

them some of what these gender historians have discovered in their research.

I am indebted to a host of feminist historians whose work has inspired me over the years. I cannot hope to list them all here, nor will they necessarily find their work specifically cited in the text. Many of them, however, will be included in the topically organized list of selected readings at the end of the book. Thanks also are especially due to Andrea Drugan at Polity, who has been a model of what an editor should be – supportive, encouraging, and quick to respond to various drafts and queries, and to Justin Dyer, for a heroic and truly helpful job of copy-editing. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for Polity and my London friends, Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Bill Schwarz, for listening to my concerns as I worked on this book. Special thanks go to Sue Juster for suggesting examples of particularly interesting scholarship on gender in Colonial North America. Most especially, I thank Guenter Rose for his patience and support and for putting up with the angst I experienced as I found writing this book to be a much more difficult and complex undertaking than I had anticipated.

1

Why Gender History?

In answering the question posed by the title of this book, “what is gender history?” I hope to convince the reader that gender both has a history and is historically significant. To begin, we must first consider what might seem self-evident but is, in fact, complex – how to think about history itself.

History is comprised of knowledge about the past. This means that history is the product of scholarship concerning the past. At this point the reader might wonder, isn’t history *the past*? Common sense would tell us that if someone is interested in history, that person is interested in what has happened before the present day. But it is important to be clear that the past is *reconstructed* through historical scholarship – the knowledge produced by historians. This suggests that the process of reconstruction is all-important in the knowledge that is produced. What we know about the past is dependent upon the questions historians have asked and how they have answered them. What has been the focus of their interest? What have they deemed to be important to study about the past? How have they gone about studying it? How have they interpreted the evidence they have unearthed? To complicate matters, the answers to these questions themselves have changed over time. Historians are not outside of history, but are shaped by it and by the political, cultural, social, and economic climates in which they live and work. Thus, history itself has a history. This is important

background to keep in mind as we begin to explore the topics of gender and gender history.

Although historians have differed and continue to differ in their approaches to their subject, they would all share the following assumption: the conditions within which people live their lives and the societies which shape those conditions change over time. These changes are many and varied, and the rates at which transformations occur also are variable. But the presumption of change or transformation is fundamental to historical scholarship. Not all historical scholarship, however, charts and accounts for changes. While some historians are concerned to show how events and certain processes were instrumental in transforming a society or an aspect of society, others are interested in exploring the processes producing continuities over time, and still others are involved in projects that describe aspects of life in a particular period or set of years in the past. But although such historians may not focus on change *per se*, they assume that the characteristics of the lives they unearth and write about are products of social and cultural processes that take place through time.

Gender history is based on the fundamental idea that what it means to be defined as man or woman has a history. Gender historians are concerned with the changes over time and the variations within a single society in a particular period in the past with regard to the perceived differences between women and men, the make-up of their relationships, and the nature of the relations among women and among men as gendered beings. They are concerned with *how* these differences and relationships are historically produced and how they are transformed. Importantly, they are also concerned with the impact of gender on a variety of historically important events and processes. In order to more fully explore the concerns of gender historians and how they “do” gender history, it is crucial to consider the meaning of the term “gender.”

Scholars use the concept of gender to denote the perceived differences between and ideas about women and men, male and female. Fundamental to the definition of the term “gender” is the idea that these differences are socially constructed. What it means to be man and what it means to be

woman, the definitions or understandings of masculinity and femininity, the characteristics of male and female identities – all are the products of culture. Why use the term “gender” rather than the term “sex”? Why speak of the differences between men and women, or males and females, as gender differences rather than sex differences? In very recent years and as the next chapter will discuss in more detail, sex and gender have been considered synonyms and frequently are used interchangeably in popular discourse. But the term “gender” was originally used by feminist scholars to mean the cultural construction of sex difference, in contrast to the term “sex,” which was thought to mean “natural” or “biological” difference.

Before the last decades of the twentieth century and the growth and impact of scholarship on women and gender in numerous disciplines, including anthropology, history, and sociology, it was popularly assumed that the differences between men and women were based in nature and that these “natural differences” accounted for or explained the observed differences in women’s and men’s social positions and social relationships, their ways of being in the world, and the differences between them in various forms of power. Importantly, the hierarchical nature of the relations between men and women was assumed and not questioned. The presumption that the various differences between women and men were based in nature rather than being products of culture meant that it took particular historical circumstances to occur for scholars to begin to think that gender had a history or histories and that gender mattered to history.

Gender history developed in response to the scholarship on and debates about women’s history. As a field of study, women’s history began to flower only in the late 1960s and flourished in the 1970s, continuing to this day as a crucial component of gender history. But even before this, histories of women had been written, so that the development of the field from the 1960s may be considered a revival or renaissance, but in a new context that encouraged its formation as an academic field of study. Histories of women written before the twentieth century generally concerned such figures as queens and saints. For the most part the lives of ordinary women went unrecorded and unremarked upon except for

the work of a few important predecessors to contemporary women's history who wrote during the first half of the twentieth century. These important predecessors included Eileen Power, Alice Clark, and Ivy Pinchbeck in Britain and Julia Spruill and Mary Beard in the United States. Disregarding their work, professional historians considered the activities of women as mothers and wives, servants, workers, and consumers irrelevant to history. The histories of women written before the late 1960s and 1970s were generally not integrated into professional or popular histories of the time.

Why was it that women had been ignored by "mainstream historians"? A primary reason, one recognized early on in the development of the new women's history, was that women had been neglected as historical subjects because historians viewed history to be almost singularly about the exercise and transmission of power in the realms of politics and economics, arenas in which the actors were men. The rise of women's history and its development contributed to a rethinking of historical practice that was taking place among social historians who considered knowledge about the everyday lives of ordinary people as important to making sense of the past. But social historians, too, ignored women as historical actors because they mistakenly understood men, especially white, European, and North American men, as the universal agents of history. For example, "workers" were imagined as male figures, and so labor history neglected women's work in the fields, workshops, and factories as well as in their homes.

Historians of women began to discover that women as well as men had been labor and community activists, social reformers, and political revolutionaries, and they demonstrated how women's labor contributed to their households and to the economy more broadly. Importantly, women's historians eventually challenged what had been a narrow definition of politics and power, broadening their scope to include arenas of life outside of governments and political parties, particularly in people's "private lives." These scholars delved into topics that had previously been considered "natural" rather than cultural or social, such as family violence, prostitution, and childbirth. These challenges to traditional historical practice came out of the very historical

developments contributing to the rise and progress of women's history.

