**Single Women in History 1000-2000**

**Abstracts**

**AUTTI, Mervi M.Soc.Sc. University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland Cultural history and Women’s Studies THE MISSES AUTTI´S 1920s : A Gaze at the Northern Modern through Photography**

My doctoral theses explores the resources on the margins of society that the two photographer sisters, Lyyli and Hanna Autti, could draw on to empower them and enable them to work as unmarried, female photographers in the 1920s. At that time, the town of Rovaniemi in Lapland, afforded young, single women new emancipatory opportunities and their empowerment—missy culture, if you like—pointed the way for other women in Lapland to follow. Through their activities and photographs, the sisters dismantle the great historical narrative of Lapland and its iconic clichés; in their narrative, the peripheral North exposes a totally new side of itself. The micro-historical approach adopted here serves to illuminate a community, a specific locality in the North of Finland.

The foundations of this interdisciplinary research lie within cultural history—micro-history in particular—women’s studies and historical sociology. The sisters stood in relief against their environment, leaving traces of themselves in the form of photographs. Traditionally, old photos serve as illustrations and ascertain the truth of the text they accompany. To me, however, old photos are a resource. Thus, the method of interpretation that I have developed, based on the standard micro-historical approach, clue method and a thorough inspection of photos from the viewpoint of cultural correctness, enhance our understanding of the validity and use of visual materials in research.

In my presentation I will discuss the photographs as source of historical research in a family album context. How to write history according to photographs? What images tell us?

**I’m working as a researcher in a Finnish Academy project *VOLUNTAS POLARIS. Individual agency and societal emancipation in the Northern context.*The project is led by Professor Aini Linjakumpu, D.Soc.Sc.**

The key concepts of my research are microhistory, women’s history, North, emancipation, empowerment, missy culture, gendered agency, creative margin, border, iconic cliche, cultural model story.

**BEATTIE, Cordelia, University of Edinburgh :  Medieval Single Women:  Categorizing Women in Late Medieval England**

In 1316 Semeine, son of Henry le Servant, appeared before the King’s Bench on a charge of having abducted Isabel, the wife of William de Cornwall, and taken away some of William’s goods. Semeine’s defence was that on the day of the alleged charge he considered Isabel to be his legal wife and had done so for more than a year. Further, ‘this Isabel at the time of the making of the contract of matrimony between her and the same Semeine and for days and years before *was living as a single person at Great Yarmouth and was regarded as single*’. Isabel, though, was evidently ‘single’ only in the sense that she did not live with her legal husband. Semeine went on to claim that William had successfully brought a cause before an ecclesiastical court to have Semeine’s and Isabel’s marriage annulled, on the grounds that she had already contracted marriage with William.

This example reveals the existence of a conceptual distinction between single and married women, that the distinction was considered to be an important one to maintain in practice, but also that the apparently clear-cut division between the single and the married could be blurred by individuals, including the women being labelled (for example, by living alone in a new area). Although the issue of who medievals thought of as a single woman might seem an arcane one, the example illustrates that at times this could be a real concern for people in pre-modern England. My paper will focus not only on *who*medieval people thought of as a singlewoman, but in *how* they thought about the single woman.

It is often said that all women in the Middle Ages were virgins, wives or widows – that is, married, formerly married or awaiting marriage - and that there was no concept of the ‘single woman’. However, ‘single woman’ was a contemporary term, used in Middle English from the fourteenth century, and had earlier equivalents in the Latin ‘sol[ut]a’ and the Anglo-Norman ‘femme sole’. Rather than use a modern definition and argue for its medieval existence, I take as my starting point the question ‘who was the single woman?’. I interrogate various uses of the category to uncover why such a group was marked out and what this reveals of wider concerns about women and the social structure. Under close study the apparent strict classification of women into maids, wives, and widows breaks down, and it can be shown that concerns about sexual activity or chastity, or legal and economic independence could have the affect of differentiating between types of unmarried women.

**BEER, Frances, Graduate Programme in English, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada:   Radical Mystics: Hildegard, Mechthild, Julian and the power of being single”**

In this paper I’d like to consider the lives/careers of three medieval women: Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Julian of Norwich.  All were single, and significant figures in their own time.

An abbess, writer, visual artist, musician, scientist, preacher, and social reformer, Hildegard defied male hierarchy and founded her own all-female house.  From the pulpit she denounced the corruption of the church; and she wrote scathing letters to contemporary secular and spiritual male leaders. Mechthild’s work was distinguished by a representation of the erotic, mutual bond between the soul and her divine lover, and a depiction of the Virgin as the equal of her son; also an outspoken critic of clerical corruption, she eventually had to flee her béguinage and take refuge at a safe convent.  Julian, an anchoress, described an intense identification with the crucified Christ, whereby she became a kind of earthly counterpart/intercessor in the process of salvation; perhaps most striking is her discussion of the Motherhood of God.  Her courage is remarkable in that she was so theologically radical even as Lollards were regularly being burnt near to her anchorhold.

The medieval attitude towards virginity is germane: virgin women were not as ‘good’ as men, but they came a lot closer than married women.  In later European literature it’s seen as a distinct liability to be a spinster; but not so in these women’s time.  Possibly their status as single/virgins strengthened the sense of entitlement that their writings so powerfully reveal.

Reverence for *virginitas* is obviously linked to the rampant misogynist fear of female carnality faced by these women. Essential to the contribution of each is not only a refutation of this misogyny--e.g. Hildegard suggests a female co-creator; Mechthild’s and Julian’s Jesus comes very close to actually wanting to be a woman--but also the dualism upon which it is based.

Collectively they argue for the significant generative/spiritual power of women; the rejection of patriarchy and the notion of evil as an independent principle; the equality of souls; and a holistic view of the creation.

**BONCHEVA, Tsvetana,  Ethnographic Institute with Museum - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria:  Regarding the Problem of Women’s Religious Celibacy among the Bulgarian Catholics in Plovdiv Region during the First Half of the 20th Century (using materials from the villages General Nikolaevo and Sekirovo)**

The report is devoted to the institution of the village nuns. This institution is a form of women’s religious celibacy among the Bulgarian Catholics in Plovdiv Region during the first half of the 20th century. Unlike the monastery nuns, the village nuns do not have a cenobitic lifestyle but they reside at their parents’ home, take informal oral vows for celibacy and perform different duties connected with the church and the religious practices of the local communities.

The analysis focuses on the following aspects of the village nuns’ institution: its quantitative parameters, demographic dimensions, construction of the institution, its structure and functions. The report presents the highlighted aspects in the light of the relation between tradition and religious canon, examining how this relation reflects the local effects of the process of modernisation, going on in Bulgarian society during the first half of the 20th century. The suggested presentation of the institution of the village nuns holds the prospect of challenging the one-sided concept of religion as a male-dominated sphere. The relationship between clergy and male celibacy on the one hand, and the institution of the village nuns and female celibacy on the other hand, could be perceived as a projection of the fractal dichotomy male-female, corresponding to the opposition strategy- tactics (according to Certeau’s concept about the strategic and tactical types of actions). Hence, the question arises how the existence of the village nuns’ institution fits into the paradigm of female tactics and whether this institution can be viewed as a unique turning point at which female tactics turn into strategies and bring about certain power shifts affecting the male-female relation. On the basis of the available resources, an attempt has been made at juxtaposing the suggested institution with different forms of celibacy characteristic for the catholic world. This juxtaposition without pointing out the uniqueness of the institution reveals its distinctive features, produced by the local Bulgarian tradition.

The territorial centre of the research, focused on the villages General Nikolaevo and Sekirovo (now residential districts of the town of Rakovski, situated at 25 km north-east of Plovdiv), has been chosen on account of the fact that during the stated period, the two localities were the greatest catholic settlements in the region with ethnically and religiously homogeneous population, which suggests a minimal and indirect influence of other ethnic or religious groups on the local lifestyle. It is only in these two villages that the nun’s institution develops to a considerable degree and preserves its viability for a long time, which makes its more comprehensive study possible. The time span chosen in the research is a period of transformations, when the modern age, interacting with tradition in a specific way, strives to assert itself as a basic principle of Bulgarian society.

The sources used in the research are from different types-census registers, the parochial books Liber Baptizatorum, Liber Mortiorum and Liber Status Animarum (only for Sekirovo), civil registers of births and deaths, household registers, various publications of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria, ethnographic field material, collected by the author. The methodology employed combines various quantitative and qualitative methods: the aggregate method, the gatekeeper and snowball methods, structured and semi-structured interviews, the biographical and the comparative methods.

**CHALUS, Elaine, Bath Spa University, UK :  ‘She was universally reputed, received and acted as a single woman’:  perceptions of the legally single woman in the eighteenth century**

On 10 February 1769, Elizabeth Chudleigh, later to become notorious as the bigamist duchess of Kingston , was declared to be a single woman by the ecclesiastical courts. Her suit of jactitation against Augustus John Hervey, Lord Bristol, while undoubtedly collusive, had been successful. Both were now technically free to marry.

