

Gender and Work in Early Modern Europe

Stockholm 10-11 May 2012



Abstracts of discussions from sessions 1-6



Session 1. Perspectives on Periodization 1

Speakers:

Judith Bennett, Report from the Middle Ages

Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Periodization in Women's Work

Themes from the discussion:

- Widows

It was commented (by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira to Judith Bennett) that widows were not just winding up their deceased husbands' businesses. Many historians have shown that women were a part of it all along. Judith Bennett agreed to that, but pointed out that women often were closing up their husbands' businesses, but that they certainly couldn't just step into the business [without prior experience].

Margaret Hunt remarked that there were pressures, from guilds etc., on widows who wished to continue their husbands' businesses to divest themselves of these businesses.

Ariadne Schmidt declared herself a fan of inserting women into economic history, and remarked that the number of widows continuing their husbands work also depended on [economic?] conjunctions.

- Women and armies

Hilde Sandvik commented (with references to research done by Maria Sjöberg) that the standing armies were regulated, and that pillages often were a consequence of low wages for the soldiers.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks: The state coordinated military with family economy, e.g. in Sweden where soldiers were given small farms where the women worked. This replaced the pillaging.

Anne Laurence remarked that the English Civil War was another place for women, not in the camp, but as suppliers of uniforms. She suspected the German mercenaries didn't have any uniforms; that uniforms were signs of state armies.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks confirmed that there were no uniforms in the German war, which was a problem for the combatants; who were they killing? She raised the question of who made the uniforms. Who decided on how many uniforms? Did soldiers get a uniform, or who paid for it? Where did they get colours for the dyeing of uniforms? Jan Lindegren didn't find that a problem: How much uniform do you need, a hat is sufficient!

Maria Ågren then widened the question by introducing the violence perpetrated against customs officers in Sweden. It was a great problem that they didn't get recognized as such. The uniform problem among such civil servants was even greater than among armies.

- Changes from Middle Ages to Early Modern Time

Hilde Sandvik commented on Judith Bennett's introduction that there were changes from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern times; there was a feminization of the work force, when men were gone to war, and the wages for female servants changed.

Judith Bennett answered Hilde Sandvik that there is a difference between wage workers and servants, servants working for room and accommodation, wage workers for day-wage. The sex-ratio in this work needs more studies.

Leigh Shaw-Taylor held that the optimist as well as the pessimist interpretations is insensitive to variations. There are massive geographical differences in women's work from the 18th century in Britain; every definite optimist or pessimist picture is wrong. You can't generalize this question; every picture has to be regional.

Julie Hardwick commented on Judith Bennett's key-not speech: You made us all sceptics, but scepticism does not mean no change. Part of scepticism is recognizing regional differences. She pointed out other important issues: consumption, the pressure on women, doing work to get wages, paying taxes, all part of the history of Early Modern Europe.

Judith Bennett remarked that there were huge things happening; if women's work didn't change, *that* would need an explanation.

- Women skills

Jan Lindegren then raised the question of women skills. In a peasant society where one third of the men were dead the women naturally did more than just household work. They were working alongside the remaining men; only the ploughing of very hard soil was left to the men. Did these women have the skills for running these farms? Of course they did. He referred to research by Carolina Durieu du Pradel, who in her master thesis showed that during the years 1750-1800, to our understanding, every widow under the age of 38 remarried, no matter how many, or few, children they had; the reason, according to Jan Lindegren's interpretation, was that they had shown that they could manage a household.

- Empowerment

Alexandra Shepard highlighted that the question of women getting empowered by their work is absolutely essential; but what do we mean with empowered or disempowered? A high rib excludes even men. Is a woman empowered by her work relative to men, to community, or what?

Judith Bennett said empowerment was a question of how they controlled their land, wages, etc., and referred to Jane Whittle.

Jane Whittle said that women worked in the lowest sectors, and she was sceptical whether that empowered them. That they had property didn't necessarily empower them either; landholdings went down for women in the late Middle Ages. We shouldn't be assuming that they were empowered just because they did things.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks reminded us to think of what people want; we think of work as empowering, but what people really want is to be able to stop working. That is empowering! Think of the status that comes from not having to work.

