Introduction

> Both man and woman of three parts consist, Which Paul doth bodie, soule, and spirit call . . .
>
> Rachel Speght, *Mortalities Memorandum with a Dreame Prefixed* (London, by Edward Griffin for Jacob Bloome, 1621), ll. 127–8

> Nothing more resembles a tomcat on a windowsill than a female cat.
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> Marie le Jars de Gournay, *L'Égalitédes hommes et des femmes* (A la Reyne, 1622)

Since the 1970s, there has been an explosion of studies in women's history. Historians have searched for new sources that reveal the historical experience of women and have used traditional sources in innovative ways. They analyze the distinctive experiences of individuals and groups and relate these histories to political, ideological, and economic developments.

Interest in women's history has resulted from several academic and political movements. Beginning in the 1930s, some historians turned their attention from the traditional subjects of historical inquiry such as public political developments, diplomatic changes, military events, and major intellectual movements to investigating the lives of more ordinary people – what is usually termed "social history." Social history attracted more people in the 1960s, as historians and activists used historical investigation of past incidents of racial, class, or religious oppression in support of demands for change in present institutions and power structures.

The political movements of the 1960s also reinvigorated the feminist movement as women involved in civil rights and antiwar causes discovered that even their most revolutionary male colleagues did not treat them as equals or consider their ideas or contributions as valuable as those of men. The feminist movement that began in the 1960s – often termed the "second wave" to set it apart from the "first wave" of feminism that began in the nineteenth century – included a wide range of political beliefs, with various groups working for a broad spectrum of goals, one of which was to understand more about the lives of women in the past. This paralleled

a similar rise of interest in women's history that accompanied the first wave of feminism.

Students in history programs in North America and western Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s, most (although not all) of them women, began to focus on women, asserting that any investigation of past oppression or power relationships had to include information on both sexes. Initially, these studies were often met with derision or skepticism, not only by more traditional historians who regarded women's history as a fad but also by some social historians, who were unwilling to see gender along with race and class as a key determinant of human experience. This criticism did not quell interest in women's history and may in fact have stimulated it; many women who were active in radical or reformist political movements were angered by claims that their own history was trivial, marginal, or "too political." By the late 1970s, hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States and Canada offered courses in women's history, and many had separate programs in women's history or women's studies. Universities in Britain, Australia, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries added courses and programs a bit more slowly, and other developed countries were slower still. (Universities and researchers in developing countries have far fewer resources, which hampers all historical research and limits opportunities for any new direction.) Women in some countries in the early twenty-first century still report that investigating the history of women can get them pegged as less than serious and be detrimental to their future careers as historians. Thus, an inordinate amount of the work in women's history, including that which focuses on the continent of Europe and many other parts of the world, has been done by English-speaking historians, although this is changing.

Women's history therefore began in some ways as a subfield of social history, but it has widened to include investigations of intellectual, political, economic, and even military and diplomatic history. Historians of women have demonstrated that there is really no historical change that does not affect the lives of women in some way, although often differently from how it affects the lives of men of the same class or social group. Women's historians often began by fitting women into familiar historical categories – nations, historical periods, social classes, religious allegiance – and then realized that this approach, sarcastically labeled "add women and stir," was unsatisfying. Focusing on women often disrupted the familiar categories and forced a rethinking of the way that history was organized and structured. The European Renaissance and Enlightenment lost some of their luster once women were included, as did the democracy of ancient Athens or Jacksonian America.

Gender History

This disruption of well-known categories and paradigms ultimately included the topic that had long been considered the proper focus of all history – man. Viewing the male experience as universal had not only hidden women's history, it had also prevented analyzing men's experiences as those of men. The very words used to describe individuals – "artist" and "woman artist," for example, or "scientist" and "woman scientist" – encouraged one to think about how being female affected Georgia O'Keefe or Marie Curie while overlooking the ways that being male shaped the experiences of Michelangelo or Picasso or Isaac Newton. Historians familiar with studying women increasingly began to discuss the ways in which systems of sexual differentiation affected both women and men and, by the early 1980s, to use the word "gender" to describe these systems. At that point, they differentiated primarily between "sex," by which they meant physical, morphological, and anatomical differences (what are often called "biological differences"), and "gender," by which they meant a culturally constructed and historically changing system of differences. Most of the studies with "gender" in the title still focused on women – and women's history continued as its own field – but some looked equally at both sexes or concentrated on the male experience, calling their work "men's history" or "men's studies."