 Suits of jactitation were brought when ‘one of the parties boafts or gives out that he or fhe is married to the other, whereby a common reputation of their matrimony may enfue’. They required the defendant to prove the marriage or be charged to perpetual silence on the subject. As a result, these cases turned, not only on legal understandings of marriage, but also on contemporary perceptions of ‘single-ness’. As sources of single women’s involvement in the social and economic arenas and, especially, as insights into how they were viewed by their peers, they bear further examination. Beginning with Elizabeth Chudleigh’s suit of jactitation and extending through a selection of other eighteenth-century jactitation cases, this paper will explore the importance of reputation, reception and action in the legal construction of the single woman.

**CHAMBERS, Lee, University of Colorado in Boulder, USA: Singlehood, Sibship, and Sororiality: Challenging the “Rule of the Brother” in Nineteenth-Century America**

There remains a tendency to describe unmarried women as superfluous and unattached, or as dependents who burden or serve others. This is particularly the case in the first half of the 19th century when domestic ideology proclaimed it so even as demographics provided a disadvantageous marriage pool for New England women.  Yet single women were rarely unattached, but rather deeply embedded in intra-generational kinship networks. That grounding had political implications. Indeed, we need to consider Carole Shammas’ observation that historians view of the family structure as the result but not the cause of political and economic events works to relegate the family to the private and non-governmental realm.

During the first half of the 19th century, American families developed class-specific strategies to respond to economic uncertainty and take advantage of transformations in the economy (Ryan, Farber, Farrell, Levy, Peter Hall). These included reducing fertility, retaining children in the paternal home for extended periods, later marriage and child-bearing, investing in the education and professional training of sons by means of paid work of their sisters, and the establishment of female-headed, sibling households. In the early Republic, American fathers gave up control over their children’s marriages and communities gave up policing the appropriateness of alliances.  The result was that fathers’ lost control over new household formation and intra-generational transmission of property (Shammas). Siblings stepped in, mapping kinship networks onto new financial structures  (interlocking directorships, banks, insurance companies), accessing investment capital, funding economic activity, developing continuity of wealth, and consolidating class standing. Among the foremost of their strategies in this effort was marriage: sibling exchange marriage, marriage to a dead wife’s sister, and cousin marriage. While under fire in Great Britain, no less a personage than Supreme Court Chief Justice Storey proclaimed these “the best kind” of American marriages.

Siblings also consolidated political influence through marriage. Women  contributed to these durable bonds, making matches and augmenting connections through shared tasks, visits, and conversation (Glover, Baptist, Billingsley). Sisters not only provided psychological and social nurturing, housekeeping, and nursing, they also offered intellectual stimulation and political awareness. Catherine Allgor, for example, describes women manipulating personal relationships rooted in natal and marital connections to produce a patronage system that defied the rhetoric of republicanism. Although she does not utilize sibship as an analytical category, sisters played a crucial role in the complex set of social relations that governed this system of patronage.

Sibling networks played a significant role in the voluntary associations and political parties that moved America toward democracy as well. Perhaps as many as 70% of women joined moral reform and benevolent societies as part of a family unit (Hanson). Julie R. Jeffrey and Anne Boylan argue that if family ties brought women into social activism, they did not serve to keep them there. I would argue that sisters did just that—particularly unmarried sisters and widows who replicated their domestic labor in public work by keeping married sisters and sisters-in-law informed, committed and active when pregnancy, sickness, and child care reoriented the attention of married women to the domestic arena. Single sisters provided the conduit for information, the spur to participation, and the organization of kinship toward political ends. They brought  and read newspapers, tracts and speeches to busy mothers and housekeepers conducting their domestic business.  Prior to marriages that dispersed their ranks, sisters’ shared work embedded them in reciprocal relations that extended outward from the home to politics. Single sisters and retained their capacity to arrange and organize time and activity among their female kin over the life cycle.

So too, antebellum sisters did not learn solely dependency within the family. In educating, clothing, nursing, marrying off, and advising their brothers, they learned to wield a gendered power while developing a jaundiced view of male privilege. These too, sisters carried into their political work. And when they met resistance on the grounds of their gender, they continued to work their relationships in accordance with the skills and expectations they had developed in handling their siblings, challenging the “rule of the brother.”

This paper will argue that family structure, roles, and specifically the work of unmarried sisters played a crucial role in the expansion of American democracy. Through the lens of one family of antislavery activists (six sisters, two brothers, only two of whom married, two sisters-in-law, and a brother-in-law), who dominated the Garrisonian Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society. In utilizing the analytical framework of sibship, it will explore the labor of single sisters in organizing, funding, and promoting political activity from a base in family connections, roles, and labor, and the challenge they posed to the “rule of the brother.”

**DEBOICK, Sophia, London, UK:** **‘…all man…is synfull…of which man I am a member’ –  Julian of Norwich, Sin, Singleness and Socialisation**

Julian of Norwich, like other anchorites, was expected to live as one dead to the world.  During the ceremony marking the new anchorite’s entrance to her cell, the sacrament of Extreme Unction was performed, signifying her spiritual rebirth, but also her social death. Anchorites were subject to extreme clerical censure, and the imperative disseminated in writings such as *De Institutione Inclusarum*, the *Ancrene* *Wisse* and the *Myrour of Recluses* is that their relationship with the outside world should be one of fear, suspicion and silence. But investigation of Julian's world suggests a very different reality. Once inside the anchorage Julian became an active participant in the economically thriving and spiritually vibrant community around her, her status as a source of wisdom, both religious and worldly, meaning that she entered into a far richer social existence than she could have ever hoped for as a wife, widow, spinster, mother or nun.

But Julian was also part of a unique East Anglian religious network, where monks of all orders, anchorites, friars, hermits, priests and lay religious met casually, exchanging their religious experiences and providing support to each other in their spiritual endeavours. The existence of this community of single people of both genders forces us to reassess our ideas about the social relations that were possible between late medieval men and women. Using Margery Kempe’s famous book and her account of her meeting with Julian as a valuable and vivid insight into why and how these people interacted, we will see that the reality of being a single religious woman could differ wildly from the ideals of clerical thought. Here we will also discover the power of this network’s influence, as it was through her participation in this remarkable community that Julian came to reassess her idea of sin, her opinion of her fellow Christians and ultimately her own identity.

**DOLLARD, Catherine,  Denison University, Granville USA:  *Fräulein oder Frau*?  German Women between Marriage, Work, and War, 1850-1919**

Terms of address serve as social and cultural signifiers.  Appellations such as Mr. and Mrs., Miss and Ms., Doctor and Professor, offer both introduction and categorization, providing an instant summary of cohort, life status, and profession.  German women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced clear rules when it came to legal titles.  Infant females, girls, and unmarried women were legally signified by the term ‘*Fräulein*,’ while married, divorced, and widowed women earned the designation of ‘*Frau*.’  But in Prussia and then in unified Germany , some women challenged the clear rules of the name.  Through the various associations of the organized women’s movement, female activists sought to raise attention to the ways in which the term ‘*Fräulein*’ froze unwed adult women in the state of childhood and prohibited them from being taken seriously in workplaces and in civic life.  While representatives of the women’s movement argued on behalf of German women in general, the laws of the state permitted a more particularized path by which titular dissatisfaction could be expressed.  Individual German women could petition the Ministry of the Interior in order to request a legal title change, moving from ‘*Fräulein*’ to ‘*Frau*’ without the benefit of marriage.

For the conference on “Single Women in History,” I propose a paper which will present the findings of an archival investigation into all petitions submitted by women to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior from 1850 to 1870 and to the German Ministry of the Interior from 1871 to 1919.  I have gathered these petitions together in the course of visits to Berlin ’s Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitzn 2004 and 2005. The petitions emerged at a sporadic rate (no more than a handful per year) from the mid-nineteenth century until the early 1890s.  The rate then picked up in the early twentieth century, a time when women began to be admitted to universities and were permitted membership in political parties, amounting to as many as twenty per year in the period leading up to World War I.  During the Great War, a new office was created in order to handle the enormous flow of petitions that emerged through the upheaval of a society at war. While other scholars have referred to the existence of these petitions, my study will be the first to assess the petitions in their entirety.

This conference paper will have three goals.  First, the paper will categorize the petitions in terms of region, age, religion, social class (inasmuch as possible), basis of petition, and success or failure of the petition.  Second, the paper will qualitatively assess what sorts of factors inspired women to seek a title change without being married.  Third, the paper will evaluate this archival source collection with regard to extant scholarship on the German women’s movement of the imperial period.  The petitions to the Ministry of the Interior that serve as the foundation of this paper offer a unique evidentiary lens into the changing conditions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female lives.  In so doing, they get at the heart of the question of the female vocation as it pertained to single women in pre-imperial and imperial Germany.

**EVANS, Tanya,  Centre for Contemporary British History, Institute of Historical Research,  University of London : Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Britain**

I am in the second year of an ESRC funded project on ‘Unmarried Motherhood in England and Wales , 1918-1995’ being led by Professor Pat Thane . This project will be the first detailed study of unmarried motherhood in England and Wales between World War 1 and the 1970s.

