

Reading Guide – Thinking Historically about Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Gender, sex, and sexuality are important areas of research for scholars across the humanities and social sciences, as well as many scientific fields, including medicine. Historians have played a crucial role in changing the way we understand these topics. The readings for this week are designed to introduce you to some of the ways historians approach and analyze gender, sex, and sexuality, and also to help you begin thinking historically yourself.

Required Texts:

- Nancy Cott, "What is Gender History?" Speech delivered at the American Historical Association Conference (January 2005) 1-5.
- Jeffrey Weeks, "The Social Construction of Sexuality," in *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality*, Peiss, ed. (2002) 2-9.
- Jonathan Ned Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality," in *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, 8th edition, Anderson et al, eds. (2012); pp 231-242.
- John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Abelove et al eds. (1993) 467-476.
- Joanne Meyerowitz, "Introduction," in *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2004) 1-13.
- Susan Stryker, "An Introduction to Transgender Terms and Concepts," in *Transgender History* (2008) 1-29.
- Figures excerpted from Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger* (1984).

Questions to Consider:

Nancy Cott is a preeminent historian of gender and women's history. What distinctions does she make in her short speech between the history of gender and the history of women? In what ways has thinking about gender contributed to and changed the way we understand US history?

Weeks, Katz, and D'Emilio each offer slightly different approaches for thinking historically about sex and sexuality. Which of these approaches is most appealing to you? Both Katz and D'Emilio claim that certain sexual identities (homosexuality and heterosexuality) were "invented" only recently. Do you find their arguments compelling? What historical contexts or forces helped lead to the emergence of homosexuality and heterosexuality?

Meyerowitz and Stryker are both historians of transsexuality, and both make distinctions between trans history and the history of gays and lesbians. How does trans history differ from the history of other sexual minorities, or from the history of gender? What role does science and medicine play in the Meyerowitz and Stryker texts, for example? Note: Stryker, like many historians of gender, sex, and sexuality, is an activist as well as a scholar. You might consider as you read this week the ways in which history can contribute to social movements. Can simply writing the history of lesbians, transpeople, or gender identities be considered a form of activism? Why or why not?

Please look closely at the figures excerpted from Gayle Rubin's influential 1984 essay "Thinking Sex." Have the acts and identities she lists under "charmed," "good," and "bad" categories changed over the past 30 years? How about the categories themselves? Are they universal, or prone to change over time? How might you amend her figures for the 21st century?

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