An Introduction to Gender History
Dr. Hester Vaizey, Dr. Bianca Gaudenzi
Tuesdays 5 - 6.30 pm, Week 2 - 4 - 6 – 8

Course outline

These classes are designed for MPhil/PhD students who are interested in exploring gender history in greater depth. As the course aims at providing a discussion platform for historians with diverging levels of knowledge and experience of gender history, the sessions will be organised around discussion of some of the classic recent historiographical contributions while maintaining a strong practical component. The seminars will address important questions in this field, from basic issues such as the nature and reasons behind the development of gender history to an exploration of the historiographical benefits and challenges of using this approach on an empirical basis. The classes will examine the shifts in gender roles across time by exploring the construction both of femininity and masculinity and will analyse its practical implications through the convenors’ and the students’ own research experience.

Sessions outline

Session 1: General introduction to Gender History and Gendered Histories: The first introductory session will introduce some of the main issues and debates on gender history. What is gender history? What are the benefits and pitfalls of adopting a gendered historiographical perspective? Is gender history really new? What is its relation to women’s history? How can the risk of ghettoising ‘his’ and ‘her’ story be avoided?

Session 2. Gender in Twentieth Century History: Important shifts characterised men’s and women’s roles and relations from the end of the XIX century. This session will take a look at how issues such as war, female suffrage, birth control, women and gay rights have shaped gender relations in the present. The class will also discuss on-going challenges to equality between the sexes and how the gendered perspective has influenced the historiographical profession over the past twenty years.

Session 3. The empirical challenges of gender history: This session will tackle a series of practical issues arising from the convenors’ own research experience in the field of gender history. It will consider the challenge of postmodernism for women’s history and the contribution of interdisciplinary and visual studies to the analysis of gender roles and representations. How do historians get round the fact that what women have written in the past, their opinions and outlooks, were conditioned by the male-dominated societies in which they lived? How can historians access women’s voices? How did images shape gendered roles and were reflected differently in relation to social categories such as class and race.

Session 4. Gender history in practice: Following a workshop format, the last session will provide students with the opportunity to illustrate the limitations and challenges encountered with the adoption of a gendered approach in their own historiographical research. Students will be encouraged to suggest readings which they found particularly helpful or debatable relating to either theories or practical applications of gender history.
Basic readings

Session 1

Session 2

Session 3

Session 4