Little is known, in specific terms, about unmarried mothers during this period. Ignorance about the subject has had important ramifications for policy making and for the representation of unmarried mothers. The key aim of the project is to use previously unused data from the archive held at the Women’s Library of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, now One Parent Families,  (the Council is an exceptional case study of an NGO which has been continually active over a long period while promoting an issue unpopular in public and government circles for most of its history) together with the Dennis Marsden collection at Qualidata which has been deposited online and includes transcripts of 116 interviews with lone mothers in the mid-1960s as well as sources at the National Archive, to study the change since 1918 in (a) the experiences of unmarried mothers and their children, in attitudes to and treatment of them by the community and by official and unofficial agencies; (b) influences on and outcomes of government policy and administration in relation to unmarried mothers over this period.

We’re hoping to increase understanding of recent changes in demography and family structure, particularly the growth since the 1970s of unmarried parenthood. We want to suggest that the growth in unmarried motherhood since the 1970s has a longer history then is generally appreciated and that recent attitudinal and structural aspects of family life are not new. Indeed, since the 1970s we have seen a return to much older norms of serial partnerships, complex families, and late marriage ages, though in a different mortality regime and legal and cultural context from that of earlier periods. This paper will present selected aspects of this research.

**Publications**

‘Women and the Family’, in H.Barker and E.Chalus (eds.) *Women’s History Britain , 1700-1850* ( London , 2005).

‘”Unfortunate Objects”; London ’s Unmarried Mothers in the Eighteenth Century’, *Gender and History*, 17, 1 (2005).

‘’”Blooming Virgins all Beware”: Love, Courtship and Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century British Popular Literature’ in A.Levene, T.Nutt, and S.Williams (eds.), *Illegitimacy in Britain , 1700-1920* (Houndmills, 2005).

*Unfortunate Objects: Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London*(Houndmills, 2005).

**FLAHAULT, Erika, University of Maine-Le Mans, France:**

**The perception of the press on "single women" in France from 1900 to date**

Articles on single women have been published from time to time in the French press since the end of the XIXth century, and more regularly since the seventies. Who are these women, is the model evoked similar in the various newspapers and at various times? What discourses emerge from those articles and what images of these women the general press and women newspapers offer to their readers?

A short historical summary can help relocate those discourses in a wider context. Then a comparative analysis of the various views of the general press and women’s press on “single women” will reveal that the social perception of these women has not improved and shows important similarities from one newspaper to another. The same miserabilist reports and – still today though hardly different– the main themes in favour of the “family” discourse are developed: the inescapable motherhood and the clear sexual differentiation stating the ideal type of men, powerful, securing, “who is all”, and women, devoted, loving, submissive and mothers.

If the feminine press appears at first more open to these atypical ways of life, it eventually adopts the clichés of the general press, using the same artefacts and frightening ideas to reach the same goal: avoiding social troubles and contributing to perpetuate a social order based on the couple and the family. Even more than the general press, women’s press rely on a feminine stereotype which is not even defined any longer and which is used as a tautology: “A woman will always be a woman”. And a woman will always be the mother, therefore the wife or at least the partner. When she is deprived of one of these statuses, her feminity and also her individuality are easily questioned.

These discourses display the functioning of society and influence it at the same time. They participate in the re-assertion of sexual identities and therefore limit the world potentially open to women. Besides being mere traditionalist, they prove to be strongly antifeminist insofar as they express a real hostility to women’s route to the idea of seeing women becoming independent persons. By putting forward the incomplete status of single women, their inability to endorse events constituting their feminine identity, these discourses marginalize the women who are not in conformity with the norm and deny to women any possible existence outside the framework of a family; the family representing “the true rootage of women’s existence”. While the feminists have shown that the family represents only a part of women’s life among “various interests and infinite desires for a thousand things in life”, the general and women’s press insist on placing the couple and the family as the paramount centre of interest in feminine life.

**FRANZEN, Trisha, Albion College** **U.S.A. :   Redefining Boundaries:  The Rev. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw and U.S. Womanhood**

A child of immigrants, raised on a rural homestead on the Michigan frontier, Anna Howard Shaw (1847-1919) rose from these origins to become a Methodist minister, medical doctor and leader of the U.S. and international woman suffrage movements.  In her public persona as the suffrage movement’s greatest orator, Shaw embodied the new woman who blended economic independence and social autonomy with an unthreatening womanliness.  In her private life, Shaw challenged the gender boundaries of her era by creating a life that ignored assumed gender norms.  Yet, unlike many significant women leaders, Shaw’s reputation has not been rehabilitated during the growth of women’s history.  This paper explores links between Shaw’s status and identity, her historical presence and the position of single women in women’s history.

Aileen Kraditor wrote that Anna Howard Shaw “was one of the most remarkable in a group of remarkable suffrage leaders.”  Carrie Chapman Catt stated that Shaw “stood unchallenged throughout her career as the greatest orator among women that the world has ever known, and who made more converts to the suffrage cause than any other one person.”  Yet this leader is hardly known outside the circle of woman suffrage scholars. Ironically the growth of the field of women’s history seems to have diminished rather than improved recognition of her as a woman of importance. This paper questions how Shaw’s place in history is related to her status as a single, self-made woman.

The story of Anna Howard Shaw’s life - how the feisty daughter of immigrants left home, earned an education, entered the professional ranks, and became an international leader, is a version of the quintessential American success story.  But in the nineteenth century, the hero of these tales was usually a man.  The single and educated women who pioneered the identity of the “new woman,” most frequently emerged from the old, established families.  While a number of important African-American women leaders overcame poverty, educational barriers and a particular combination of sexism and racism during this period, U.S. women’s history recognizes few individual white women whose roads to prominence were complicated by issues other than sex.

Anna Howard Shaw’s identity was complex.  Her parents’ families, both Scottish, first became part of the internal migration in the United Kingdom before coming to the United States .  Though poor, her family identified more with the middle-class political and intellectual reformers of New England than the industrial working class.  From her early childhood, Shaw’s interests and activities reached beyond those of most girls; when survival demanded that she shoulder male responsibilities, she did.  This pattern of seeking her own path continued throughout her life.  While she created a public persona that reassured her audiences of her womanliness, she lived her own life outside of heteronormativity, as if no gender barriers still existed.  Shaw found or produced cracks in her era’s class and sex/gender systems that allowed her to become, according to her *New York Times* obituary, “a great American.”

This paper asks if it is this complexity that has kept Shaw out of the pantheon of U.S. feminist heroes.  Have scholars yet to develop the theoretical tools needed to analyze her exceptional life?  Shaw could not have challenged the gender boundaries that she did without certain pre-conditions that included her economic independence, social autonomy and status as an outsider.  While she is no easy hero, an examination of her life is necessary for our understandings of women’s options during that era as well as the U.S. struggle for woman suffrage.

**GILBERT,**  **Dr. Anne-Françoise, University of Berne, Switzerland,** **Single women from the 18th to the 20th century: a space for cultural innovation.**

In the dominant western cultures, singleness is usually considered as a transitional status preceding or following marriage. When it turns out to be a permanent way of life for women, it appears somehow deficient. In my PhD Thesis on identities and cultural spaces of single, never married women, I look at the dimension of (explicit or implicit) resistance against dominant images of femininity in the lives of single women from the 18th to the 20th century (Gilbert 2001a).[[1]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftn1" \o ")

In my work, in order to overcome the current perspective of deficiency, I adopted a critical historical approach. First, I assume that the social position of single women is largely determined by the historically dominant form of gender relations. Thus, the construction and transformation of gender relations in the course of modernization constitutes the central axis of reference for the analysis of single women's identities and experiences. Second, I focus on the subjective experience of women, drawing on exemplary qualitative case studies to reconstruct the struggles and identity positions of single women in a particular historical context.

The case studies include the correspondence of Henriette with Rousseau in the second half of the 18th century (see also Gilbert 2004); the autobiographical writing of Lida Gustava Heymann, a leader of the radical German women's movement in the late 19th century (see also Gilbert 2001b); and the case studies of three women living in the area of Zurich (Switzerland) in the second half of the 20th century, on the basis of indepth-interviews.

This paper will focus on the theoretical approach underlying the analysis of the lives of single women. I will argue that the "freeing" from the traditional contexts of women's work and lives, although it marginalizes single women in terms of the dominant gender images, opens up cultural spaces for innovation in gender relations. Selecting one central dimension of analysis, a will address the significance of female friendship in this process.

The standard of the (heterosexual) couple that emerges in the second half of the 18th century displaces/represses the potential of individuality for women. On the contrary, in her letter to Rousseau, Henriette states herself as a subject and fights against her isolation and the loss of relation to the world (in the sense used by Hannah Arendt). However, in the late 18th century, her fight remains a private one.

In the second half of the 19th century, single women play a major part in the collective struggle for womens emancipation and rights. They thereby rely on a new form of socialization: the female friendship. Lida Gustava Heymann consciously opposes marriage and instead cultivates a lifelong friendship with Anita Augspurg. Unlike marriage, the female friendship provides a cultural space for self-development *and* a basis for public activity for both partners. Around 1900, to stay single can be considered a strategy for female autonomy.

Drawing on the concept of public space by Hannah Arendt, I will show that the identity strategies of single women and their relationships break up the cultural evidences encapsulated in gender relations and work towards a transformation of gender images. This line of analysis can be drawn further into the 20th century and shades a new light on the lives of single women after World War Two.

