credit at the other. The discussion is based on the responses given by witnesses in the English church courts to the question of how they maintained themselves or got a living, focusing on the terms in which women and men appearing in court categorised and detailed their own working activities, their occupational identities, and the social relations both involved. The paper will explore the relationship between marital status, work and occupational identities for men as well as women, and will identify points in the life-cycle when significant proportions of both sexes admitted to depending on others for a living. It will also outline the range of tasks performed and the credit attached to women's working activities to suggest some points of gender convergence as well as gender divergence in the status and identity attached to work.

### *Digital Possibilities*

Speakers: Professor Margaret Hunt, Amherst, Dr. Leigh Shaw-Taylor, Cambridge University, & Professor Maria Ågren, Uppsala University.

#### **Margaret Hunt**

##### **Women's History and the Digital Future**

We are just beginning to grasp the implications of the new technologies for the history of women and gender and in this presentation I try to think through some of what we can expect to see in the next ten years or so. I argue that we are likely to see at least three fairly big changes.

First, *the new technologies will likely change the questions women's historians ask of their sources and the methods they use to find answers*. Here I discuss two aspects of the new digital universe that have already opened up new ways of thinking about early modern women's history and are likely to continue to do so. The first is the capability for full-text searching of diverse medieval and early modern sources; the second is the relative ease with which large collaborative projects, across wide geographical areas but also across very different disciplines (e.g., archaeology, human genetics, and archival history) can be mounted and their findings cross-referenced. Projects like these have the potential to pose and answer very big new questions about the history of women both in the short term and the *longue durée*.

Second, *the new technologies are likely to change the way we think about training the new generation of women's historians*. Women's historians of the future must develop a sophisticated understanding of how the new technologies can (but do not necessarily) contribute to the writing of good history. Here I try to imagine the new forms of critical thinking about sources, qualitative *and* quantitative evidence, research questions, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, communication, and funding that will likely be required, and offer some suggestions for tailoring our pedagogy to prepare our students better for this new set of problems.

Third, *the "politics" of women's history in the future are likely to be strongly coloured by the rise of the amateur historian on the web*. Here I talk both about some of the potential benefits of this (the possibility of crowd-sourcing of some kinds of historical labour, for example) but also the tensions that are accompanying this major shift in the sociology of knowledge. I illustrate the latter first by contrasting popular women's history on the web with the interests of most professional women's historians, and second by describing a recent project at my own institution devoted to revising Wikipedia articles so as to include better and more up-to-date scholarship in women's history – and how surprisingly challenging that proved to be.

#### **Leigh Shaw-Taylor.**

##### **How new technology has transformed the possibilities for the quantitative analysis of women's work in the past: some examples**

In my discussion I will use some examples, from two interconnected research programmes to illustrate the ways that new technology has changed what is possible. The two research programmes are the [Occupational Structure of Britain c.1379-1911](#) and the [International Network for the Comparative History of Occupational Structure](#) (INCHOS).

Firstly, I will present some data from what were hitherto the most detailed analyses of the vast body of data on female employment in the British published census reports from 1851 to 1911.

Second, and by way of contrast I will present some maps showing the geographical patterns in female employment in the middle of the nineteenth century. These show how it is now possible not just to create vastly larger datasets but also to map them using Geographical Information Systems (GIS). I will use a selection of the maps available at <http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/occupations/britain19c/occupationsbritain/>

Thirdly, I will talk about the enormous potential that now exist for analysing the much richer unpublished individual level census data over the same period. Work on this is currently being pioneered by Xuesheng You who is attending the conference.

Fourthly, I will comment on how this work on occupational data in the nineteenth century relates to time use and why it might matter for the early modern period. And why this kind of work may be even more illuminating for the early modern period in other European countries.

Fifthly, if time allows, I will discuss the comparative work being undertaken as part of the INCHOS project and how this work depends both on new technology and on common methodologies and common data coding. I will comment on some of the problems associated with kind of work as well.

**Maria Ågren**

**The need for collaborative work in the Humanities:  
The GaW example**

By tradition, scholars in the humanities mainly work individually. In the quest for the answers to our questions we search the archival documents alone, we analyze our findings alone, and we finally write up our results alone. It is true of course, that we meet at seminars and conferences to compare and discuss interpretations, but this does not change the basic fact that so much work is carried out by individuals. One is particularly struck by this fact if one is fortunate enough to be given the chance of working together in a big research group. While small-scale individual projects are often of very high quality, some scholarly problems are simply too big to be feasible for one person only. Such problems require a large group of scholars making concerted efforts to achieve the same objective. Moreover, we need not only several researchers who can divide the general problem into a set of sub-problems; we also need a common strategy for data collection and data sharing.

The problem of how men, women and children supported themselves in the early modern period is a good example of such a big problem. For many reasons it benefits hugely from a collaborative approach. The lack of good early modern occupational statistics (for Sweden) and the problematic character of many occupational titles forces the researchers to look for other types of data, namely information on *time use* or *practices*. Culling information on time use from handwritten sources is, however, a very time-consuming task. It requires both collaboration between the scholars who collect the data and access to good research infrastructure, i.e. databases where the information can be stored and searched systematically.

But even with a collaborative team and good database facilities, finding out how women and men supported themselves in the early modern period remains difficult for conceptual reasons. It is difficult analytically to discern and define “work” as opposed to “non-work” because of the “entangled” nature of much early modern work. Since so much work (both men’s and women’s) was unpaid and performed in many different places, it cannot be identified as that for which somebody is paid or that which takes place in the workshop (or some other place). The absence of a clear notion of leisure also makes it conceptually difficult to define work.

In my presentation I will discuss some of these problems in relation to the database GaW and the so called verb-oriented method used within the Gender & Work project at Uppsala university.

### **Practical matters**

The conference will take place at The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Villagatan 3 in Stockholm.

A welcome dinner for participants arriving from abroad will take place at Crystal Plaza Hotel, Birger Jarlsgatan 35, at 19.00 in the evening of 9 May.

Questions about the conference can be directed to Dr. Benny Jacobsson at the Gender & Work Project ([benny.jacobsson@hist.uu.se](mailto:benny.jacobsson@hist.uu.se)).

Questions about hotels and travels should be directed to Helene Carson at The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities ([hcarson@vitterhetsakad.se](mailto:hcarson@vitterhetsakad.se)).