Historians interested in this new perspective asserted that gender was an appropriate category of analysis when looking at *all* historical developments, not simply those involving women or the family. *Every* political, intellectual, religious, economic, social, and even military change had an impact on the actions and roles of men and women, and, conversely, a culture's gender structures influenced every other structure or development. People's notions of gender shaped not only the way they thought about men and women but also about their society in general. As the historian Joan Scott put it, "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power." Thus, hierarchies in other realms of life were often expressed in terms of gender, with dominant individuals or groups described in masculine terms and dependent ones in feminine. These ideas in turn affected the way people acted, although explicit and symbolic ideas of gender could also conflict with the way men and women chose or were forced to operate in the world.

Along with a focus on the gendered nature of both women's and men's experiences, some historians turned their attention more fully in the 1980s to the history of sexuality. Just as interest in women's history has been part of feminist political movements, interest in the history of sexuality has been part of the gay liberation movement that began in the

1970s. The gay liberation movement encouraged the study of homosexuality in the past and present and the development of gay and lesbian studies programs, and it also made both public and academic discussions of sexual matters more acceptable. Historians have attempted to trace the history of men's and women's sexual experiences in the past and, as in women's history, to find new sources that will allow fuller understanding. The history of sexuality has contributed to a new interest in the history of the body, with historians investigating how cultural understandings of the body shaped people's experiences of their own bodies and also studying the ways in which religious, medical, and political authorities exerted control over those bodies.

Just at the point that historians and their students were gradually beginning to see the distinction between sex and gender (and an increasing number accepting the importance of gender as a category of analysis), that distinction became contested. Not only were there great debates about where the line should be drawn – were women "biologically" more peaceful and men "biologically" more skillful at math, or were such tendencies the result solely of their upbringing? – but some scholars wondered whether social gender and biological sex are so interrelated that any distinction between the two is meaningless. For example, although most people are categorized "male" or "female" at birth when someone looks at their external genitalia, some have more ambiguous sex organs. The gender polarity man/woman has been so strong, however, that such persons were usually simply assigned to the sex they most closely resembled. Since the nineteenth century, this assignment has been reinforced by surgical procedures modifying or removing the inappropriate body parts, generally shortly after birth. Thus, cultural norms about gender (that everyone *should* be a man or a woman) determine sex in such cases, rather than the other way around.

The arbitrary nature of gender has also been challenged by transsexual and transgender individuals. In the 1950s, sex-change operations became available for people whose external genitalia and even chromosomal and hormonal patterns marked them as male or female but who mentally understood themselves to be the other. Transsexual surgery could make the body fit more closely with the mind, but it also led to challenging questions: At what point in this process does a "man" become a "woman," or vice versa? With the loss or acquisition of a penis? Breasts? From the beginning? In the 1980s, such questions began to be made even more complex by individuals who described themselves as "transgendered," that is, as neither male nor female or both male and female. Should such individuals be allowed in spaces designated "women only" or "men only"? Should they have to choose between them, or should there be more than

two choices? Anthropologists point out that many of the world's cultures have a third or even a fourth gender, that is, people understood to be neither men nor women, who often have (or had) specialized religious or ceremonial roles. The contemporary trans- movement points to these examples and highlights limitations in any dichotomous system of gender *or* sex, instead favoring a continuum.

