

***Doing Feminist History:***  
**A Project of Recovery and/or History of the Present**  
**WGST 50103; Fall 2018**

This feminist inquiry project will seek to contribute to ongoing work by students and faculty who are building a richer, more complex gendered history of TCU than is currently available to our university community. As an interventionist enterprise, this work aligns with decades-long work in women's history and feminist history. By presenting our work in a way that capitalizes on the strengths of new media, we aim to make our history-telling accessible to multiple audiences.



Men's Football 1909; Women's Basketball 1914

***What is Feminist History?***

This project might involve your doing work in *women's history*, but it might not. At the heart of your work will be a commitment to feminist ideas about (and practices for doing) *feminist history*. Thus, although a woman or women, a girl or girls, feminine-gendered experience or females' experience of gender might be your focus, your subject could take a different turn. For example, you could uncover and interpret data from men's involvement in bystander efforts addressing campus rape culture, or you might examine the gendered experience of several male faculty who took paternity leave, setting those stories in a larger context of questions about childrearing/nurturing as a gendered responsibility. Here's a quote from June Hannam's online essay on "Women's history, feminist history" aimed at making make this distinction between women's history and feminist history clearer:

Women's history and feminist history are often used interchangeably but this serves to play down the specific approach of feminist historians. . . . Although women are usually the subject of feminist history that is not invariably the case, since a feminist approach can be used to understand all areas of history. For example, Sonya Rose and Wendy Webster have brought feminist insights to the study of national identity, race and citizenship during the Second World War and the post-war years.

In that context, as Hannam has noted, one helpful approach today—even as we acknowledge the importance of work that has been done to recover often-marginalized experiences of *women* in history—is to think of “gender history” as a fuller framework for going feminist history, so that “the themes [previously] raised by women’s history” could be applied “to both sexes,” thereby “focus[ing] on the varied ways in which gender differences across time and place have been constructed and understood.” And she cites, as an example, a study of work and family in Birmingham, England, that examined class-inflected experiences of both sexes.

Making such a shift to “gender history” rather than a narrower “women’s history” does carry with it the danger that many years’ efforts to bring women’s lives and voices to the center from the margins could be undermined. One way of resisting that problem is to strive for a comparative, intersectional perspective. Another is to value the range of methodologies that have been developed (and are still being developed) in feminist inquiry focused on women’s history.

### ***Principles to Guide Our Work***

For our own seminar’s project applying feminist inquiry approaches to doing gender(ed) history, you might draw from a range of methods that feminist scholars have used in historical research. But you will certainly cultivate the following core principles associated with feminist history as a potentially subversive enterprise:

- **Feminist history emphasizes individual and collective agency—and not just among those officially in positions of leadership.**
- **Feminist history values (the study of) daily life experiences—and not just “major” turning-point events (such as, to cite a classic example of HISTory, battles in a given war).**
- **Feminist history examines how power differences have shaped the past in ways that continue to have an impact today.**
- **Feminist history understands that those doing historical research bring political concerns to their work that lead to questions about objectivity as a goal.**
- **Feminist history acknowledges the need for history-makers to continually question their own methods—i.e., to seek a self-reflexive brand of historiography.**

### ***How Can We Effectively Use New Media to Share Our Research?***

The presentation format you choose for this project should make your research accessible to audiences beyond an in-person occasion and should do so by capitalizing on some of the strengths of new media. The specific approach you choose might be shaped in part by what you find during your inquiry, in part by what new-media-supported formats you most like to use.

Examples of formats for sharing your research could include a blog, a PowerPoint, a Prezi, or a webpage or mini-website. Whatever format you select, be sure to save time to polish your presentation itself, paying particular attention to features that will make your research clear and compelling. For instance, if you choose to create a PowerPoint, you want to avoid having slides crammed with lots and lots of words. Similarly, if you choose an interactive PDF, you want to capitalize on various approaches for making hypertextual connections to engage your readers.