Women's history as a field of inquiry was a product of the women's movement, or what has been called "second-wave feminism," distinguishing it from the feminist movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which sought to gain the vote for women as well as raising a number of other issues relating to women's inequality. Feminism was central in stimulating interest in and generating analytical approaches to the history of women. While those who consider themselves to be feminists today may not be in total agreement about precisely what the project of feminism should be, most would agree that fundamental to feminism is the belief that women should have the same basic human rights as men. Feminists argue that generally women are disadvantaged relative to men. They suffer such disadvantages because of how gender has patterned their social worlds. The idea that women everywhere should have the same advantages as men led feminist scholars to want to recover the previously untold story of women's lives in the past, to uncover the reasons for women's subordinate status, and to wonder about the apparent omission or exclusion of women from the historical record. As two US-based European historians, Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, wrote in the introduction to their aptly entitled collection, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, published in 1977, "The essays written for this volume seek both to restore women to history and to explore the meaning of women's unique historical experience."¹

While the women's movement generally stimulated interest in women's history, the paths taken by feminist scholars varied depending upon the national context in which they worked. The place of women in the profession of history internationally differed with their institutional cultures – some were more open to women scholars than others. Women's history developed relatively quickly in the United States, for example, as women scholars began gaining institutional support in some universities early in the 1970s. In Britain, institutional support developed later, and feminist-inspired historians there began to do women's history from outside of the academy. But into the late 1980s women's history still lacked academic respectability, and even today

feminist historians are struggling to have women and gender incorporated into some areas of historical writing. In France and Germany, women's history has been even slower to gain the acceptance of professional male historians.

Although women's historians all were motivated by feminism, the substance and direction of women's history as a field developed somewhat differently in different national settings.² In the United States, the concept of "separate spheres" became highly influential. In search of the roots of women's subjugation and to recover the texture of and influences on women's lives in the past, scholars depicted them as living and acting in a distinct space and or realm of activities centered on their families and households. As Linda Kerber has noted, historians discovered the use of the term "women's sphere" in their sources, and that discovery, in turn, "directed the choices made by twentieth-century historians about what to study and how to tell the stories that they reconstructed."³ In an enormously influential 1966 essay about American women's lives in the years 1820–60, Barbara Welter described what she called the "Cult of True Womanhood," an ideology prescribing that women should live by and for the virtues of "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity."⁴ Welter focused her inquiry on white, Northern, middle-class women, using as sources such written material as advice books, sermons, and women's magazines. Although as the field of women's history changed and diversified it was to be criticized by scholars for being based only on prescriptive literature and for its attention to only one group of women, Welter's analysis kick-started what was to be a dominant emphasis in the US field generally into the 1980s. While being descriptive, it also was critical of the patriarchal relations that confined women and defined their lives, and like other works of the women's history revival, it emphasized women's oppression. Importantly, Welter suggested that the cult inspired diverse responses, and coupled with larger societal changes, including the abolitionist movement and the Civil War, women expanded their activities beyond the narrowly domestic realm.

"Women's sphere" in nineteenth-century US history was analyzed by some feminist scholars in the mid-1970s and into the early 1980s as the source of what became described as a

"women's culture." Scholars developing the idea of "women's culture" were not focused primarily on analyzing how and why women were victims of a patriarchal society. Rather, they were interested in exploring the centrality of the relationships among women in history. In an important essay, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, for example, argued on the basis of her analysis of numerous letters and diaries that in order to understand women's lives in nineteenth-century America, it was crucial to examine their relationships with one another. Women, she argued, as relatives, neighbors, and friends, spent their everyday lives together. Women's friendships were characterized by devotion and solidarity, and were emotionally central in their lives. She further suggested that some Victorian women's relationships involved physical sensuality and possibly sexuality as well as emotional affection from adolescence into adulthood. For Smith-Rosenberg, women's sphere was not just a separate one, it had "an essential integrity and dignity that grew out of women's shared experiences and mutual affection."⁵ Nancy Cott moved the idea of "women's sphere" onto new ground in her analysis of the development of the ideology of domesticity and women's sphere from 1780 to 1835. The title of her book, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, was meant to underscore the double meaning of the term "bonds" as both constraints and connections.⁶ Using diaries in addition to prescriptive literature, she revealed some of the oppressive consequences of the ideology of domesticity, but more importantly she showed that a sense of sisterhood was nurtured within women's sphere, as a consequence of which some women became politically conscious as women and organized to promote their rights.

In Britain, feminist historical research was stimulated by both the women's movement and socialist or Marxian-inspired social and labor history. In the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist historians were keen to understand how women's lives and activities were simultaneously affected by sex-based and class-based divisions. Sheila Rowbotham's significant publications in the 1970s were influenced both by Marxism and by feminism. In her 1973 *Women's Consciousness, Man's World*, she argued for the necessity of understanding the "precise relationship between the patriarchal dominance of men over women, and the property relations

which come from this, to class exploitation and racism.”⁷ In *Hidden from History* published in the same year she surveyed the impact of capitalism on the lives of women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and critically explored women’s participation in both feminist and socialist projects.⁸ Sally Alexander’s mid-1970s feminist-inspired research critically addressed Marx’s ideas about the capitalist mode of production.⁹ She argued that the sexual division of labor, articulated by and reproduced within the family when the household was the unit of production, continued to shape industrial capitalism as industrial methods were transformed in nineteenth-century London. Alexander maintained that this dynamic involving the impact of the household division of labor on industrial transformation should be central to feminist historical research.

A significant study by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris of northern British working-class women’s participation in the struggle for the vote, published in 1978, carefully explored the connections between their suffrage activism, their work and family lives, and their involvement in trade unionism.¹⁰ Based on interviews with the daughters of these suffragists as well as a wealth of archival sources, Liddington and Norris’ study reconstructed the suffrage activities in which these women engaged, often in the face of the hostility from the men in their lives, and their cooperation with one another in carrying out their domestic duties so that they could continue their political work.

Making use of the social and economic historians’ concept of “family economy,” Laura Oren showed that the sexual divisions within the household caused women’s diets as well as their children’s to suffer relative to men.¹¹ Women stretched household expenses that husbands allotted to them from their pay to assure that their husbands were well taken care of, while men kept pocket money for themselves to use for their own necessities as well as pleasures. Oren concluded that the wife’s management of the household budget served as a buffer both for her husband in hard times, and for the economy and industrial system more generally.

Although the study of working-class women was a predominant focus of women’s historians in Britain, the ideology of separate spheres and the split between the primarily

middle-class private, domestic world of women and the family and men’s public worlds concerned some women’s historians there as well as in the United States. Leonore Daviddoff and her colleagues, for example, focused on what they called the “beau idyll,” the image of peaceful, bourgeois family life in suburban towns that were developed to imitate life in rural villages. At its center was the separation of women and the family from the concerns of the public arena, giving women “their own sphere of influence in the home.”¹² The domestic/public division was not, in their view, a timeless feature of social life, but rather it was an historically emerging ideology connected to the development of the competitive economic world of business. This ideology was instrumental in creating the domestic ideals and spaces of middle-class women’s lived lives.

While some British feminist historians were concerned with domestic ideology and its consequences for middle-class women, a growing number of US feminist scholars turned to women’s labor and working-class history. In the mid-1970s, Alice Kessler-Harris asked, “Where are the organized women workers?” and her research on early twentieth-century US workers pointed to the decided ambivalence of male unionists to working women, the low level of support that major US trade union organizations gave to women organizers, and employers’ efforts to prevent women from organizing.¹³ In the early 1980s Kessler-Harris published a history of US wage-earning women from the colonial period to post-World War II.¹⁴ The book highlights the various ways in which women’s economic opportunities were limited and the changes in the relationship between family and work from the nineteenth century to the last half of the twentieth century.