**Selected Publications:**  
Gilbert, Anne-Françoise (2004): "Deconstructing Gender: Henriette's Correspon-dence with Rousseau."In: Bland, C. & M. Cross (Hg.): *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter Writing, 1750-2000.* London: Ashgate, S. 43-53.

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**GILL, Erin, Univeristy of Wales, Aberystwyth, UK:  Careful how you classify her: Lady Eve Balfour women’s single status**

This paper focuses on the difficulties associated with categorizing the relationship status of some pioneering women of the twentieth century. It looks in particular at the life of Lady Eve Balfour (1898-1990), founder of the Soil Association and a key figure in the early organic movement.\*

As women gained new freedoms in the years following the winning of the vote their range of choices widened regarding the type and number of romantic and/or sexual relationships they could pursue. However, social proprieties continued to exercise a strong hold over women’s choices, leading, in some cases, to secrecy about the nature of friendships with both male and female friends. Not all seemingly single women of the mid-twentieth century would today be classed as such, but how do we draw the line between single women who cohabited with female friends, and lesbians? And do we risk classifying women as single who were, in fact, in long-term relationships with married men?

Many people today assume Eve Balfour was not the single woman she and her family presented her as, but rather a lesbian in a long-term relationship. This assumption may be correct, but it should be put to the test. Making use of Balfour family letters and other documentary material, I will demonstrate how women such as Eve who seemed so fearless in stepping outside traditional gender roles were nevertheless constrained by familial and societal expectations. I will also ask whether it is possible to come to any firm conclusions about the veracity of some women’s supposedly single status in the absence of good documentary evidence. When it comes to classifying women such as Eve Balfour it is essential that contemporary assumptions about women’s behaviour are challenged and that close attention is paid to documentary evidence when it is available.

 \* Eve Balfour was the niece of conservative Prime Minister Arthur James Balfour and the great-niece of another conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury. Many of the women in her family were active supporters of the suffrage movement. Eve was one of the first women to study agriculture at the University of Reading and at the age of twenty bought a farm with her sister in Suffolk. She went on write a bestselling book about natural farming in 1943, which led to the founding of the Soil Association in 1946. The Soil Association is today the world’s largest organisation campaigning for organic food and farming

**GREEN, MIDORI , University of Minnesota , USA:      The Noir Secretary**

Some scholars have seen the male anxiety prevalent in film noir arising as the result of a changed American society encountered by servicemen returning home from World War II.  Among the sources of this angst was the newly independent woman who had spent the war years doing “men’s work,” which created what film scholar Frank Krutnik calls a “temporary confusion in regard to traditional conceptions for sexual identity, for both men and women.”  In an effort to sort out this confusion, scholars usually examine women in film noir in terms of extreme representations of either the femme fatale or the nurturer/redeemer.   Using articles and images from popular magazines as well as examples from film, I will argue, though, that this confusion began not with Rosie the Riveter in the Second World War, but when female office workers began entering the workforce after the turn of the century. Boldly leaving behind the confinement and watchful eyes of family found in the domestic sphere, these predominately young, single women entered the male world of the city and business office.   Since they first stepped into the office, these women, especially private secretaries, have been the subjects of male fantasy. I will also show that because private secretaries often had direct access to the most confidential aspect of their bosses’ professional and personal lives, loyalty, trust, and understanding were also qualities employers relied upon from their “office wives.”  These two seemingly divergent images of the secretary offer a chance to rethink the traditional and polar categorization of female characters in film noir.

To do this, I will focus on noir films in which the female lead is a secretary, unmarried, all of who become romantically, or at least sexually, involved with the boss.  I will show that the noir secretary, while not necessarily as glamorous as the femme fatale, was similarly portrayed as both independent and sexually alluring. Conversely, I will also show that the noir secretary’s success ultimately relied on her ability to establish a trusting professional and personal relationship with her boss, one in which the otherwise suspicious noir male feels able to reveal his true self.   As a result, these secretaries often became their bosses’ wives in these films. Thus, the image of the noir secretary incorporated aspects of both thefemme fatale and the nurturer/redeemer, a combination that reflected the reality that men found so confusing in modern single businesswomen:  women who were independent and loyal, sexy and trustworthy, and who could be good businesswomen as well as good wives.

**GUSTAFSON, Melanie, Department of History, University of Vermont, USA:     “ Harriet Hubbard Ayer’s New York Career in Face Creams, Health Tonics and Advice to Women and Men.”**

In 1882, Harriet Hubbard Ayer left her husband behind in Chicago , moved to New York City , and got a job selling antique furniture to support herself and her two children.  Within a year she had established Harriet Hubbard Ayer, Inc., to manufacture and sell toilet articles, mainly the Recamier Cream and Vita Nuova tonic. In 1889 Ayer faced her first business crisis when her financial backer attempted to take over the company. After a courtroom fight that chronicled secret financial maneuverings involving family members, stolen documents and an abuse of drugs, Ayer won her case. Four years later Ayer was again in court; the result this time was her commitment to a private mental asylum and the destruction of her business.  After her release, she took to the lecture circuit, speaking about her experiences as a mental patient.  She then returned to the beauty business, using the skills she had first demonstrated in the advertisements she had composed to sell her cosmetics.  She spent the last years of her life writing a beauty column for the *New York World* and preparing her 543-page, fully illustrated book, *Harriet Hubbard Ayer’s Book: A Complete and Authentic Treatise on the Laws of Health and Beauty*.*Book*, which was published in 1899 and reissued in 1902, the year before she died.

Ayer’s unique history as an internationally successful cosmetics manufacturer makes her story intriguing while her social circumstances as a divorced woman in late-nineteenth century America makes it historically significant.  Ayer falls within the boundaries of what historian Christine Stansell calls the “smart women of the time” whose rejection of family claims and an engagement of business (or politics or the arts) necessitated a refashioning of self.  In Ayer’s case, this refashioning was an attempt to preserve both her wealth and her reputation, and the process played out in newspapers and advertisements, moved from law courts to lecture halls, and took place in Europe and the United States . This paper will explore the factors that underscored Ayer’s private and public risks and her aesthetic boldness in the consumer world of late-nineteenth century New York City .

**HACKNEY, Fiona,   University College Falmouth, UK:  That Dangerous Modern Problem: Single Girls and Working Women in Commercial Women’s Magazines in the Inter-War Years**

The single working woman was a significant presence in women’s magazines in the 1920s and 1930s. From career columns and fashion ideas for the business girl to employment problems and the glamorous heroines of romantic fiction her presence reflected the real increase both in numbers of single women and in those entering paid employment in the period. Located, as she often was in magazines, in a suitably glamorous environment such as an advertising agency, the single working woman was also an important signifier of modernity and the new freedoms, pleasures and possibilities that it held. Tensions, nevertheless, existed. The economically independent and sexually self confident modern girl was celebrated in magazines; she was also carefully feminised in order not to threaten conventional notions of womanhood. At a time when the separation of home and workplace was entrenched in the concept of the family wage (with the wife engaged in unpaid domestic labour at home) and a marriage bar operated in many professions, the conflict between women’s reproductive and productive capacities was the subject of sustained debate.

This paper explores how these debates were articulated for readers of popular magazines, sometimes for the first time. Drawing examples from the middle class monthly *Modern Woman* (1925), older tuppeny weeklies such as *Home Chat*(1895) and *Woman’s Weekly* (1911)and the new weekly *Woman* (1937) it will focus on the figures of the ‘bachelor girl’ and, in the 1930s, the ‘bachelor woman’. Editorial features and correspondence columns will be contrasted with the fantasy scenarios of romantic fiction to explore how attitudes to the single woman changed and how, in particular, she became a means of imagining the fears and possibilities, pleasures and responsibilities associated with modern womanhood in these years.

**HALL, Valerie,  Peace College , North Carolina , USA ,   Single Women in Farming and Inshore Fishing Communities in Northumberland , England 1870-1939**

My paper deals with single women in farming and inshore fishing communities in Northumberland in the period 1870-1939.  I have chosen to study these women because their unique experiences provide an important addition to the growing picture of working class women’s lives.  Both groups played a crucial role in ensuring the viability of the industries in which they were employed: agriculture and inshore fishing. Further, the economic and cultural patterns in these communities led to the persistence of a family economy well into the twentieth century. It is no exaggeration to say that in these communities, the interests of these women were subsumed in those of their families, and that the concept of a modern pattern of individualism is not apparent..  My study also shows that their role in agriculture and fishing could lead to a subversion of gender roles and that, though a sexual division of roles in farming for instance was clearly established, boundaries between male and female work could change according to economic and cultural pressures. In addition the domestic/public divide apparent in other classes was absent.

The role of these single women grew out of the technical and economic characteristics of the industries in which they worked. The viability of both industries depended on the low-cost labor of women. The pattern of employment in agriculture in Northumberland, though similar to the pattern in the contiguous border counties of Scotland , was unique in England . Whereas the employment of women in agriculture had declined greatly in the rest of the country by the end of the nineteenth century, women in Northumberland continued to be a mainstay of the industry . Hinds could not find employment or the all important rent-free house without being able to provide at least one female worker, and that worker did all the tasks involved in farming, with the exception for the most part of ploughing.  At times, a daughter would be the one who ensured the family a house. In inshore fishing, daughters played an equally important role. Along with their mothers, and from an early age, they baited lines, gathered mussels for bait, carried equipment down to the shore, and hauled the boats in and out of the waves.  They also hawked fish from creels in the nearby towns and villages. So important was their work that daughters who married outside the inshore community were looked down upon, the idea being that their marriage had deprived the community of skilled workers. A frequent statement was that a woman had to be brought up to the tasks involved in fishing before she could be a successful partner to a fisherman.