Historians of women also contributed to debates about the distinction between gender and sex. They put increasing emphasis on differences among women, noting that women's experiences differed because of class, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and other factors, and they varied over time. Because of these differences, some wondered, did it make sense to talk about "women" at all? If, for example, women were thought to be delicate guardians of the home, as was true in the nineteenth-century United States, then were black women, who worked in fields alongside men, really "women"? If women were thought to be inferior and irrational (as was true in sixteenth-century Europe, as we see in Chapter 1), then was Queen Elizabeth of England a "woman"? Was "woman" a valid category, the meaning of which is self-evident and unchanging over time, or is arguing for a biological base for gender difference naïve "essentialism"? These historians noted that not only in the present is gender "performative," that is, a role that can be taken on or changed at will, but it was so at many points in the past, as individuals "did gender" and conformed to or challenged gender roles. Thus, it is misguided to think that we are studying women (or men, for that matter) as a sex, they argued, for the only thing that is in the historical record is gender.

All of these doubts came together at a time when many historians were changing their basic understanding of the methods and function of history. Historians have long recognized that documents and other types of evidence are produced by particular individuals with particular interests and biases that consciously and unconsciously shape their content. Most historians thus attempted to keep the limitations of their sources in mind as they reconstructed events and tried to determine causation, although sometimes these got lost in the narrative. During the 1980s, some historians began to assert that because historical sources always present a biased and partial picture, we can never fully determine what happened or why; to try to do so is foolish or misguided. What historians should do instead is to analyze the written and visuals materials of the past – what is often termed "discourse" – to determine the way various things are "represented" in them and their possible meanings. This heightened interest in discourse among historians, usually labeled the "linguistic/cultural turn," drew on the ideas of literary and linguistic theory – often loosely termed "deconstruction" or "poststructuralism" – about the

power of language. Language is so powerful, argued some theorists, that it determines, rather than simply describes, our understanding of the world; knowledge is passed down through language, and knowledge is power.

This emphasis on the relationship of knowledge to power, and on the power of language, made poststructuralism attractive to feminist scholars in many disciplines, who themselves already emphasized the ways language and other structures of knowledge excluded women. The French philosopher Michel Foucault's insight that power comes from everywhere fit with feminist recognition that misogyny and other forces that limited women's lives could be found in many places: in fashion magazines, fairy tales, and jokes told at work, as well as overt job discrimination and domestic violence. Historians of gender were thus prominent exponents of the linguistic turn, and many analyzed representations of women, men, the body, sexual actions, and related topics within different types of discourses.

The linguistic/cultural turn – which happened in other fields along with history – elicited harsh responses from other historians, however, including many who focused on women and gender. They asserted that it denied women the ability to shape their world – what is usually termed "agency" – in both past and present by positing unchangeable linguistic structures. Wasn't it ironic, they noted, that just as women were learning they *had* a history and asserting they were *part* of history, "history" became just a text? They wondered whether the ideas that gender – and perhaps even "women" – were simply historical constructs denied the very real oppression that many women in the past (and present) experienced. For a period, it looked as if this disagreement would lead proponents of discourse analysis to lay claim to "gender" and those who opposed it to avoid "gender" and stick with "women." Because women's history was clearly rooted in the women's rights movement of the 1970s, it also appeared more political than gender analysis, and programs and research projects sometimes opted to use "gender" to downplay this connection with feminism.

As we enter the twenty-first century, however, it appears that the division is less sharp. Historians using gender as a category of analysis do not focus solely on discourse but treat their sources as referring to something beyond the sources themselves – an author, an event, a physical body. Historians who were initially suspicious of the linguistic turn use a wider range of literary and artistic sources than did earlier women's history, thus paying more attention to discourse. The distinction between sex and gender has not been defined – indeed, it seems to get ever more murky – but "gender" has become the accepted replacement for "sex"

in many common phrases – "gender roles," "gender distinctions," and so on. Scholars describe the field as "women's and gender history" – occasionally even using the acronym WGH – thus highlighting the link between them rather than the differences.