- Some other points

Jan Lindegren also thought we have given too much weight to property in men-women relations. There are other aspects as well. Peter Hagendorf says in his diary: I got married to a woman in a regiment, and so got into the regiment.

Jane Whittle took up the theme of women spending, of women obsessed with clothing. Also men spend; we shall be careful in giving women the greater role in consumption.

Session 2. Perspectives on Periodization 2

Speakers:

Carmen Sarasúa, Towards an Economic History that acknowledges women's work

Hilde Sandvik, Perspectives on periodization in preindustrial Nordic countries. 1500 -1850

Themes from the discussion:

- 18th-century discussions on women's work

Ann Ighe remarked (to Sarasúa's talk) that the same pro-modernist arguments regarding women's and men's work figured in the Swedish 18th century. The phrase "proper to their sex" concerning gendered work is crucial here.

Carmen Sarasúa said that there were voices in the 1780s to forbid women certain works, but other voices that wanted to allow them free access. Reformers said there was no need to forbid women certain works: What women can do, they will do; what they can't do, they will not do. There was an influence of Adam Smith. In the late 18th century we have in Spain the first great debate about what work women and men could/should do. Apart from the arguments there was also the fact that women were a cheaper work force.

- Guilds

Dag Lindström remarked that both speakers emphasized the importance of the abolition of guilds. But do we know in what respect it was important? In what respect did things change? Did the gendered division in labour change? He also pointed out that it was legally possible from 1720 for women in Sweden to apply for the right to establish themselves outside guilds, but it seldom happened.

Hilde Sandvik: The story of guilds is also a story of fashion. When sewing became easier it disappeared as a profession. There is also the question of regulations. It was easier for the guilds to control business if they had the right to do it. But it's a long story, not just a story of regulations.

Carmen Sarasúa said that guilds became outdated when they came into contradiction with the market forces. She didn't think the abolition of guilds was important for women's work. Guilds had before then been denouncing working women, so they clearly existed, but it didn't matter much. The Napoleonic wars and the increased demand for goods had greater importance.

Amy Ericsson remarked that guilds, at least in England, did adopt themselves to changing circumstances, so then do prolong their existence.

Maria Ågren then made two comments, the first on Hilde Sandvik's point, that the economy in the Nordic countries was strictly regulated. I think, Ågren said, that it is worth discussing more when we discuss periodization. Maybe compulsion increases in Scandinavia, but decreases in other parts of Europe. This is interesting to pay attention to in a gender/work perspective.

- Support oneself

Her second comment was about costs: We shall keep in mind that women were cheaper, at least in a wage perspective. But there were also petitions from women for the right of selling goods, etc. (studied by Sofia Ling). I suspect that allowing this was partly about reducing the relief costs of cities, but partly also about the obligation to support oneself. It is more complicated than just a question of the prize of women's work.

Hilde Sandvik agreed: especially in the towns it was thought that women should be allowed to support themselves.

- Seasonal work migrations

Carmen Sarasúa then had a question to Hilde Sandvik concerning men's seasonal work migrations. Did they bring the earnings home, or did they wholly or partly spend it?

Hilde Sandvik answered that the men often had big debts; often they brought home more debts than income.

Session 3. Comparing the Gendered Division of Work across Time and Place 1

Speakers:

Craig Muldrew, The Contribution of Female Wage Earnings to Family Income In England 1660-1780

Christopher Pihl, The value of work for men and women working for the Crown in sixteenth century Sweden

Themes from the discussion:

- Earnings, marriage and household

Mark Hailwood and Craig Muldrew discussed how earnings of spinning contributed to household status. Income played a part in their reputation in society, as did education and skills.

Julie Hardwick asked about the value of income beyond cash. Could they e.g. marry younger? Margaret Hunt wondered if women took job as spinsters for better marriage opportunities. Craig Muldrew remarked that evidence is scarce, but marriage ages decreased, as did the celibates, in the 18th century. Yes, they probably tried to enhance their marriage opportunities.

Sophie McGeevor referred to contemporary studies that show that the greater women's part of income, the greater their freedom in household or family.

- Children

This was followed by discussions, initiated by a question from Xuesheng You, of children in spinning. Were women and children substituted for each other in spinning, as in the industrial revolution? Craig Muldrew summarized that in the early modern period the wage declined with falling age. There is a lot of information on boys, e.g. they get the same pay as their fathers at the age of 15. But spinning is piece-time work that varied with every boy or girl. It's not substituted as in the industrial revolution.