What can we conclude from the situation of these women?  Their situation, like that of many women especially in the working class, was an ambiguous one.  In some respects their economic contributions to their families and to the economy of their districts accorded these single women some agency. Also, the hard physical nature of their labor, which often equaled that of men, allowed them to rise above the stereotype of feminine fragility.  Yet to middle class observers their manly work made them suspect and potentially immoral. In addition, they were in some ways slaves to their families which many times organized their employment and took their wages. The perceptions of these women however  were different. They clearly had pride in their work and saw themselves as making a contribution.

**HANNAM, June,  University of the West of England, Bristol,  UK ‘ “Married to the Labour Party”: single women and British labour politics between the wars’.**

In the inter-war years women were able for the first time to make a career in parliamentary politics and many chose to do so through the Labour Party. The majority of those who were elected as MPs, or who stood as candidates, were single women who took on a demanding public role in a period in which marriage and children were expected to provide the main source of emotional satisfaction. Male leaders of the Labour Party for instance suggested that women engaged in politics as ‘agents of family moralisation’ because of their maternal qualities. In this context unmarried Labour women MPs and candidates discussed their relationship with the Labour Party in emotional terms. For example, in 1932, writing of the Labour Party’s chief woman officer Marion Phillips, who became an MP, Ellen Wilkinson noted that ‘she poured into the socialist movement the creative energy which other women have given to husband and children’.  Such statements were so common that Brian Harrison has claimed that labour women were ‘married’ to their party.

However, it was not as simple as that. Women did have emotional relationships alongside their party political activities –sometimes these were close friendships with other women or, for a younger generation, they could be sexual relationships with men outside of marriage.  And yet, single women felt the need to represent their politics in familial terms that conformed to the social norms of the period. This paper will examine the complex ways in which women’s engagement with labour politics was affected by their ‘singleness’ in this period. It will explore the differences between single women, in particular on the basis of generation, and will analyse the importance of emotions in political life. It is hoped that this will shed light on what politics meant to women in the inter-war years and on the complex ways in which their public life was gendered.

**HARRIS, Amanda, University of New South Wales, Australia**,  Music versus marriage:  Women composers at the turn of the twentieth century

Women composers at the turn of the twentieth century not only subverted conventional expectations of middle and upper class women in pursuing a career in music but often also followed a path of unconventional sexuality and the rejection of heterosexual marriage in their personal lives. Some of the composers I will look at, such as Ethel Smyth and Adela Maddison, actively engaged in passionate relationships with women and yet still were involved in heterosexual romances, at a time when lesbian identity was just beginning to be defined.  Others such as Lili Boulanger and Luise Adolpha Le Beau chose life as single women with the support of their unconventional families.

For all of these women, the choice not to marry was a choice *for* creativity and an artistic profession, something that was still incompatible with the reality of marriage for most women.  Faced with the disapproval of those around them, some of these creative women aligned themselves to those feminists struggling for women’s rights while others actively distanced themselves from the women’s movement.  In this paper, I will look at the strategies that musical women devised to enable freedom and success in their careers and the implications of the choices they made for their place within a rapidly changing society.

**HENLEY-EINION, Alyson, University of the West of England,** **Bristol, UK:**  **Doing what was best for the baby: dimensions of single motherhood through three generations**.

Dimensions of single motherhood are defined through the narratives of three generations of women in direct matrilineal descent.  Single motherhood during the Second World War, single motherhood as an abandoned wife in the 1970s, and single motherhood as a lesbian in the 1990s are reported as interconnected (her)stories.  Narrative theory within a feminist epistemological framework allows for the exploration of these women’s experiences as single women, dimensions of which are defined by their own and their mothers’ lived understandings of single childbearing.  Singleness as a childbearing woman is seen as mediated through and challenged by historical/societal norms, moral/social norms and personal/preferred norms.  A generative model of mothering as a single woman shows commonalities of social prejudice, isolation, familial/peer reactions and personal/political identity across the three generations.

**HIGGIE, Anita, English Department,  Catholic University of Paris, France** **.    Medieval Mystics: a wife's affective piety in the shadow of an Anchoress' intellectual response.**

Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1440) was an English religious mystic whose autobiography is one of the earliest in English literature. The daughter of a mayor of Lynn , she married John Kempe in 1393 and bore 14 children before beginning a series of pilgrimages in 1414. Her autobiography, The Book of Margery Kempe, recalls the birth of her children, her attempts at establishing a business, and her dramatic call to the spiritual life, complete with visions, pilgrimages and a vow of chastity. Julian of Norwich, on the other hand, was an Anchoress - a woman who separated herself from society in order to devote her life to penance and prayer in solitude.

Both women wrote spiritual autobiographies recounting their dreams and visions - Julian's 'Book of Showings', and Margery Kempe's 'Book of Margery Kempe'. We know that the two women met, and that Margery discussed her visions with Julian and appeared to need the latter's approbation. Their mystical experiences, however, bear marked differences. In examining these differences in my paper,  I will focus on the life experiences of these two women - one a wife and mother, the other a recluse who lived in a cell, and will examine issues including how each woman considers she fits into the hierarchy of the female estate, and the extent to which Julian's visions are based on intellect, and Margery's on affective piety.

Are we left today with a sense that Julian's visions and writings are the more valid of the two, because she was an anchoress? Is this partly due to the heritage of the 'Ancrene Wisse' - a thirteenth-century English guide for anchoresses composed by an Augustinian canon for three anchorite sisters - and in that case, what is the role of the gendered voice of authority in these two women's mystical experiences?

**HOBBS, Andrew MA,  Preston, UK,**    **It doesn’t add up:  Myths and measurement problems of births to unmarried women in Blackpool , 1931-1971**

‘Because Blackpool is organised for pleasure, most believe that it is more vicious and dangerous than elsewhere’. (Mass Observation).  For these observers, and for local public health officials, journalists and later historians who used them as sources, evidence of Blackpool ’s vice was provided by the sexual behaviour of single women, resulting in a high number of births outside marriage as a proportion of all births.

Births to single women have been seized on by social researchers and historians because they seem to offer an objective, public, proxy indicator of a very private activity, sexual behaviour.

This paper examines contemporary debate over unmarried mothers in Blackpool , including concern over female domestic servants, the belief that the ‘problem’ came from elsewhere and wartime social dislocation.

Statistically and conceptually, births to unmarried women are shown to be a poor indicator of sexual nonconformity. The measurement method required of local Medical Officers of Health by the Ministry of Health (the ‘illegitimacy ratio’) is shown to be inherently flawed. Blackpool ’s reputation was based on counting methods that did not allow for the higher proportion of unmarried women of child-bearing age in its population, nor for high levels of in- and out-migration.

The paper concludes that there are sound empirical and logical reasons, as well as moral reasons, for rejecting any clear distinction between marital and non-marital births. These findings have implications for many other parts of Britain with a historical reputation for high levels of births to unmarried women.

**HOWELLS, Jane, Salisbury, UK,  ‘Sister of the more famous Henry’**

Sarah Maria Fawcett lived in Salisbury all her 92 years. Until the 1880s she appears to have been an orthodox Victorian spinster, first supporting her brother Henry after he lost his sight, and then caring for her parents until their deaths. From the one surviving volume of her diary and clues from other sources it is possible to build up a more complex picture of Maria’s subsequent life that contains many contrasts and tensions of later 19th and early 20th century society. Her network of contacts and activities bridged the local and national, domestic and civic, professional and trade, young and old, serious and frivolous, Liberal and Conservative, and more. Amongst her correspondents and visitors were Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Jane Walker, Bessie Dale and Elizabeth Wordsworth. As a governor of the Godolphin Schooland secretary for girls entering Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations, Maria was involved in female education, though nothing is known of her own schooling. She attended lectures, concerts and bazaars; played games with her great nieces and nephews; and went on holiday to London and the Isle of Wight . Her daily life seems routine, even humdrum, but it contains many facets which reveal the richness and variety that was accessible to an elderly spinster in a provincial city.

**JOHANSEN, Hanne Marie,  University of Bergen, Norway :  Divorced women’s status and rights as “social widows” – the example of Norway – 17th and 18thcentury”**

In the early modern society the ideal household was headed by a male. As a unit of (re)production it was a central part of social organisation and the economy. Each individual was expected to be part of a household, and the male head of household was given extensive juridical and social authority over the remaining household members, both family and servants. Norwegian women were at this time still considered minors with the exceptions of widows, who had almost the same legal rights as grown men and was also allowed to run their own households.