Other important works on women’s labor and working-class history in the United States include Thomas Dublin’s research on women working in the Lowell, Massachusetts textile industry between the 1820s and 1860, Jacqueline Jones’ landmark study of black working women from slavery to the post-World War II period, and Christine Stansell’s study of working-class women in New York City between 1780 and 1860. Dublin’s research, based on extensive company archival records, memoirs, and letters, detailed the

growth of the textile industry and the recruitment of young women from rural New England to work in the mills.¹⁵ He examined the community these women established in Lowell, the protests they organized over low wages and poor working conditions, and the subsequent transformation of the industry and decline of women's labor activism as the workforce diversified. Jacqueline Jones' study of black women workers investigates the sexual division of labor in the fields under slavery, and after the Civil War, the high value accorded black working women in their own communities, and how race discrimination forced them into the lowest paid and most menial forms of labor.¹⁶ She shows their commitment to the economic welfare of their families despite the degraded nature of their work. Christine Stansell's research explored the nature of the communities that young workers created in early nineteenth-century New York City and she investigated the changing nature of women's place in the family economy, their increasing opportunities to earn wages with the expansion of "outwork" in manufacturing allowing them to earn money working at home, and the neighborhood networks that they formed for mutual support.¹⁷

Radical feminism was another path taken by women's historians in both Britain and the United States. Radical feminists viewed women's oppression as a consequence of patriarchal dominance and thus saw the problem of men's power over women (or patriarchy) as the central problem to be analyzed by women's historians. As the London Feminist History Group put it, "[W]omen have not just been hidden from history. They have been deliberately oppressed. Recognition of this oppression is one of the central tenets of feminism."¹⁸ This did not mean that women should be viewed only as victims. Rather, women's historians working within this general framework were concerned to show the ways that women resisted their oppression. Thus, for example, in their discussion of separate spheres, the London Feminist History Group suggested that it was important for histories to be written showing that women's activities that ranged beyond the domestic realm into the world of politics and the professions were "directly resisting men's dominance and control of these areas," even as they faced considerable opposition from men who controlled their movement.¹⁹

Important studies focusing on women in the past from the various feminist perspectives continued to be produced into the 1980s. Increasingly, however, critical voices were heard. Some were concerned that there was a tendency in women's history to assume a universal women's experience, ignoring differences among women not only of class, but of race, sexual preference, and ethnic, national, or religious backgrounds. Increasingly, feminist scholars became concerned that the research intended to recover women's lives in the past to bring them into the historical record, regardless of the theoretical position informing it, produced a history of women that was isolated from the history of men, reinforcing the "ghettoization" or marginalization of feminist history.

In the mid-1970s two US-based European women's historians suggested an approach to feminist history that a decade later was to be elaborated into what we now know as "gender history." Joan Kelly-Gadol, arguing that "compensatory" women's history would not transform how history is written, suggested that the "social relation of the sexes" ought to be at the center of feminist history.²⁰ At about the same time, Natalie Zemon Davis proposed that to correct the bias in the historical record, it would be necessary to look at both women and men – "the significance of the sexes of gender groups in the past." This, she suggested "should help promote a rethinking of some of the central issues faced by historians – power, social structure, property, symbols and periodization."²¹

Although socialist feminist scholars in Britain were intent upon broadening Marxist theory to include a focus on women and sex difference, it was in the United States that the term "gender" first became central to understanding women's lives in the past. Scholars there began to question the concept of women's culture or the existence of a separate female world and attempted to take into account questions of race, class, and ethnicity. For example, in their introduction to a book of essays, *Sex and Class in Women's History*, the editors, US-based historians of America and Britain, Judith Newton, Mary Ryan, and Judith Walkowitz, stated explicitly that in thinking about women's history, they would "employ gender as a category of historical analysis."²² Their purpose in using the category was "to understand the systematic ways

in which sex differences have cut through society and culture and in the process have conferred inequality upon women."²³

The shift to a focus on gender through the late 1970s and into the mid-1980s also is apparent in the Introduction to the second edition of *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, published in 1987. The editors of the new edition, Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, comment that they intend not only to make women visible, but also to "examine the socially constructed and historically changing gender systems that divide masculine from feminine roles."²⁴

While the concept of "gender" was becoming increasingly influential in the early and mid-1980s, it was Joan Scott's theoretical intervention, published in the December 1985 issue of *American Historical Review*, that was to have a major impact on the development of gender history as a field of scholarship. To answer questions such as how gender works in social relationships and how it influences historical knowledge, it is necessary, she argued, to conceptualize gender in a theoretically rigorous manner.²⁵ She maintained that such a theoretical approach, rather than one that describes women's lives in the past, is necessary if feminist scholarship is to transform historical studies. While, as we have seen, feminist scholars earlier had been using the term "gender" and had argued for its significance, Scott offered a new approach that did not focus on the recovery of women's activities in the past, but instead queried how gender worked to distinguish masculine from feminine. She defined gender as the meanings given to the perceived differences between the sexes. The primary questions for Scott concerned how "the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed."²⁶ Influenced by French post-structuralism, Scott insisted that meaning is constructed and communicated through language or discourse which inevitably involves differentiations or contrasts. These differentiations or oppositions, including the dichotomy of male and female, are both interdependent (male is only meaningful in contrast to female) and they are inherently unstable (because of the intrinsic heterogeneity of all categories). All dichotomies, including the dichotomy of male and female, vary over time and across societies. But such binary

oppositions appear to be timeless because the politics involved in establishing them have been obscured. It is the historian's job to recover them for the historical record.

One of the most important aspects of Scott's theory of gender is her proposition that gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power – gender is a critical means by which power is expressed or legitimated. Mrinalini Sinha has shown, for example, how the stereotypes of the "manly Englishman" and the "effeminate Bengali" served to legitimate colonial rule and racial hierarchy in late nineteenth-century India, and both emerged from and shaped various political controversies in India and Britain.²⁷

Scott's ideas had an enormous impact on numerous feminist historians as they contributed to and participated in what became known in academic history circles as the cultural or linguistic "turn." Increasingly the terms "discourse" and "text" and a focus on the production of meanings appeared in scholarship. But Scott's theoretical approach and the turn to gender more generally was and continues to be controversial.