- Skill and education

Following a question by Ann Ighe to Christopher Pihl there was a discussion on the meaning of the word “skill” in early modern times. Craig Muldrew said that skilfulness certainly was a defining factor for evaluation of work, and referred to a court case where a man witnessed that women were more skilful. Margaret Hunt remarked that it is difficult to use the term skill for certain tasks. Jane Whittle said that while historians use the term ‘skill’, the contemporaries often talked of ‘art’. Historians have assumed that men’s works are more skilled because they have formal education (e.g. apprenticeships). Judith Bennett thought the term ‘skill’ was not just an historian’s invention.

In connection with this, Maria Ågren turned to Christopher Pihl and raised the question of differences in expectations; men were put in educational programs to learn, women were assumed to know, but not looked upon as able to be further educated. Were they looked upon as not having potential (in Aristotelian meaning)? Can this difference be viewed from the perspective that women just are, and cannot be developed?

Christopher Pihl referred to Per Brahe’s *Oeconomia*, that supposed that boys’ education were longer, and girls’ shorter. It was not necessarily that the girls lacked potential, but they shouldn’t be educated.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks remarked that terms like ‘secret’, ‘skill’, ‘education’, ‘learning art’, ‘Gelehrtekunst’, was a way of saying that women can’t do that. It was a marker of status.

Leigh Shaw-Taylor pointed to a problem regarding ‘skill’. It is supposed to take a long time to learn, and it’s supposed to be rare. Men tend to end up with the latter skill, which increases the value and remuneration of their work. Laundry, on the other hand, is no rare commodity.

Craig Muldrew remarked that women and children are often lumped together in historical studies, and asked whether that’s the case in the sources. And if the sources are such, do we know they really worked together? Were women spinning and taking care of children at the same time, and children then came to do the same work? It is hard to find evidence, when work was done in households.

Alexandra Shepard said that women gave informal training to their own children; that’s not so different from apprenticeships.

Ann-Catrin Östman said that skill and marriage seemed to go together. A farm-maid could make butter, but it was the married woman who did it. The married status conferred ‘skill’. To this Christopher Pihl remarked that to work in the manors he has investigated, you had to be married. Craig Muldrew didn’t see that connection between married and skill, other than the skilful got more earnings.

Amy Erickson ended the discussion by pointing out that the married status in a household conferred not so much ‘skill’, as the ability to train others, just as a master in a craft.

Session 4. Comparing the Gendered Division of Work across Time and Place 2

Speakers:

Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, Gender and work identities for Black-Africans in early modern Portugal

Dag Lindström, Gender and work in guild organized trades – some methodological and comparative issues

Themes from the discussion:

- Guilds

Hilde Sandvik opened by pointing to guild courts as important sources, including e.g. discipline cases. Widows could use guild courts to discipline journeymen.

Dag Lindström said he hadn't yet come across examples of women using guild courts. The guilds in Sweden were ordered to find journeymen for the widows, but in the court records there are no women. The guilds tried to find those who violated the guild rules, but he has never found a woman accused. That could be an interesting blind spot. Were women, even when they produced, seen as a no-threat to the masters?

- Slaves

Hilde Sandvik asked Abreu-Ferreira the question: Where did conflicts go [in Early Modern Portugal]? Did slaves have any legal roles?

Darlene Abreu-Ferreira said there were laws to protect slaves, but court records have not survived. There are however examples of resistance, like running away, etc. To a question from Judith Spicksley she confirmed that there certainly is evidence of different treatments of boys and girl slaves, when it comes to manumissions, etc.

Margaret Hunt then asked Abreu-Ferreira about the nature of slavery in the Mediterranean. It is said to have been more like servitude, and the boundaries between family, apprentices, and slaves are more blurred. It is complicated, and the evidence sometimes anecdotal. Are there examples of arrangements for slaves to get married? Did the children of slaves and slave-owners sometimes inherit?

Darlene Abreu-Ferreira said it was sometimes, according to chronicles, seen as part of a Christianization. They did sometimes inherit. But we have to proceed carefully not to whitewash.