Understanding the distinctions between wives and women who were not wives are essential to the history of women and gender in the early modern period. When women have been studied by scholars widows have been the primary subjects of investigation, as they have been most visible in the sources. Other kinds of single women have received less attention. In this paper I will focus on women seeking separation and divorce in Norway 1600-1800.  Many of these women had much in common with widows. Their marriage was over (or was about to be), their future insecure. I will investigate how social widows, pre-married women without the widows full legal rights, survived economically and socially outside a male household. I will also focus on the problem (and opportunities) of remarriage.

*Theory:* Considering women’s lack of rights in the public sphere and subordination to a male head of household, I will use a theory that takes its departure in subordination; Gender theory is used to differentiate between male and female. The hierarchical order in witch the male comprises the norm for what is normal and human is a starting point.

*Sources:* My source material is a) court records from church courts and b) petitions to the king for separation and divorce.

**JONES, Christine, University of Essex , UK**:  **Those whom God hath not joined**

This paper will explore and compare the experiences of never-married women and never-married men in nineteenth century England and Wales . A collective biographical approach is employed for a sub-set of 14,000 people aged 45 and over drawn from the 1881 census, who were born in one of 18 parishes whose registers have been reconstituted. These individuals are analyzed by marital status to show the differences in their migratory habits, residential patterns and occupations. Forty per cent of the sub-set could be linked to their families of origin via reconstitution forms. For these the attributes of their parents are explored and the composition of their birth-families compared and contrasted by subsequent marital status.

This paper argues that while economic factors played a large part in people’s marriage decisions, providing the opportunities and constraints against which those decisions were made, where the evidence does not fit an economic model more complex factors were involved at the familial and personal levels. Evidence for this is provided both quantitatively and qualitatively from the available sources. The family of origin is shown to be a powerful influence on an individual’s marriage decisions.

**KAMPF, Antje, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz , Germany ,**  **‘A “little world of your own”: singleness, gender and contact tracing venereal disease cases in twentieth-century New Zealand ’**

As in other countries, in order to protect the public from venereal disease (syphilis and gonorrhoea) contact tracing has been a major public health strategy of the New Zealand Health Department since the mid 20th century. Compulsory notification, examination and treatment were required and male and female tracers were employed to find suspected cases of venereal disease or those who defaulted in treatment. So far, the focus in the historiography has been on the aspect of control of the cases traced. Few, if any, studies have been undertaken of the influence of this work on the life and marital status of the contact tracer.

Based predominantly on a rare interview with a female New Zealand Department of Health contact tracer for venereal disease, this paper aims to expand this scholarship by focussing on the tracer instead of the patient. Through the lens of contact tracer ‘Marsha’s’ [pseudonym] experience and her long-term involvement in welfare and public health, the paper argues that working as a tracer had a distinct impact on the life and possible even her marital status. Both were compromised by secrecy, stigma, morality and the demands of public health policies –– aspects that were, paradoxically, quite similar to those she traced.

Sources: the paper is based upon the interview with ‘Marsha’ together with additional interviews with health officials, hitherto unpublished archival material of the New Zealand Department of Health, newspapers, and clinic reports.

**KEREZSTY, Orsolya,  Eötvös Loránd University,  Hungary:**  **Promoting women’s education both practically and theoretically The life and works of Antonina De Gerando**

Following the processes in the Enlightenment and the Reform era, women’s spaces and roles were redefined and reconstructed again in the process of imagining the Hungarian nation in the era of the Dual Monarchy (1867-1918). At that time women’s ‘entering’ the ‘public sphere’ was due to two main reasons. First, women themselves wanted to study and work intentionally; and second, the families could not make their ends meet from one salary, that is why there was a high demand that wives should also contribute to the living of the family. Women’s education was considered as essential to achieve this goal.

 My paper studies the life and works of Antonina De Gerando (1845-1914), who was one of the ’dominant’ figures in the field of education in the era of the dualism in Hungary. As being the headmistress of the second high school for women (felsőbb leányiskola) in Hungary for thirty two years, she created an institution based on her visions about women’s places and roles in the society. As being active in the field of education both theoretically and practically she published countless articles, books, language books, textbooks with the aim of promoting women’s secondary education.

In addition to a short introduction into the life and works of Antonina De Gerando, this paper focuses on what time and space she constructed her position, voice, and endeavours. It also focuses on the role her social position particularly her singleness played in her constructing her views and ideas about women’s education.

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**KOFFMAN, Offra, Goldsmiths College, University of London , UK:  From unmarried mothers to teenage pregnancy?: social scientific literature in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s.**

'Teenage pregnancy' is a phenomenon which Britain is trying to tackle. Currently there is a Government ‘Teenage Pregnancy Unit, a ‘National Teenage Pregnancy Strategy’ as well as a ‘Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board’ in every local authority. Socio-historical accounts of ‘teenage pregnancy’ in the U.S. have often reflected on the relationship between the problem of ‘teenage pregnancy’ and the preceding concern with ‘unmarried mothers’. However, this issue has received relatively little academic attention in Britain .

This paper explores the history of 'teenage pregnancy' through examining the portrayal of 'adolescence' in professional literature on 'unmarried mothers' during the 1950s and 1960s. One of the key strands of literature at the time, associated with figures such as the psychoanalyst John Bowlby, proposed that becoming an 'unmarried mother' was a sign of psychological pathology. They claimed that this was not the result of temporary abnormality but the existence of an enduring personality trait. The psychological concept of 'adolescence' as a distinct developmental stage can be identified across a range of texts.

Through analysing the use of this concept I attempt to demonstrate that within this literature there was an inherent tension between the concept of 'adolescence' and the concept of 'unmarried mothers'. While 'unmarried mothers' were seen as having lasting psychological pathology, 'adolescence' represented a temporary aberration. For this reason, although 'adolescence' was described as a disturbed state, it undermined the problematic nature of the 'unmarried mother' rather than increase it. Thus, for 'teenage pregnancy' to emerge as a primary concern the 'psychopathological' notion of ‘unmarried mothers’ had to disappear.

**LEONARD, Angela, *Loyola College in Maryland,* Black Women in "Juke Joints"**

This paper  is an exploratory study of what have been referred to as "juke joints"--variously spelled--and of the presence of black women in this social space.   At still an early stage of what will be included in compilation of essays on Juke Joints currently under review by UGA press.  The process involved in researching this topic is, in itself, quite telling. This discussion will integrate several key points--the stereotypical "juke joint," male domination of this space, the difficulty of locating women of/in the joint, impact of segregation on black entertainment sites--in particular in Baltimore, and re-defining the "joint"--into a single presentation to reach the conclusion that to study "divas in the joint" requires a reconceptualization of this social space, and that a reconstructed definition will differ from commonly held stereotypes as well as prior studies about "juke joints." In the interest of time and coherence, most of this paper will treat the "joint" and "divas of the joint" using Baltimore and its surrounding areas as a model of the formation of these institutions and the lifestyle of those female  entertainers who worked in them.

**LEVITAN, Kathrin,   University of Chicago, USA ,   Redundancy, the “Surplus Woman” Problem, and the British Census,  1851-1861**

In 1851, the census revealed that out of a population of twenty million, there were 500,000 more women than men in Great Britain , and there were two and a half million unmarried women.  The census sparked concern about the decline of the family as the moral and reproductive basis of British society, and triggered the debate about the “surplus woman” problem that continued on throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.  At a moment when a large population had come to be seen as crucial for maintaining Britain ’s industrial, imperial, and military strength, women’s duties as wives and mothers were increasingly exalted, and women who did not fill these roles were viewed as increasingly problematic.

As discussions surrounding the census suggest, Victorian society was preoccupied with productivity, efficiency, and usefulness, and it tended to define particular groups as problems when it saw them as unproductive.  Few historians, however, have attempted to understand single women as fitting into this category.  I believe that almost all the nineteenth-century writers on the subject, both male and female, feminist and anti-feminist, argued that single women were unproductive and therefore problematic members of the society.  Where commentators differed was on the question of whether it was possible to make single women productive or not: while some argued that single women could never be useful if they remained single, others insisted that it was a lack of educational and occupational opportunities that forced single women to be burdens on society.  For a full understanding of the subject, the 1851 census must be viewed as a moment in the history of debates over surplus population as much as a moment in the history of feminism.  The discussion about single women appropriated the language and the theoretical frameworks of already existing debates about other problem populations.

 Most of the work done on the surplus woman problem has focused on the ways in which single women themselves dealt with being single, on the attempts to expand women’s spheres and increase women’s options outside of marriage, and on the successes that the feminist movement in Britain eventually had.  The surplus woman problem and the 1851 census have thus been described as the starting point for British feminism and as an important moment in the history of women’s changing roles.  What has not been explored in nearly enough detail are the ways in which the problem was articulated in the first place, the ways in which it fit into larger Victorian discourses about population, surplus, and empire, and the ways in which feminists themselves were informed by the census.  The census, concerned as it was with population, national strength, and proportions of people, allowed British people to view single women as one among many unproductive groups within the nation.  Of all the “redundant” populations isolated by the census, however, single women were the most articulate in the public sphere, the ones who most explicitly challenged the label of “surplus” that was attached to them, and the ones who were ultimately the most successful in redefining the terms of the debate about nationhood and population.