While Scott's advocacy of French post-structuralism was drawn upon by numerous feminist historians to analyze the language of gender in various historical contexts, this theoretical position met with criticism and considerable hostility from others. Scott's primary concern with language and representation and with unstable meanings enraged some feminist scholars for denying "retrievable historical 'reality.'"²⁸ As Joan Hoff put it, in this approach "material experiences become abstract representations drawn almost exclusively from textual analysis; personal identities and all human agency become obsolete, and disembodied subjects are constructed by discourses. Flesh-and-blood women...also become social constructs."²⁹ In stressing the primacy of language, Scott questioned the concept of "experience," suggesting that experience is unknowable outside of language and thus it is itself discursively produced. But there were feminist historians who feared that without a concept of experience outside of its textual production there was nothing that women shared on which to ground a feminist politics. The idea that "woman" was only a social construction seemed to some scholars to deny the existence of women and thus to

deny them "a position from which they can speak, based on their embodied experience of womanhood."³⁰

Critics of the turn to gender as well as post-structuralism were concerned that by opening gender history to the study of men, women would again be obscured from the historical record. Furthermore, some argued that the result of focusing on the symbolic link between gender and power could well sidestep historical questions about the operation of "patriarchy," the inequalities in power between women as a group compared to men.³¹ While concern about the relationship between women's history and gender history persists among some feminist historians, others applaud the contributions of gender history and defend it against some of the criticisms that have been leveled at it. As to the charge that a focus on differences among women and on the instability of the meaning of the category "woman" as a social construction diminishes a common ground on which women can create a feminist politics, it has been argued that only by recognizing diversity and difference and acknowledging the multiple and possibly conflicting ways in which identities are formed is it possible to create political ties among women. Gender history's attention to men and masculinity emphasizes the idea that masculinity and femininity exist in relation to one another. Focusing on men as gendered beings corrects the assumption that masculinity is some sort of unchanging "natural" state of being and that men's historical agency can be understood without taking gender and sexuality into account. Acknowledging the diversity among men and working with the idea that there are multiple masculinities forged in relation to one another as well as in relation to women does not deny that generally men are more powerful than women. Indeed, as US historians Nancy Cott and Drew Gilpin Faust have maintained, it is because gender has been understood as a hierarchical formation, not simply one of difference but one of domination, that gender has been a way of signifying relations of power.³²

There can be no doubt but that Joan Scott's intervention stimulated the development of gender history especially in North America and Britain, even if many practitioners did not follow her post-structuralist approach but used other, more traditional methods of analysis. In 1989 the journal,

Gender & History was founded in Britain by Leonore Daviddoff with two editorial boards, one in the United Kingdom and one in the United States. In its inaugural issue the editors indicated their intention to take a feminist perspective that would address men and masculinity as well as women and femininity, "traditionally male institutions as well as those defined commonly as female"; and they indicated their encouragement of multiple approaches by recognizing that gender is "not only a set of lived relations; it is also a symbolic system."³³

Although its founding editorial collectives were in Britain and North America, and it was an English-language journal, the editors not only welcomed an interdisciplinary perspective, but encouraged contributions from scholars of other nationalities and languages. Yet, the impact of Scott's initial challenge and the turn to gender history more generally was to be more profound in the Anglophone world than elsewhere. This does not mean that gender histories were written only about North America and Britain and Ireland, but that gender histories of Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and so on, were more likely to be produced by scholars working in English-speaking countries (including Australia and New Zealand). There were a number of reasons for this. First, feminist history generally had a slower impact on the historical professions in countries where the historical profession was less open to women's history as well as to non-traditional approaches to historical analysis. Second, the term "gender" itself does not necessarily have equivalents in other languages. Also, cultural differences may have been at play. In France, for example, the closest equivalent to the term "gender" is *genre*, which refers both to grammatical gender and to literary genre. With some notable exceptions, French scholars were reluctant to adopt "imported concepts," and they rejected a hierarchical understanding of male-female relationships in favor of a complementary view of those relationships.³⁴ In China there is a fairly long tradition of historical scholarship on women produced by male scholars. This tradition of scholarship is based on the view that the distinction between man and woman (in Chinese, *nan/nu*) is a basic organizing principle of society. Yet, the concept of "gender" as it has been used in the Anglophone world has been slow

to gain acceptance by Chinese academics, perhaps due to an assumption by Chinese historians of women that the relationship between men and women is a “harmonious” one. Historians and other scholars there, for example, have been slow to recognize men and masculinity as gendered beings.³⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the reader to some of the basic conceptual issues in the study of gender and history, including defining both history and gender. It has traced the origins of gender history through the development of women’s history in North America and Britain and discussed questions about history that arose as a consequence. The chapter has suggested that the turn to “gender” was stimulated by the concerns of some historians that women’s history was merely “added” on to the historical record, but that it had not changed how basic historical issues were understood by professional historians. Gender history also was spurred by theoretical advances, especially French post-structuralism, whose influence on historical practice was greatly enhanced through the uses of it made by feminist historians. The advancement of gender history has led feminist scholars to ask new questions about gender as a category of analysis. Can gender have variable meanings across time and space? Have all societies in all time periods distinguished male and female on the basis of perceived bodily differences? And is there some fixed distinction between sex and gender? The next chapter will turn to some of these questions.

2

Bodies and Sexuality in Gender History

The distinction between sex and gender had been useful for feminist scholars as they investigated the histories of the perceived differences between women and men and explored the historical effects of those differences. But even as more and more scholars adopted gender as a “useful category of historical analysis,” feminist cultural critics, philosophers, and historians of science became increasingly uncomfortable with the sex/gender distinction. At the very end of the twentieth century, historian Joan Scott, whose essay on gender as a useful category of historical analysis was a critical stimulus to the field of gender history in the mid-1980s, questioned whether the distinction between sex and gender made sense, arguing that a primary question to be asked concerns how “sexual difference” is articulated “as a principle and practice of social organization.”¹ Moreover, in 2006, Mary Ryan chose the title *The Mysteries of Sex* for her book examining how the meanings of male and female have changed and varied through American history.²

Feminist scholars have noted several problems with the sex/gender distinction. One such problem is that sex and gender are frequently used interchangeably in popular discourse, with gender being deployed as a polite synonym for sex. One might read in the daily press, for example, that both genders were present at a political rally. If the two terms are synonymous, why keep the terminological distinction? Often,

too, gender has been interpreted as meaning “women,” as if “men” were not gendered beings. But other, more serious problems with the sex/gender distinction underpin this sort of confusion. If gender is a cultural interpretation of sex understood as biological or natural or as referring to physical, material bodies, then gender ultimately is based upon bodily difference, which is considered outside of or untouched by history or culture.

It may seem to be common sense that sex difference is in the realm of nature rather than culture. And that is precisely the problem. We commonly understand what is “natural” or “biological” to be unchangeable or fixed. If gender is supposed to be a cultural interpretation of sex, understood as “natural,” there must be limits to how gender can shape understandings of sexual difference. The concept of sexual difference, then, retains the assumption that there are some universal characteristics of all females and all males that are located in their respective bodies, so the biological body is the ultimate basis of gender. It was precisely this view that feminist scholars were attempting to undermine by using the concept of gender.

Historians of science, however, have demonstrated that biological science, itself, is influenced by ideas about gender difference. Londa Schiebinger, for example, has shown that beliefs about gender in eighteenth-century Europe were crucial in shaping how scientists developed classificatory schemes and built scientific knowledge about plants and animals.³ For example, using ideas about gender differences in human beings, plants were “sexed” and the breast was used as a means of distinguishing mammals from other animal species. As empirical knowledge based on the senses became the privileged source of truth, scientists began to search for the “real” difference between women and men. Eventually it became “common sense” that the “real” difference between all females and all males was the part their bodies played in reproduction. Genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes were understood to constitute the reality of sex difference, in spite of the many variations within the category “woman” and within the category “man” and regardless of the existence of human beings whose physiology and anatomy did not fit into either category. Babies born with ambiguous

genitalia had to be surgically gendered to fit the idea of sex difference.