New theoretical perspectives are adding additional complexity and bringing in still more questions. One of these is queer theory, a field that began in the 1990s as in some ways a combination of gay and lesbian studies and poststructuralism. Like women's history, gay and lesbian history challenged the assumption that sexual attitudes and practices were "natural" and unchanging. Queer theory built on these challenges and on the doubts about the distinction between sex and gender to highlight the artificial and constructed nature of all oppositional categories: men/women, homosexual/heterosexual, black/white. Some theorists celebrate all efforts at blurring or bending categories, viewing "identity" – or what in literary and cultural studies is often termed "subjectivity" – as both false and oppressive. Others have doubts about this, wondering whether one can work to end discrimination against homosexuals, women, African Americans or any other group if one denies that the group has an essential identity, something that makes its members clearly homosexual or women or African American. (A similar debate can be found within the contemporary trans- movement, with some groups arguing that gender is an "essential" aspect of identity and others that it is not or should not be.)

Related questions about identity, subjectivity, and the cultural construction of difference have also emerged from postcolonial theory and critical race theory. Postcolonial history and theory has been particularly associated with South Asian scholars and the book series Subaltern Studies and initially focused on people who have been subordinated by virtue of their race, class, culture, or language. Critical race theory developed in the 1980s as an outgrowth (and critique) of the civil rights movement combined with ideas derived from critical legal studies, a radical group of legal scholars who argued that supposedly neutral legal concepts such as the individual or meritocracy actually masked power relationships. Both of these theoretical schools point out that racial, ethnic, and other hierarchies are deeply rooted social and cultural principles, not simply aberrations that can be remedied by legal or political change. They note that along with disenfranchising certain groups, such hierarchies privilege certain groups, a phenomenon that is beginning to be analyzed under the rubric of critical white studies. (This is a pattern similar to the growth of men's studies, and there is also a parallel within queer theory that is beginning to analyze heterosexuality rather than simply take it as an unquestioned given.)

Queer theory, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory have all been criticized from both inside and outside for falling into the pattern set by traditional history, that is, regarding the male experience as normative and paying insufficient attention to gender differences. Scholars who have pointed this out have also noted that much feminist scholarship suffered from the opposite problem, taking the experiences of heterosexual white women as normative and paying too little attention to differences of race, class, nationality, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. They argue that the experiences of women of color must be recognized as distinctive and that no one axis of difference (men/women, black/white, rich/poor, gay/straight) should be viewed as sufficient. These criticisms led in the 1990s to theoretical perspectives that attempted to recognize multiple lines of difference, such as postcolonial feminism. Such scholarship has begun to influence many areas of gender studies, even those that do not deal explicitly with race or ethnicity. It appears this cross-fertilization will continue because issues of difference and identity are clearly key topics for historians in the ever-more-connected twenty-first-century world.

Early Modern History

The meaning of the first half of this book's title, "women and gender," is thus not as self-evident as it probably seemed at first glance, and the second half, "early modern Europe," has also been seen as problematic. The term "early modern" was developed by historians seeking to refine an intellectual model first devised during this very period, which saw European history as divided into three parts: ancient (to the end of the Roman Empire in the West in the fifth century), medieval (from the fifth century to the fifteenth), and modern (from the fifteenth century to their own time). In this model, the break between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era was marked by the first voyage of Columbus (1492) and the beginning of the Protestant Reformation (1517), although some scholars, especially those who focused on Italy, set the break somewhat earlier with the Italian Renaissance. As the modern era grew longer and longer, historians began to divide it into "early modern" – from the Renaissance or Columbus to the French Revolution in 1789 – and what we might call "truly modern" – from the French Revolution to whenever they happened to be writing.

As with any intellectual model, the longer this tripartite division was used, the more problematic it seemed. The voyages of Columbus may have marked the beginning of European exploration and colonization, but there was plenty of earlier contact between Europeans and other cultures, and Columbus himself was motivated more by religious zeal – generally

regarded as "medieval" – than by a "modern" desire to explore the unknown. The Protestant Reformation did bring a major break in Western Christianity, but Martin Luther was seeking to reform the church, not split it, just like medieval reformers, of which there were many. Other developments traditionally regarded as marks of modernity, such as the expansion of capitalism, the growth of the nation-state, or increasing interest in science and technology, were also brought into question as scholars found both earlier precedents and evidence that these changes were slow in coming. Thus, in many aspects of life, continuities outweighed change. More philosophical issues also emerged: What exactly do we mean by "modernity"? Will it ever end? Has it ended? What comes afterward? The thinkers who first thought of themselves as "modern" saw modernity as positive – and "medieval" as negative – but is modernity necessarily a good thing?