### ***What research and analysis methods should you use, and why?***

The methodologies used by leading practitioners of feminist historical inquiry have evolved (and continue to evolve) through interactive dialogue with the principles outlined above. While we'll all seek to abide by the principles, in other words, we can choose from an array of inquiry methods that have proven fruitful to such work. And we can mix methods. Examples include:

- Generating and interpreting text-based life histories (which might be gleaned from records like diaries and letters, supplemented by a range of institutional artifacts, such as college catalogs);
- Recovering and studying records of gendered social networks in action (e.g., by assembling and analyzing records such as newsletters or published stories about a campus group's work);
- Using interviews and/or surveys of sources who knew a specific person to generate a study of an exemplary or representative figure whose lived experiences may generate a compelling story (e.g., a graduate with an important personal profile, a retired faculty member, an influential community member involved with TCU leadership);
- Tapping into new types of data (such as social media discourse created by an individual and/or new sites of text-based engagement used by participants in gendered ways [e.g., twitter feeds, users' reviews of new video games, or the comments posted in response to online articles]);
- Participating in and simultaneously observing a gendered event or series of events and creating an ethnographic analysis in historical context;
- Linking one's own work to larger network of feminist history-making (e.g., blending a memoir of some aspect of your own TCU experiences with study of a relevant social context);
- Theorizing what Joan W. Scott has termed "the evidence of experience" by drawing on concepts from outside the discipline of history itself (e.g., psychoanalytic interpretations; literary theories).



Mary Coats Burnett

Because feminist thought and practice is inter-/trans-disciplinary, feminist history continues to be attentive to multiple disciplinary considerations of how to make useful, ethical knowledge. For instance, some feminist historians and theorists have been thinking about how conceptions of networks and related metaphors of rhizomes should affect their work. In that context, for example, they might seek out ways for studying *groups* of individual women or ways that interactions among men and women in a mixed-gender group can illuminate a particular historical problem or a distinct period.



Signage highlighting an ongoing campus project

Along related lines, feminist geographers have been thinking deeply about how to push back against histories that ignore space and place—i.e., the impact of location on events. Thus, for instance, scholars like Michael Lansing have critiqued longstanding histories of the US West as privileging the conquest story rather than cultivating a sense of “the frontier as a zone of intercultural contact or borderland” where “social relations” have influenced places and vice versa. For Lansing, an example of how feminist geography can inform feminist history would be represented by studying Theodore Roosevelt’s writings on his 1880s time in the Badlands as both responding and contributing to ideas about a “supremely masculine” environment (235-237). Along those lines, we might ask how a specific space within the unique social-geographical setting of TCU at one moment in time (e.g., pre-season football media day) reflected and sought to reinforce a particular vision of “(male) college student-athlete.”

For over a decade, meanwhile, feminist rhetoricians doing feminist historical scholarship have been taking into account their own and others’ feelings about their subjects of study—including a tendency to identify with appealing historical figures. So, as Patricia Bizzell points out in a salute to Jacqueline Royster’s *Traces of a Stream* history of black women’s rhetoric, feminist history-writing (in humanities fields, at least) has increasingly incorporated “acknowledgement of personal connection” (13)—a discursive move that some would argue very rightly also affirms that scholarship is, in itself, political and shaped by standpoint. Meanwhile, others (see, e.g., Pettegrew) would urge feminist histories to seek a brand of objectivity that takes personal perspective into account but nonetheless affirms an equally political need to honor what is empirically verifiable as true. Therefore, in the context of our own project of recovering TCU histories via a feminist inquiry, might we want both to mark out the limits and sources of our own perspectives and also to consider that not everyone’s “feelings” about (or versions of) a particular historical event or series of events at TCU would be equally trustworthy? Hmmmm.

## ***Steps for Doing Your Project***

Start with a topic you want to study, with a method (or set of methods) you want to try out, or a piece/set of data/primary material you want to build upon. Plan a question or cluster of interrelated questions to explore, consistent with principles of feminist history outlined above. Gather MORE data, which might include audio and video texts as well as print ones.

### **Prepare a presentation of your findings in a format using new media.**

Whatever format you choose, along with “traditional” written-out data and analysis in your own words, at least 3 of the 5 elements below should be included. (Note that you may use elements more than once if you like, and you may use elements in any order.)

- 1) **Artifact of a particular event/occasion or a specific site relevant to your topic;**
- 2) **Image (e.g., photograph, illustration, editorial cartoon);**
- 3) **Oral history or testimony (or an excerpt from one);**
- 4) **A document from beyond TCU that provides historical context for your topic (or information taken from such a document—e.g., a newspaper article from the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* or a chart from a government report);**
- 5) **Material from a secondary source.**

### **Note for graduate students:**

Graduate students’ projects must fold in a useful reference to at least one secondary source and must include a bibliography of at least three secondary sources used in the research and/or analysis process.