Science, under the influence of political and cultural ideas about gender (and race), interpreted “nature,” and then this culturally influenced scientific knowledge was used to justify the belief in “natural” differences. Most of us are so accustomed to looking to science/nature/biology as the ultimate source of truth, especially when it concerns bodies, that it is difficult to think outside of this framework. But historical scholarship helps us to do just that.

Importantly, Thomas Laqueur, examining numerous sources, including medical texts and anatomical drawings of the human body beginning with ancient Greece, discovered that before the Enlightenment, that is, prior to the eighteenth century, male and female bodies were viewed as similar, and what he calls a “one-sex” model of the body dominated scientific and philosophical understanding.⁴ There was but one body, a male body, and females were thought to have the same organs as males, but theirs were inside their bodies rather than outside of them. Bodily fluids were understood to be interchangeable, such that blood, milk, fat, and semen could turn into one another. Laqueur shows that historically even the major figures of the Renaissance scientific revolution assimilated their empirical observations to the cultural and political belief in the similarity of the sexes. This view of sex and the body was in accord with the idea that women were but inferior versions of men. It was not until the eighteenth century that the modern view that men and women were opposite sexes – they were different rather than similar – came to dominate how sex was understood. Scientists increasingly searched for, found, and gave names to the bodily indicators of an essential difference. Schiebinger has shown that eighteenth-century physicians sought and believed they had found the fundamental nature of sex in every part of the body – in blood vessels, sweat, brains, hair, and bones.⁵

The question of why there was a shift during the eighteenth century is still an open one. Laqueur argues forcefully that the answer does not lie in the advances in empirical science. He suggests that as a consequence of the Enlightenment, religion and metaphysics were displaced by science as the ultimate source of truth. With the political upheavals

associated with the French Revolution that began to dismantle social hierarchies, including threatening the political privileges of men in contrast to women, the biological body came to be understood as the ultimate source of the differences in men's and women's social and political capacities. Another factor contributing to efforts to demarcate bodily difference is likely to have been a consequence of European imperial expansion, with the discovery of ever more varieties of plants, animals, and, especially, other groups of human beings. Although arguments about the existence of a "one-sex" model and the dating of the transformation in scientific views of bodily difference have not gone unchallenged, the idea that culture, in this case ideas about gender, has shaped knowledge about sex and the body has become widely accepted.⁶

While Laqueur and Schiebinger have demonstrated the consequences of gender, or the historically changing beliefs about sexual difference for scientific understandings of sex and the body, philosopher Judith Butler has elaborated a way of understanding sex and the body that dismantles the widely assumed opposition between "nature" and culture.⁷ She has developed a complex set of ideas arguing that sex is a cultural achievement with bodily (material) consequences. If gender is the cultural construction of sex, then sex and the body are the effects of or are produced by discourse. This does not mean, according to Butler, that sex and the body are imagined or are somehow invented by language. Rather, she argues that the body itself becomes gendered through repeated bodily acts, a process that she terms "performativity." Gender, in other words, becomes embodied, and what we think of as sex is the effect of this "reiterative" or ritual practice – a practice that results in sex being seen as totally "natural." The sociologist Raewyn Connell puts a similar conceptualization differently. She argues that gender "norms" have physical effects on the body. Gender becomes incorporated into the body in practice – in acting and interacting in the social world. "The forms and consequences of this incorporation change in time, and change as a result of social purposes and social struggle. That is to say they are fully historical. . . . in the reality of practice the body is never outside history, and history never free of bodily presence and effects

on the body."⁸ She argues, for example, that "the physical sense of maleness grows through a personal history of social practice, a life-history-in-society."⁹ Philosophers such as Elizabeth Grosz, as well as feminist biologists, have developed ways of thinking about bodies that understand them not as fixed, but rather as always in states of becoming.¹⁰ Such ways of thinking are important because they break down the dichotomy between the material and the cultural, between sex and gender, and make possible not only histories of gender, but histories of the body using gender as a tool of historical analysis.

What might a history of the body focus upon using gender as a category of historical analysis? Feminist medical historians have studied the changing medical practices and beliefs about the female body. Bodies also have been at issue in histories of birth control and pro-natalist movements as well as in campaigns against venereal disease. As Kathleen Canning has demonstrated, bodies have been central to women's political activism, as, for example, when female textile workers in Weimar Germany during the mid-1920s organized to demand that the state expand maternity protections.¹¹ Histories of the body or bodies in history also have concerned men's bodies at war. Joanna Bourke, for example, has examined the impact of World War I on men's bodies.¹² She explores how those who returned maimed from the Front dealt with their disabilities, and analyzes how the impact of the conflict shaped post-war masculinity. Other scholars also have examined the historical links that have been made between the health and welfare of individual bodies and the society at large, understood as the "social body."¹³

Carolyn Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* was one of the earliest and most important studies that made gender and the body historically central.¹⁴ As its title suggests, the book concerns European Christian women between 1200 and 1500 and the association between their religious devotion and food. Medieval women used the symbol of denying themselves food (during a time of food scarcity) and bringing pain upon themselves to more closely associate themselves with Christ's suffering on the cross, while through the communion wafer they ingested the body of God. Bynum argued that their

asceticism that took the form of self-torture was an effort to use their bodily senses to get closer to God.

Historical analyses of the period of the French Revolution have been especially important in showing the symbolic significance of bodies as sites of political meaning. Dorinda Outram's study, for example, suggests that particularly at such a time of complex social and political transformation, bodies become important signifiers of political allegiance and of political standing. To illustrate this, she argues that the depiction of heroic masculinity derived from Greek Stoic classical antiquity served to validate the political participation of men while denigrating and excluding women from politics.¹⁵ Lynn Hunt's work has also shown the significance of the body in the political and social transformations associated with the Revolution. She suggests, for example, that the period witnessed great anxiety about social differentiation, and as a consequence increasing attention was paid to how bodies were clothed and what that clothing said about the wearers' loyalty to revolutionary ideals. In the *ancien régime*, ornate men's clothing signified privilege and aristocratic power, and the elegance of their dress was at least as prominent as was female finery. After the Revolution, men disposed of their stockings, high heels, wigs, and pantaloons, replacing them with a more "uniform uniform."¹⁶ What mattered now was their similarity to one another and their difference from women.

Isabel Hull's analysis of the development of civil society in Germany during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suggests that as men were to enter the public sphere and engage in civil society as individuals rather than as members of particular families, professions, estates, or religions, "they thought of themselves in some important sense as naked."¹⁷ They, too, had shed the signs of their difference from one another and, as in France, their bodily difference from women defined a man's identity.