If "early modern" is not as clear as it seems, what about the other part of the title, "Europe"? What is "Europe"? The answer most of us learned in school – one of the world's seven continents – can easily be rejected simply by looking at a globe. If a continent is a "large land mass surrounded by water" (which we also learned in school), then surely the correct designation for what is conventionally called "Europe" is the western part of the continent of Eurasia. If we look very closely at the globe, in fact, Europe is a small northwestern part of the huge continent of Afroeurasia, a term increasingly used by geographers and world historians for what is the world's largest land mass.

The idea of "Europe" derived more from culture than geography. The word "Europe" was first used by Greek writers in the seventh century B.C.E. to designate their side of the Mediterranean (the sea whose name means "middle of the world," which it was to the ancient Greeks) from the other side, "Asia," which to the Greeks originally included Africa. They derived the word from the myth of Europa, the daughter of Agenor, a Phoenician king. In the myth, Europa was awakened by a dream in which two continents that had taken the shape of women argued over who should possess her: Asia said she had given birth to her and so owned her, but the other as-yet-unnamed continent asserted that Zeus would give Europa to her. Right on cue, Zeus fell in love with the beautiful Europa as she gathered flowers with her friends and carried her away after changing into a bull. He took her to Crete, where she bore him a number of sons, including two who later became judges of the dead, and gave her name to the continent. In a tamer version of the myth, told by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus and repeated by later Christian writers, merchants from Crete carried Europa away in a ship shaped like a bull to marry their king. Herodotus notes that the (Asian) Trojans later

abducted Helen, wife of the Greek king Menelaus – an event that led to the Trojan War – in part to avenge Europa. Like all mythology, either version of this story raises questions of interpretation: Crete is actually located between Asia and Europe; does this represent Greek ambivalence about Europe's separation from Asia? Is Zeus's abduction (some scholars use the word "rape") of Europa a demonstration and justification of men's rights over women and mothers' lack of rights to their own children, both of which were law in ancient Athens? Why were Zeus's children from this affair given such powers, rather than his children by his wife, Hera? And where was Hera during all this, anyway? If Europa was snatched away by merchants rather than Zeus, why didn't her father come after her?

Whatever we may think of this myth, it is clear that the idea of "Europe" came from Greeks asserting their distinction from people who lived on the other side of the Aegean or Mediterranean. In this it is much like the notion of "modern," that is, a term used consciously by people to differentiate themselves from others, to create a boundary between "us" and "them." But what are Europe's boundaries? Is Iceland part of Europe? Does it become part of Europe once the Vikings get there? Does Greenland? Where is the eastern boundary of Europe? That boundary is often set at the Ural Mountains and the Ural River, which flows into the Caspian Sea, but most discussions of "European" history focus only on the western part of this area. So, are some parts of Europe more European than others?

This questioning of terminology may seem both paralyzing and pedantic – don't we all basically know what "modern" and "Europe" mean, in the same way that we know what "women" means? In fact, just as historians who have problematized "women" and "gender" still use the words, historians who note the issues surrounding "early modern Europe" continue to use the term. Being conscious about terminology can lead to important insights, however – many in the realm of women's and gender history. As we have just seen, exploring the roots of the word "Europe" highlights the gendered nature of what seems at first to be an objective geographical designation. Similarly, discussions of the implications of "modern" have suggested that its meaning was different for men and women and that gender was a key element of modernity, however it is defined.

Early Modern Women's and Gender History

Insights into women's and gender history have come from new theoretical perspectives, but, more important, from a huge amount of basic research. Europe in the early modern period has been an important