Julie Hardwick remarked that slaves in Spanish America had legal status. That they are found in the court records indicate legal status. That sexuality was an asset, as Judith Bennett said, could be a possibility to investigate here. Keeping in mind the huge number of people that were slaves in Portugal, what effect did they have on gender and work for the rest of the population?

Abreu-Ferreira said that there were obvious protest against black work, and the King prohibited it. But she couldn't say more, as she is just beginning the study.

Göran Rydén raised a question on the role of religion in slavery; e.g. were the slaves Christians when they arrived? Abreu-Ferreira said she didn't know yet, but hoped to have a

look on inquisitorial records to find out if the slaves actually conformed to Christianity. Christianization could have been a duty of the buyer, but she didn't know.

Karin Hassan Jansson then turned to the colour issue and wondered whether former slaves inheriting could be seen in the records. Abreu-Ferreira hoped to be able to follow a few such cases in the archives; what did become of them?

Amy Erickson raised the question of how to separate black women from slaves. She also pointed to households as a way of studying these things. Margaret Hunt pointed to the importance of studying groups of women, like black women in Portugal, not just women.

- Verb-oriented method

A question from Merry Wiesner-Hanks then turned the discussion to normative sources and particularly if they can be used in the verb-oriented method. Maria Ågren said that the GaW-project is interested in actual time-use, activities possible to link to an (not necessarily named) individual. That excludes many normative sources like legal codes, but not entirely. Normative statements in court records, as orders to perform work, is included if they are directed to an individual. Dag Lindström said that normative sources are useful in the study of guilds, especially if they can be combined with court records through the verb-oriented method.

- Masculinity and men's work

Ann-Cathrin Östman wanted to make masculinity visible, and asked Dag Lindström if he has found ways to differentiate between men. Dag Lindström said that the titles (master, apprentice, etc.) could be deceiving. We need to search for what kind of work they actually did, or not did. He had found many different household structures, but never one without at least one woman. In the households we also find other men (besides apprentices, journeymen), like sons, workers, etc. We need to diversify among men; he hoped the verb-oriented method could work here.

Xuesheng You asked Dag Lindström how he defined men's work. Shopping is women's work. Are you equally generous when it comes to men; is beer drinking work? Dag Lindström said that many have focused on women's work, but naturally men's work is equally interesting, and, yes, beer drinking could be work.

Session 5. Gendered Work and Gendered Identities

Speakers:

Julie Hardwick, Gender, Work, and Identity

Alexandra Shepard, Work, occupational identities, gender and the life-cycle

Themes from the discussion:

The participants commented on the "excellent close reading of sources" (Hilde Sandvik).

- Honesty

There was a repeated discussion on connotation and meaning of the terms 'honest' and 'honest work'. It could be part of a strong Protestant discourse, but also a way of expressing

honesty, as in not cheating costumers, and transparency, as when women borrowed money. For women it could also be a way of saying "I use my body in an honest way, I'm not a prostitute". Amy Erickson said that it was more likely for a woman to be accused of theft than of prostitution. Alexandra Shepard pointed to the honesty-terms association with concepts of sufficiency, as in "able, honest and sufficient man".

Julie Hardwick said that men's credit were undermined by e.g. impropriety, especially married men's, the same way as women were. Alexandra Shepard remarked that when honesty was disputed by others, it was about idleness, ale-drinking, etc.; both men and women were discredited by frequenting ale houses. Mark Hailwood pointed out that you sometimes had to go to the ale houses to be seen, to demonstrate credit worthiness, but had to make a balance here. Sofia Ling remarked that you find language of honour also in Swedish sources, where women were arguing that they had to be allowed to work in decent ways.

- Changes over time

Fredrik Sandgren put a question to Alexandra Shepard concerning changes over time, to which she answered:

- Living by one's labour, i.e. wage labour, was an answer that got less prominent over time. It was an answer connected with poverty.
- Languages of credit and worth diminished more quickly than the volume of business (?).
- Over time the answer "none of your business" got more common in the whole population.
- Defining their worth in income versus in goods may also change.
- There was also a couple of labourers answering they lived "handsomely" by their labour.