Analyses of the practices of the veiling of women and of reactions to the veil also suggest the significance of bodily representation for national and/or ethnic identity. In his study of Central Asia, *Veiled Empire*, Douglas Northrop has revealed that before the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, while Central Asian women and men engaged in practices that were

deeply gendered, there was fluidity and variability in those practices and in how gender difference was represented.¹⁸ It was only after the advent of Russian colonial control and especially after the Revolution that particular forms of female dress and female seclusion came to be deemed traditional. The veil and seclusion were used as national symbols *encouraged* by the Soviets, who, for a time, believed that the existence of an indigenous nation such as Uzbekistan in Central Asia could represent Soviet modernity. By the mid-1920s, the party line changed and the practices of female veiling and seclusion were denounced as dirty and oppressive and an indicator that the Uzbeks were incapable of civilization. In 1927, the Soviets insisted on unveiling women in order to transform Uzbek society. Uzbeks who opposed the Soviet campaign of unveiling then portrayed themselves as defenders of the nation by insisting on the veil. Both the Soviets and Uzbek nationalists used women's veiled bodies as pawns in the conflict between them.

In her analysis of the contemporary "headscarf" controversy in France, Joan Scott suggests that a major reason that the veil has become so contested is as a consequence of the mismatch between two distinctive ways of dealing with the issue of sexual difference.¹⁹ For Islam the veil announces a limit to male-female interaction, declaring sexual exchanges in public to be "off-limits." Veiling and the headscarf make visible and explicit anxieties about sexuality and sex difference. In contrast the French deny that sex difference is and has been politically salient by conspicuously displaying women's bodies, to represent the French gender system as superior, free, and "natural." Muslims' attitudes to sex and sexuality are then thought by the French to make them unassimilable.

Scott's analysis of the contemporary discord over veiled women in France and some of the other works noted above are simultaneously concerned with bodily practices and beliefs about sexuality. Another example of the close association between images of the body and issues of sexuality is to be found in the work of Iranian historian Afsaneh Najmabadi.²⁰ She has written about the changing ideals of beauty over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using paintings among other sources, she shows that ideals of beauty were

not distinguished by gender in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. The beauty of males and females was described similarly in texts while they were depicted in paintings with corresponding features and shapes. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, ideas about beauty became increasingly differentiated by gender. These changes were associated with changing ideas about sexuality, especially the nature of male eroticism. Early in the nineteenth century, young men could be objects of beauty and sexual desire, as were young women. The distinction between male and female forms of beauty and ideas about male sexuality developed over the century as a consequence of the rise of the modern nation-state and in the context of European contact.

As this example makes clear, the history of the body as a field shares some of its purview with the history of sexuality, and as Najmabadi's work and Scott's analysis show, the two often are inextricably connected. But sexuality need not necessarily be the focus of body histories. Histories of the body generally concern how bodies are represented and serve as symbols, how they are shaped through various organized social practices, and how they become the focus of political mobilization.

As a field of study, however, histories of sexuality are particularly concerned with the various histories of the regulation and control of erotic practices, the categories naming, interpreting, and classifying them and the range of consequences of societal concern about sexual desire and activity, including the creation of sexual identities. As Raewyn Connell has argued, sexual categories and norms as well as the forms and objects of desire, "the patterning of sexuality through the life history, the practices through which pleasure is given and received, all differ between cultures and are subject to transformation in time."²¹ Prostitution, same-sex relationships, population control by the state, birth control, attitudes toward marital and non-marital intimacy, understandings of men and women as sexual beings, are included in histories of sexuality and most incorporate gender as a category of historical analysis.

The contemporary field of the history of sexuality was influenced by developments in women's history and feminist

history more generally as well as the rise of gay and lesbian rights movements, and it was profoundly stimulated by the publication of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, published in the late 1970s.²² Importantly, Foucault maintained that the efforts at controlling sexuality in Western society beginning in the nineteenth century were not repressive, as had commonly been thought. Rather, the avid attention to sex in the discourses of science as well as popular literature about it served as incitements to speak and think about sexual desire. Foucault maintained that modern discourses of sexuality were a dispersed form of power that created not only desire, but also identities, so that who we are is defined by our sexual practices. In fact, the very term "sexuality" was created through these discourses.

Elaborating on Foucault's views, in his historical overview of the history of sexuality in modern Europe, Jeffrey Weeks argues that

as society has become more and more concerned with the lives of its members, for the sake of moral uniformity, economic well-being, national security or hygiene and health, so it has become more and more preoccupied with the sex lives of its individuals, giving rise to intricate methods of administration and management, to a flowering of moral anxieties, medical hygienic, legal and welfarist interventions, or scientific delving, *all designed to understand the self by understanding sex.*²³

It is precisely the connection between sexuality and the self that was central in Foucault's ideas about modern sexuality and how modern understandings of sexuality differed from understandings of sex in ancient and pre-modern Europe and in Asia as well.

Historians now understand that the homosexual is a modern category that did not exist before the nineteenth century. Even before the publication of Foucault's work, lesbian and gay historians were suggesting that the heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy was of recent provenance. While earlier European societies were concerned to regulate sexual practices in the interests of reproduction and inheritance, homosexuality as it is understood today, as a presumed state of being that defines the identities of people who engage in same-sex intimacies, would have made no sense in the past.

Same-sex erotic activity surely existed in all cultures, but those who engaged in it were not seen as homosexuals. Historical research concerning same-sex activity in the past helps to make clear the historicity of sexuality and how it was regulated.

The historian of the ancient world David Halperin has argued, based on his research, that in ancient Athens sexual partners were not understood as males or females but rather as dominant and submissive; active and passive; penetrator and penetrated.²⁴ These were not taken as signs of some sort of sexual identity. Rather, the practices were understood as expressions of personal status and indicated one's social but not sexual identity. Halperin uses the analogy of burglary to make clear how sexual activity would have been understood. Sexual engagement was not seen in the ancient world as a mutual act any more than we understand that the burglar and the victim engage in a mutual and voluntary act. Male citizens of Athens could penetrate those who were of lesser status, including boys, women, slaves, and foreigners. There are examples from across the world and over time of age differences structuring sexual relations, including in seventeenth-century Japan.²⁵

In medieval and early modern Europe the practice of same-sex erotic behavior was known as sodomy, although the term also could refer to a variety of other forms of behavior considered deviant. Helmut Puff has explored the changing discourses and regimes of control of sodomy in certain German-speaking areas of Europe during the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.²⁶ Basing his analysis on a range of texts, including trials and literary and religious writings, he showed that women as well as men could be accused of sodomy. Earlier, in the middle ages, sodomy had been associated with religious heresy, and those accused would be executed. In the early years of the Protestant Reformation there were extensive efforts to rid cities of sexual offenders, and religious sermons and tracts contributed to an extensive discourse on sodomy that urged people to live their lives free of sin. Protestant reformers frequently accused Catholic leaders of sodomy and portrayed the practice as the brutish contrast to marriage. During the period of the Protestant and Catholic reforms of the sixteenth century, authori-

ties increasingly attempted to restrict what was said about sodomy, but at the same time in Zurich and Lucerne there were sexual cultures in which male same-sex activity was common.