**LOVELL, Sue,  Griffith University, Queensland, Australia:** **Vida Lahey, art and self-representation**

Vida Lahey (1882-1968), middle class, white and single, devoted her life to art and the Queensland art scene, and therefore remains undervalued and little researched. In her lifetime, she quickly developed a national profile as an artist with an exceptional relationship to colour.  She exhibited paintings nationally and internationally at a time when Australia was considered a ‘quarantined culture’ cut off from the world, hopelessly antipodean. Travel and extensive study overseas created a desire to share her discoveries when she returned to Brisbane . Her abiding attachment to her home town meant that she resisted the more cosmopolitan cultures and art scenes in Sydney and Melbourne, although she visited these places frequently and had a wide network of colleagues and friends. Consequently, she had a lasting impact on Brisbane ’s conservative art scene by introducing contemporary work and methods from southern states and overseas and lessons in art for children through the Royal Queensland Art Gallery . In the late nineteen fifties, she received the award of Member of the British Empire in recognition of her service to art in Queensland .

In this paper I will argue that certain tensions emerge between Lahey’s art and her self representation. Photographs and public ‘acts’ clearly demonstrate Lahey’s self construction as a dutiful citizen with strong middle class sensibilities, yet her work whispers of a wider view than that of an internalised and gendered cultural gaze that sees only flowers to be painted or children to be nurtured in art.  Lahey’s images, several of which will be explored here, are certainly not restricted by gendered expectations.  Her treatment of public and private spaces is complex; her subjects are frequently women so intent on their own tasks and activities that they exclude the viewer.  They do not exude a sense of being looked at, nor of being spied upon in a voyeuristic manner.  Rather, they are self-contained women, occupied with their own thoughts and activities.  Similarly Lahey’s urban landscapes challenge the domestic focus expected of women even though she was deeply connected to her extended family.  They ‘speak’ of what was important to Lahey in the city that she loved.  This paper therefore challenges the idea that Lahey was predominantly a painter of flowers, although that is how she is often remembered and how she was frequently constructed.  She worked both within and against the constraints of her gender and her spinsterhood to create a body of work that was vibrant and varied and certainly not merely colonial or feminine. She clearly found spinsterhood rewarding and enabling and was able to leave a legacy of beautiful images that reveal this to viewers today.

**MARTZ, Linda ,  American University of Paris:**  **Faith in a single network: Emmeline Pethick, Mary Neal, and the West London Mission**

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the rise of communal religious activities among British women of various Protestant denominations. These activities created a space in which single women could acquire both a degree of autonomy and a sense of effecting change in a wider sphere than would typically be open to them.  To what extent, however, could this acquisition of efficacy be maintained once the community of single women had been left behind? This paper will look at one such organization, the West London Mission, and at two women who began careers of activism there: Emmeline Pethick, who came to prominence as one of the leaders of the Women’s Social and Political Union, and Mary Neal, whose work on the recovery of the disappearing Morris dance brought her national recognition. Both women continued to work in organizations where single women predominated, and both faced opposition from male-dominated power structures, but their ultimate senses of achievement differed markedly.

**MCGUIRE, Linda,  The Solitary Old Woman:  Images of Danger and Persecution**

Pope Innocent VIII officially proclaimed witches as heretics in 1484.  What was it about the witch that made this person so dangerous?  Was it the pact made with the devil swearing to be his servant?  Was it the knowledge that witches had supernatural powers and were believed to harm and even kill by look or touch?  Or did the idea of danger lie simply behind the image of the witch as an old and solitary woman?

This image has represented danger for centuries prior to the witch-hunts.  Where did this association come from?  Fingers can be pointed in many directions;  for example Aristotle’s attitudes to women.  Or the witch hunters cold  have been influenced by the many figures of lone hags that pervade both written text (Lilith in the Bible) and folklore (the hairy woman myth).  But its earliest European representation appears to be from the darkest recesses of Greek mythology, dating to thousands of years before Christ.

This lecture examines monster women form Greek mythology, such as Lamia , Keres, Harpies and Gello, both in terms of their physical description and what they represented as a possible source for the image of a solitary and elderly woman who caused so much terror in more modern European history.

**MÄKINEN, Arja, University of Tampere, Finland:  Spinsters, city singles, sad losers and maybe lesbians - Attitudes towards unmarried childless women in Finland now and one hundred years ago**

One hundred years ago Finland was an agrarian society. Unmarried childless women lived and worked with their relatives or earned their living as maids in wealthier families. Impression of a spinster hasn´t changed for a hundred years. At present just like a hundred years ago *spinsters* are unmarried childless women who are desperately seeking for a husband. Yet nobody wants get married to a spinster because all the spinsters are spiteful, bitter, too curious and ugly women. Spinsters are so awful that they have to stay single and childless.

If an unmarried childless woman didn´t seem to be a bitter and ugly spinster people had an alternative explanation for her singleness. They could suppose she had a sad secret. That secret could had explained why a woman who seems to be normal still remained unmarried. Maybe she had a contagious disease? Maybe she couldn´t get pregnant? Or had she lost her secret bridegroom and still mourning?  The impression of a *sad looser*, an unmarried and childless woman hiding her secret, still exists. Yet the ideas what kid of sad secrets prevent a woman becoming a wife or a mother have partially changed.

A hundred years ago there already was a small group of educated women. They were daughters of families from middle class or upper classes and worked for example as teachers or nurses. For those women their position as professional women was a goal they had achieved. Women from middle and upper classes couldn´t work outside home if they got married. That would have been immoral. Wives and mothers place was at their home if her husband earned enough to support his family. Some women chose to stay unmarried and keep their occupation. They were modern city singles at their own time. Also today we have our own female *city singles*. They are women who aren´t interested to get marry and become mothers. They want to be free and have many casual sexual relationships. To those selfish women husbands and children are just burdens. The only things city singles can love are their own career and their own body.

At the beginning of 20th century living alone was very uncommon. Also two unmarried women could share a flat together. Of course there were some women fell in love with women but the idea of lesbians and lesbian love was culturally unknown. People didn´t suppose unmarried childless women could be homosexuals. Lesbian love was almost an impossible idea because female sexual drive supposed to be passive and need a masculine touch to wake up. Nowadays people wonder if an unmarried childless woman has some lesbian interest or even lesbian relationships. Women without husband and children have become *maybe* *lesbians.*Doubts about homosexuality spread easily if there isn´t a husband, a boyfriend or a child whose existence “could testify” to woman´s heterosexuality.

*Spinsters, city singles, sad losers and maybe lesbians*aren´t real people. They have never been. They are stereotypical categories. At the centre of all these categories is woman´s sexual relationships with men. Spinsters don´t have any sexual life because nobody wants to have sex with them. Sad losers can´t become wives because they have their sad secret. City singles change their sex partner too often and maybe lesbians are not interested about heterosexual relationships at all.

Nowadays Finnish unmarried and childless women and men in the same situation are typically different kind of people. What are the differences? How the attitudes towards unmarried childless women have changed or not changed in one hundred years? There are many questions to ask and to answer.

**MARTIN Moira, University of the West of England,** **Single women and urban politics: a study of associational life in Bristol 1880 to 1914**

Our understanding of urban politics in the nineteenth century has been enhanced in recent years by a number of studies of the contribution of voluntary societies to the associational life of cities.  The focus of many of these studies has been on the way in which certain middle class men, who were already in positions of economic, legal or political power, were able to extend their influence beyond these formal structures and to enhance their personal status and collective sense of identity.  This paper challenges the views expressed by Morris, Shipley and Gorsky that women were effectively excluded from holding influential positions within charitable organisations and that their contribution to urban politics was therefore limited.  A study of Bristol in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests that middle class women of different political persuasions defined themselves as members of civic society through their contribution to social progress.  Working within philanthropic and political associations, women developed organisational skills and political confidence.  The majority of these women were single, and for them, more so than for married women, the ties of family, religion and neighbourhood were vital. By the 1880s some had become key members of local government and of voluntary organisations and were thereby able to influence the ideology and practice of urban politics in the decades prior to World War 1.

**MULDOWNEY,****Mary, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland:** **Wartime adventures? Single Irish women and war work in Britain , 1939 to 1945.**

This paper will discuss the experiences of Irish women who travelled to Britain to work during the Second World War years, based on extracts from oral history interviews with a number of women who were single and young at that time. They came from Éire and Northern Ireland , from middle class and working class homes, and from diverse family circumstances.

Éire was neutral during the Second World War whereas Northern Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom , was a belligerent state.  Conscription was not extended to Northern Ireland during the war because of concerns about the response of the nationalist and republican communities.  Thus women in both parts of Ireland could make decisions about their participation in the war effort without the compulsion that was exerted on women in Britain .  Young, single women from Éire and Northern Ireland chose to travel to Britain to take up war work, in industry and in the armed forces, for a variety of reasons that will be considered in this paper.

The paper will draw on the recollections of the Irish women to postulate a number of questions about single women and the opportunities created for them by modern warfare.  During the Second World War, the government of the United Kingdom combined the incentive of new employment opportunities for women with the compulsion of conscription to ensure the optimum recruitment of women for the war effort.  Young single women were particular targets of the Ministry of Labour, which advertised in Éire as well as in Northern Ireland .  The paper will examine the extent to which the women’s single status influenced their decision to travel to Britain in wartime.  This will involve consideration of the social position of single women in Ireland and in Britain , as well as the role played by their families, with particular reference to parental control.