- Occupational titles and self-descriptions

To a question from Leigh Shaw-Taylor, Julie Hardwick said that it was unusual that the French parish records registered both marriage and occupation. If occupation is not mentioned it is doubtful if any conclusions can be drawn concerning work identities. Amy Erickson pointed to the importance of who did the recording, and who reported the titles; was it the women themselves or clerks? Julie Hardwick said that women could be speaking in the depositions.

Mark Hailwood then asked whether the self-descriptions as craftsmen or tradesmen in the material Alexandra Shepard has studied, suggested a rhetorical claim of higher status, and whether that was open also to women. Shepard said it was difficult to evaluate these answers. There were more men and fewer women in this group. People in this group could often be hiring others to do the work. They were claiming a source of independence, a higher status, when they answered trades or crafts. She was unsure whether the language is gender dependent here. It is a disparate group.

Maria Ågren also commented on the occupational titles. They were also in Sweden more common to men, while household titles were more common to women. It could be useful

however to ponder what the titles really mean, e.g. in Sweden there is the doubling of the term 'hustru', suggesting both a marital status and a status of honesty. Julie Hardwick and several others remarked that the same doubling of 'wife' can be seen in early American language; there was also the use of 'goodwife', a term that was all about honesty.

- Geographical differences

Sofia Ling asked Alexandra Shepard about differences between rural and urban areas. Shepard said that there were differences, e.g. women spinning were primarily a rural thing. Women living by their labour were few in London, more frequent in rural areas and market towns. Market towns were not so different from the surrounding rural areas, and other towns were more similar to market towns, than to London.

- Patriarchal two breadwinner model

Maria Ågren suggested that the "patriarchal two breadwinner model", a concept coined by Klas Åmark for the 20th Century, could be a useful term also for the Early Modern time. That suggestion was seconded by Merry Wiesner-Hanks.

Session 6. Digital Possibilities

Speakers:

Leigh Shaw-Taylor, How new technology has transformed the possibilities for the quantitative analysis of women's work in the past: some examples

Margaret Hunt, Women's History and the Digital Future

Maria Ågren, The need for collaborative work in the Humanities: The GaW example

Themes from the discussion:

- Census records

A question from Carmen Sarasúa concerned the sources of Leigh Shaw-Taylor's project. He responded that there are limitations in the census records. Women were asked if they were regularly employed and any woman with full-time job is likely to be enumerated. But a lot of work is likely to be omitted, since it was not full-time. There was also a presumption that all farmers' wives worked in agriculture. The census data were originally collected with a medical interest in people's health.

- Crossroads

Jane Whittle talked about the necessity of both large-scale quantitative studies and deep qualitative studies. There followed a discussion in which Maria Ågren remarked that there has been a bifurcation in Swedish historiography between quantitative and qualitative history. The Gender and Work project and its database are envisioned to overcome that, and represent a third standpoint.

Hilde Sandvik and Margaret Hunt pointed to the possibility of interaction with local historians and genealogists on the internet.

Merry Wiesner-Hanks commented that Shaw-Taylor's project has given us a new view of the 19th century economic history: We have always talked about railroads and iron, let's instead

talk about straw hats! The new technologies show us new things, answers to questions we didn't even think of asking.

- Funding and maintenance

There was also a discussion on the maintenance of databases and the funding necessary for this. Several speakers asked what we should do with all the materials, digital photos of documents that we possess. Should they be put in a database or on the internet?

Margaret Hunt warned that databases cost money and if you do it badly, it's not being done again. She was also worried that the collection of data in databases is not done systematically, and that's the problem with crowd-sourcing.

Jan Lindegren commented on digitization and databases. To digitize materials is one thing, to set up databases like the GaW is another thing. Databases are expensive to set up, but expensive also to maintain. Researchers should be able to use them even in the future, so they have to be maintained, and people being employed for this. Universities could to a degree do this, but in the end it's a question for governments and government funding. Special places for the maintenance of databases have to be set up at national archives or national libraries.

Alexandra Shepard pointed to several issues: rare manuscripts could get digitized, but how do you make manuscript sources searchable, no one has come up with a solution to that problem yet. She also called for collective, collaborative solutions, but how? How to get databases to speak to each other? How to get and maintain the same methodology? We need a Board! Judith Bennett: God forbid! We don't want to be more controlled. Margaret Hunt said it wasn't need for any overarching governmental body, but we need to have some established standards from the start of digitization and database projects.

Benny Jacobsson