Across Europe in the context of religious and political turmoil in the period from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, what was perceived to be sexual deviance was harshly punished and subject to surveillance. The Catholic Church in Spain and Italy during the Inquisition harshly punished those believed to be sexually immoral, and the Church made clear that procreative sex sanctified by marriage was the only form of sexuality that would be permitted. Protestants both in Europe and in North America, likewise, severely punished prostitutes and adulterers and burned at the stake those accused of sodomy. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, for example, the Netherlands executed hundreds of people accused of sodomy.²⁷

Randolph Trumbach's research on the period in English history from the 1680s to the 1790s reveals that during the eighteenth century there was a transformation in the sexual identities of men.²⁸ Before then, sexual activities between men in young adulthood probably were fairly common, but they did not mark men's identities in any discernible way. During the first decades of the eighteenth century, however, male sexual practices came to be seen as either exclusively heterosexual activity or sodomy. London was seen as being populated by men, women, and "sodomites." "Sodomites," thus, constituted a "third gender." A thriving subculture of men who engaged in same-sex activity existed in eighteenth-century London, where men who desired sex with other men congregated in what was known as "molly houses"; men thought to be frequenting them were in turn defamed as "mollies." In order to prove their masculinity, men of all classes had to comply with the new heterosexual sexual order. Accompanying this transformation of normative sexuality with its concurrent emphasis on domesticity and family life, there was a rise in extramarital sex, which was sanctioned for men but not women, as well as a rise in prostitution. Prostitutes served men not only as commercialized sexual objects, but also as resources for securing their heterosexual reputations. Female prostitutes and male sodomites

were similarly denigrated. Trumbach's research should not be understood as constructing a "golden age" of sexual freedom versus sexual restraint. Rather, he is concerned to trace the increasing emphasis on heterosexuality as a crucial component of manliness, defined in contrast to those "others" seen as "sodomites" who participated in a visible same-sex subculture.

George Chauncey's important study of male-male sexuality and sexual subcultures in four areas of New York City, *Gay New York*, describes and analyzes a period around the turn of the twentieth century when men from a variety of walks of life openly thwarted societal norms of exclusive heterosexuality, participating in a lively and complex gay world.²⁹ It was during this time that the terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual" appeared. A gay subculture emerged first in the 1890s in an area known as the Bowery, where working-class immigrants lived and a red-light district flourished. There, men who desired men, defined by medical and other experts at the time as "inverts," but known locally as "fairies," adopted exaggerated feminine modes of behaviour in public. The "respectable middle-class" men who secretly visited them from other areas of the city, where involvement in same-sex activity would have destroyed their reputations, called themselves "queer." Fairy culture developed in bohemian Greenwich Village and black Harlem in the 1910s and 1920s. Class and race differences structured how men understood their acts and perceived their partners. Gay and sexually permissive cultures that included places of lesbian activity expanded during the years of (alcohol) Prohibition into central areas of the city. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933, however, witnessed the beginning of an intensive crusade of repression against gays and lesbians, who were now seen as degenerate, as contrasted with those people who led exclusively heterosexual lives of domesticity. Interestingly, Chauncey also tells us that the term "gay" first was used to refer to prostitutes, and they, like gay men were considered "perverts."

Although lesbians make a brief appearance in books by Trumbach and Chauncey, both focus primarily on men. Studying women's same-sex relationships has been troubled by the availability of sources and questions concerning how to interpret them. How are the sexual subjectivities of women

in the past to be studied if their same-sex activities are not named; if the women do not identify themselves and their relationships with other women in terms that are understandable to us as sexual references?

Martha Vicinus has suggested that women's sexual subjectivities are and have been fluid and that understanding women's same-sex relationships in the past involves seeing a "continuum of women's sexual behaviors, in which lesbian sexuality can be both a part of and apart from normative heterosexual marriage and child-bearing."³⁰ She argues that neither the visibility of women's intimate relations with other women nor names or labels for those relationships are necessary in order to comprehend women's sexual identities or subjectivities in the past.³¹ These ideas are illuminated in her study, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*.³² This work explores various instances of educated middle- and upper-class Anglo-American women's same-sex intimate relationships over the period using women's words about themselves gleaned from diaries, letters, and court testimony as well as fiction and poetry. These sources are mined to reveal how women represented the passionate and erotic affection they shared with one another. Vicinus discusses, for example, how some women who had erotic attachments to other women made use of the Victorian vision of sexually pure womanhood to reject and abstain from heterosexual sex. She documents relationships between women who lived with one another as married partners, such as the Ladies of Llangollen (Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler), and details the intrigues of the community of American and British women living in mid-nineteenth-century Rome, some of whom moved in and out of heterosexual relationships as well as forming same-sex marriages with one another. Her cases include women who adopted mannish modes of self-presentation, portraying themselves as tomboyish, "rakish," or gentlemanly, but did so fluidly such that the self-styled rake might become a protective husband or the tomboy a prudent mother. One of the cases involved two women who, in 1809, ran a boarding school and apparently there shared a bed. They initiated a libel trial against an aristocratic woman whose Anglo-Indian grandchild, a student at the school, accused the schoolmistresses of "indecent and

criminal practices." They won the libel case on the "racial" grounds that such behavior was not known to take place among British women and thus their indecency was a figment of the distorted imagination of the colonial "half-caste" child. The accused women, nevertheless, were hounded from the school. The cases that Vicinus examines over a 150-year period reveal a variety of ways that women engaged in and understood their erotic and loving relations with one another and crafted their own identities.

Basing their study on oral histories of working-class lesbians in Buffalo, New York, who lived and formed same-sex relationships in the post-World War II years, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis explored the creation of the sexual subjectivities of the women and the development of their lesbian identities and group consciousness.³³ These working-class women created a "butch-fem" culture that visibly announced their erotic difference as a way of confronting the outside world. They manipulated symbols of heterosexual monogamy as a way to refuse to abide by the norms of the larger society and to defend their right to same-sex relationships. The authors argue that these "tough bar lesbians" resisted male dominance and normative heterosexuality and defended themselves against public harassment using bar rooms that they defined as their preserve through their gendered role-playing.

Anxieties about masturbation also have been studied by historians. Isabel Hull's discussion of sexuality in Germany's "long eighteenth century," referred to earlier with regard to histories of the body, includes an examination of the outpouring of anti-masturbation literature in the 1780s.³⁴ The main assumption of that literature, which focused on males, was that semen, understood as the source of masculine strength, would be lost as a result of the practice, leading to both physical and mental weakness. The discourse about masturbation associated the practice with overly civilized living, especially in cities. Boarding schools as well as servants were blamed for introducing children to the practice. They also were supposed to have learned it from reading, and were made susceptible because of new kinds of associations and forms of sociability. Hull suggests that anxiety about masturbation and the belief that the habit had increased was a

consequence of fears about the material, social, and cultural changes of the time and how they affected children and youth.

Like same-sex and solitary sex, prostitution, too, has histories. How prostitutes were viewed, how prostitution was organized and regulated, and, as we saw in Trumbach's work discussed above, prostitution's role in educating or confirming masculinity and male sexuality in different time periods and cultural settings all have been the object of scholarship.