### **Additional requirement for all students:**

As noted above, one principle undergirding feminist history is the need for self-reflexivity. Thus, a first-person account of your learning process (what you learned about/through the process of doing feminist history) should be handed in as a separate piece of the assignment on the same day as you turn in your new-media-supported presentation. In your reflection, for example, you could share thoughts on possibilities for future work on your topic or reflections on how the project has impacted your view of the institution’s history. This written reflection should be no more than two pages, typed and double-spaced.

## ***How will your project be evaluated?***

Together, in class, we’ll create a rubric for assessing the project. During class sessions where we share drafts, we could (if you like) try out the rubric for informal evaluation of drafts.

## ***Where can you find examples of similar work?***

Here are a few examples based in the history of other institutions—Agnes Scott College, where Dr. Robbins (your instructor) was enrolled just after high school, and UNC-CH, from which she earned both a B.A. and an M.A.

“Confederate Memorials...” <https://tinyurl.com/yd3x42my>

“Biggest Upset....” <https://tinyurl.com/ybe5y7qb>

“Women Students. . . .” <https://tinyurl.com/yc7y36xe>



TCU's 1961 Quiz Bowl Team, Three Times a Winner  
From *TCU Magazine*: <https://tinyurl.com/ybk6s56v>

### **Project Bibliography: Resources to Assist Your Work**

Bizzell, Patricia. "Feminist methods of research in the history of rhetoric: What difference do they make?" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30.4 (2000): 5-17.

Damousi, Joy. "Does Feminist History Have a Future?" *Australian Feminist Studies* 29.80 (June 2014): 189-203.

Frank, Sarah Noble. "Feminist Historiography *As If*: Performativity and Representation in Feminist Histories of Rhetoric" *Rhetoric Review* 36.3 (2017): 187-199.

Graban, Tarez Samra. "From Location(s) to Locatability: Mapping Feminist Recovery and Archival Activity through Metadata." *College English* 76.2 Special Issue: The Digital Humanities and Historiography in Rhetoric and Composition (November 2013): 171-193.

Hamilton, Paula and Mary Spongberg. "Twenty Years On: Feminist Histories and Digital Media." *Women's History Review* 26.5 (2017): 671 ff.

Hannam, June. "Women's history, feminist history." *Making History: The Changing Face of the Profession in Britain.* *Making History: The changing face of the profession in Britain.* [http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/womens\\_history.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/womens_history.html)

- Hesford, Victoria and Lisa Diedrich. "On 'The evidence of experience' and its reverberations: An Interview with Joan W. Scott." *Feminist Theory* 15.2 (July 2014): 197-207.
- LaGreca, María Inés. "Hayden White and Joan W. Scott's feminist history: the practical past, the political present and an open future." *Rethinking History* 20.3 (2016): 395-413.
- Lansing, Michael. "Different methods, different places: feminist geography and new directions in US western history." *Journal of Historical Geography* 29.2 (2003): 230-247.
- Mari, Francesca. "The Microhistorian." *Dissent* 60 (Spring 2013): 81-85.
- McKinney, Cait. "Newsletter networks in the feminist history and archives movement." *Feminist Theory* 16.3 (September 2015): 309-328.
- Morantz-Sanchez, Regina. "Feminist Theory and Historical Practice: Rereading Elizabeth Blackwell." *History and Theory* (December 1992): 51-69.
- Morgan, Sue. "Theorizing Feminist History: A thirty-year retrospective." *Women's History Review* 18.3 (2009): 381-407.
- Mosmann, Petra and Laura Rademaker. "Editorial: Imagining Futures for Feminist History." *Lilith* (August 2015): 3-5.
- Pettegrew, John. "From Radicalism to Perspectivalism: US Feminist History, 1970-2010, and the Example of Linda Gordon." *Journal of Women's History* 30.1 (Spring 2018): 129-153.
- Sosulski, Marya R, Nicole T. Buchanan, and Chandra M. Donnell. "Life History and Narrative Analysis: Feminist Methodologies Contextualizing Black Women's Experiences with Severe Mental Illness." *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* (37.3 (September 2010): 29-57.
- Wilson, Robin. "A Well-Behaved Scholar Makes History." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 24, 2006): <https://www-chronicle-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/article/A-Well-Behaved-Scholar-Makes/10147>.

**A Note on Format:** As with other bibliographies distributed in our class, the above listing employs a format mixing several styles so as to provide all the data from sources that you would need for a reference list in any specific discipline. Consult an appropriate guide to adapt to particular styles such as APA, MLA, Chicago.