Ruth Mazo Karras' study of prostitution in medieval England, based on a range of source materials, including sermons, civic rules regulating brothels, church and secular court records, examines how prostitutes were viewed, and the economic, social, and cultural conditions under which they lived. While prostitutes, themselves, were maligned, the practice of prostitution was tolerated as a "necessary evil." Although town brothels did not commonly exist in England as they did in medieval Germany and elsewhere on the Continent, Southampton and Sandwich maintained legal brothels, apparently to provide for the needs of sailors in order to safeguard the virtue of the towns' respectable wives and daughters. Karras argues that women's sexual behavior, generally, was a subject of gossip and public attention, as it defined their reputations in the communities in which they lived. Respectable married women were believed capable of becoming "common women," and thus they, too, needed to be controlled and supervised. The sin of lust was believed to characterize all women, but it was the whore who "acted on that lust indiscriminately."³⁵

In late medieval Augsburg, as Lyndal Roper has shown, brothels were municipally run services designed especially for youth as a kind of apprenticeship for manhood and marriage. Roper argues that prostitution reinforced male bonding and "defined sexual virility as an essential male characteristic."³⁶ But respectable women, too, were thought to benefit from prostitution because the practice afforded them safety. Virginity was highly prized just as it was in marriage, and a man's masculinity was especially confirmed if he was the first to penetrate a particular woman. As a consequence of urging by Lutheran preachers, the brothels were made illegal in 1532. The Lutherans encouraged the belief that men's sexual

natures were controllable, and that their sexual desires could be channeled into matrimony. But with the new regime came greater powers of surveillance, and the boundary between the prostitute and non-prostitute became blurred. Women's sexual desires were feared and all women were suspected of being capable of debauchery.

Judith Walkowitz's important study of prostitution in Victorian England focuses on the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had been passed by Parliament in 1864.³⁷ Designed to protect soldiers and sailors from venereal disease, the Acts authorized police in garrison towns to require women suspected of prostitution to register as prostitutes and to undergo a humiliating medical examination. If women who were suspected of prostitution were found to be infected with disease, they faced long jail sentences. The Ladies National Association (LNA), under the leadership of Josephine Butler, opposed the Acts on the grounds that not only were they ineffective in stopping the spread of venereal disease, but they punished the women but not the men who used them and whom the LNA accused of being the cause of the vice and its consequences. Walkowitz's work reveals not only the work of the middle-class philanthropically minded members of the LNA, but also their complicated relationships and interactions with the prostitutes, whom they attempted to rescue and in whose name they fought against the Acts. They portrayed themselves sometimes as sisters who understood that poverty could lead any woman to choose prostitution, but also as "mothers" who saw the prostitutes as passive figures who had lost their innocence but whose virtue could be restored in rescue homes. Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* also opens a window onto the lives of poor women, showing that the women who registered as prostitutes under the Acts were similar in almost all respects to other young women living in their neighborhoods. They did not think of themselves as prostitutes, and usually left lives as sex workers in their late twenties either to cohabit with a man or for marriage. One of the effects of the Acts, Walkowitz demonstrates, is that the average age of the women who registered as prostitutes rose and prostitution increasingly became a career rather than a temporary way of making a living. The Acts were finally repealed in 1886.

As it happens, anxiety about venereal disease was if anything more pervasive in the British Empire than in the metropole: contagious diseases acts were passed overseas before they were passed at home and they involved greater levels of surveillance. Philippa Levine's exhaustive study of prostitution in the British Empire during and after the period of the metropolitan contagious diseases acts and the movement for their abolition (1860–1918) examines the intersection of gender, race, and concerns about imperial governance in the regulation of prostitution.³⁸ The practice of prostitution by colonial subjects was regarded by the imperial government as an indication of their immorality and lack of civilization but deemed a necessary evil when the clients were European. Prostitution was regulated to protect these clients not the local population. The East, especially, was regarded as a site of sexual licentiousness, and prostitution was often regarded as evidence for the necessity of colonialism. Yet, colonial officials argued that prostitution was essential as an outlet for aggressive male sexuality believed characteristic of soldiers and imperial men. In various parts of the Empire, military and civilian colonial authorities classified brothels according to the "race" of the clients frequenting them. First-class brothels served only white men, and in India, where European women worked in brothels, those, too, were considered first-class and were restricted to British soldiers. Third-class brothels were for local clients and providers. Unlike in the metropole, brothels were legalized and regulated. In Southeast Asian colonies, prostitutes were required to carry identity cards, and by the end of the nineteenth century, their photographs and the details about them had to be displayed at the brothel.

The regulation of prostitution in the interests of the military was not only a feature of Victorian Britain until the mid-1880s and in the British Empire for a longer time period, but it also became policy in Nazi Germany, as research by Annette Timm has shown.³⁹ When the Nazis first came to power they used the authority of the law to define prostitution and sexual activity with Jews as "asocial" and subject to punishment. They engaged in a strenuous effort to "clean up the streets," subjecting streetwalkers to strict penalties. However, many city administrators instituted brothels, insist-

ing that they were necessary to protect public health. From the mid-1930s state-sponsored brothels were legitimated by the government and promoted by the military. Prostitutes themselves, however, were denigrated as “racially inferior,” although their availability in brothels was seen to serve both hygienic and military functions. With the beginning of the war, women who were considered prostitutes were registered and restricted to brothels. If they left police and medical control they were sent to concentration camps. Women who frequented bars and other places of entertainment were subject to intensifying surveillance, and all public displays of female sexuality were seen as threatening the health of the population. At the same time both military and civilian brothels became increasingly available. Timm argues that public health ultimately was not the reason for the institutionalization of prostitution. Rather, protection against venereal disease was a “smokescreen” for the state’s concern to channel sexuality to the needs of its aggressive militarism and racial policies. Men could only be men and virile, effective soldiers if they were sexually satisfied and given the opportunity to perform masculine sexuality. Male sexuality and the nation’s military strength mirrored each other.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered questions concerning the sex/gender dichotomy and reviewed arguments suggesting that biology and the notion of biological sex itself have a history. It has discussed ways of thinking that retain some sort of notion of the material body while not assuming that the body is outside of culture. The chapter has also explored some of the historical studies that center on bodies and on sexuality using gender as a category of analysis. How might we summarize some of the ways that gender is critical both to histories of the body and to histories of sexuality? We have seen that the gendered bodies of both males and females and their sexual activities have been deployed as political symbols or symbols of the nation. In the late eighteenth century, gender difference as indicated by dress appears to have become critical in estab-

lishing men’s similarity to one another and difference from women in France during the Revolution and in Germany with the development of civil society. How gender difference was marked on the body of women became central to the Soviet regime in Central Asia and then became a focus of nationalist opposition to the regime. We have learned that while there have been historical changes in how same-sex sexual practices were viewed, anxiety about and hostility to same-sex sexual activity were associated with religious insistence upon marital procreative sex. While tolerance of same-sex sexual practices varied historically, sexual identities appear to have originated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And we have learned that both men who engaged in same-sex interactions and women who sexually desired other women often adopted gendered personae and might subvert society’s gender norms in their pursuit of same-sex erotic relationships. Finally, we have seen that the regulation of prostitution was not only due to anxieties about female sexuality, but also was related to particular understandings of masculinity and male sexuality and the “race” of the men and women involved. The next chapter will explore the argument that race/ethnicity, class, and gender are not independent dimensions of social life, but rather they are relationally constituted and intersect in historically important ways.