**OPPENHEIM, Stephanie,  Borough of Manhattan Community College , The City University of New York:** **Spinsterhood and the 18th- and 19th-Century British Woman Writer**

 My paper examines the position of the single woman author in 18th- and 19th-century England .  By looking at the autobiographical and fictional writing of such authors as Frances Burney, Jane Austen, and Charlotte Bronte, I highlight the way these authors challenge the social conditions that make spinsterhood so problematic and the literary conditions that delimit the narrative options of women’s fiction.  These authors dramatize the quandary of the woman writer who seeks create an alternative to the marriage and seduction plot--an autonomous female plot that I refer to as the “spinster plot.” They grapple with the apparent “nothingness” of the female life that, in straying from the common path toward marriage and motherhood, eschews social and literary precedents.  Burney uses satire to fault her society for subjecting spinsters to economic hardship and physical danger.  Austen indicts her society for refusing to *hear* spinsters, denying them a public voice.  Bronte deplores the isolation of the spinster, denied both meaningful work and human connection.  Through their attempted spinster plots, these authors express dissatisfaction with the limitations placed both on women’s lives and women’s fiction.

I will situate my reading within a historical framework by focusing on the autobiographical writings of the women authors under discussion, chiefly personal correspondence. The letters of these novelists reveal the constraints and risks that characterized the real lives of spinsters and informed their fictional representations.  The letters, like the fiction, query the cultural conditions that made the lives of single women both difficult and difficult to textualize. They illuminate how these authors make sense of their identities as spinsters.   Noting how the lives of spinsters are commonly constructed by their society, they alternately echo and defy such constructions. What brands the spinster within 18th- and 19th-century British culture is her apparent failure to *produce*, be it capital, desire, or offspring, Her economic and sexual non-productivity mark her as useless, sterile, and static.  In the estimate of her society, she doesn’t *do* anything, for she fails to do what it requires. Challenging this consignment to nothingness, women writers, as evidenced in their letters, turn to their fellow spinsters to find a precedent for alternative female destinies.  In their search for a precedent, they indicate the *necessity* of such precedents—both in women’s lives and women’s fiction.

**PHOENIX** **, Karen,  University of Illinois, USA,**  **A Global Network of Single Women**

 “A Global Network of Single Women” examines the American Young Women’s Christian Association’s efforts to build a global community of women in the first part of the twentieth century.[[1]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm#_ftn1) The American YWCA sent Secretaries (as the YWCA workers called themselves) to many different areas of the world (as did the British YWCA, both under the auspices of the World’s YWCA) to garner support for new YWCAs, as well as to guide the newly formed YWCAs in other nations. This paper looks at the imagined community of single women which these American YWCA Secretaries maintained throughout the world. The American YWCA created this community by first recruiting women with college backgrounds and training them at the same places so that they would have similar experiences before going abroad. They maintained community through two newsletters which were distributed from the American YWCA National office in New York City . The first was from Sarah Lyon, the Executive Director of the Foreign Division, and kept American Secretaries abreast of what was happening in the United States (for example she often included the weather outside her window in New York, and the current hat and skirt styles). A separate series, “Under a Foreign Stamp,” took pieces of reports written by American Secretaries abroad to the American YWCA Foreign Division, and distributed them to other American Secretaries. These two sets of newsletters created professional as well as social communities for the YWCA Secretaries.

 The imagined community in which the YWCA Secretaries participated was one of single women. This was partially due to the American YWCA’s emphasis on Secretarial work as a profession, which meant that work was done exclusive from other tasks such as maintaining a household or rearing children; when Secretaries married, they generally married out of YWCA leadership to enter “housekeeping.” [[2]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftn2" \o ") While some leaders did have husbands and children while working for the YWCA, particularly those who were in their home countries, Secretaries from the US were almost always single. Their status as single women meant that they relied upon the imagined community which the American YWCA provided for emotional, professional, and practical support, all of which were filtered through rhetorics of liberal feminist “American” values and assumptions.

 “A Global Network of Single Women” intervenes in several different historiographies. Unlike many other studies of single women, which focus on lower-class women as workers (and emigrants or immigrants), this paper examines middle-class working women. It also adds the perspectives of single women to the growing literature on women’s travel, particularly in colonial spaces. It contributes a gendered dimension to the creation of imperial discourses. Finally, it demonstrates that distinctions between “domestic” and “foreign” which are based on geographic distance are in many ways falsely dichotomous, and that single women could play an integral part in constructing “domestic” spaces even in the midst of “foreign” ones.

[[1]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm#_ftnref1) For more on imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (Verso Books, 1991).

[[2]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftnref2" \o ") The YWCA maintained this division of housekeeping and work if at all possible; Secretaries were not expected to keep household for themselves in addition to working at their YWCA positions. If they could not hire local household staff, they rotated housekeeping duties so that each woman either did housework or secretarial work, but not both at the same time.

**POWLETT-BROWN, Jill, University of Edinburgh,** **UK:**  **A Unique Concentration:  Single Women Living and Working in a 19th century Edinburgh suburb**

The Edinburgh suburb of Morningside is a place in which the myth of the passive 19th century woman, constrained by custom, ideology and convention (Gordon 1990) is challenged.  Citing a particular form of gendered community expression - "a concentration of femininity unique in all Scotland" (Mcgregor 1966) - this paper explores the place women, and specifically single women, claimed through their own resourcefulness.

The notion that patterns and uniformities of suburban life revolve around the conformist middle-class, male headed household where women know and keep their place is increasingly open to challenge.  The gender composition of Morningside that emerged between 1841 and 1900 signals the economic and social differences that distinguished Edinburgh from her Scottish sister cities, opening up routes our of poverty for enterprising women.  The impact of this in terms of empowerment is reflected not only in statistical data but in life stories and in the gendered suburb that Morningside has come to characterise.  These realities both reflect Dobriner's generalisation (1963) that suburbs are hotbeds of participation .... female dominated", and suggest that the resourceful Morningside woman used her situation to claim a place for herself that transcended the constraints of custom and ideology.

**RATTIGAN, Clíona, Department of Modern History, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland:** **‘Being a single girl I was afraid of the disgrace’:  Single women and infanticide in Britain and Ireland , 1922–1949.**

Writing in the December 1949 edition of *Holiday*, Frank O’Connor claimed that ‘infanticide in Ireland is appallingly common.’[[1]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm#_ftn1) Infanticide cases were tried regularly in Ireland during the period 1922 to 1949. Basil McGuckin, who prosecuted on behalf of the State in the Ellen D. case in November 1930, ‘said that he was sorry to say that the case with which the jury were called upon to deal with was not uncommon in the Free State .’[[2]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm#_ftn2) Similarly, Mr Finlay, who prosecuted in the Mary Anne K case in June 1929, told the jury that ‘the number of cases of infanticide was becoming too numerous in the courts.’[[3]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftn3" \o ") The vast majority of women charged with infanticide during the period under review were single and many were quite young. In March 1941 an official at the Department of Justice noted that ‘it is almost without exception that the accused in [infanticide] cases are young girls.’[[4]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftn4" \o ")

Between 1922 and 1949, twelve women were sentenced to death for the murder of an illegitimate infant in the Irish Free State . In all twelve cases, the convicted women were recommended to mercy and their sentences were reduced to penal servitude for life. Few women served more than three years in prison. Many women convicted of the concealment of birth or murder of their infants served their sentences in convents rather than in prison.

 Unmarried motherhood was clearly a common feature of Irish life in the period under review but Irish society was deeply intolerant of single mothers and their illegitimate children. A small number of Irish women who had emigrated to England and Scotland were charged with infanticide during the period under review. This paper will discuss infanticide cases involving single women in the Irish Free State and will also consider the experiences of single Irish women who were charged with infanticide in Britain . Rosemary B. had been living in England for five years when she was charged with infanticide. She had been sleeping in public air raid shelters for a number of months before she gave birth in a disused café over an air raid shelter in November 1940. Some women, like Rosemary B., became pregnant while they were living in England . Others may have left Ireland in order to conceal their pregnancy from family members, neighbours and friends. An article published in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in August 1921 suggested that a considerable number of unmarried expectant mothers came to England from Ireland in order to ‘hide their shame.’[[5]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftn5" \o ") Belinda R. knew she was pregnant when she left Ireland for England in April 1947 but ‘being a single girl [she] was afraid of the disgrace and kept it to [herself].’[[6]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftn6" \o ") Her employer found the baby’s body in a suitcase under Belinda’s bed when she returned to Ireland for the Christmas holidays in December 1947.

Other aspects of single women and infanticide that will be discussed in this paper include social class, the role played by relatives of the birth mother in infanticide cases and the treatment of the fathers of illegitimate children. The differences in the law on infanticide in Britain and Ireland between 1922 and 1949 will also be considered.

[[1]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm#_ftnref1) National Archive of Ireland , Department of the Taoiseach, S14716.

[[2]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm#_ftnref2) *Irish Times*, Nov. 26th 1930 .

[[3]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftnref3" \o ") *Irish Times*, June 11th 1929 .

[[4]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftnref4" \o ") National Archive of Ireland , Department of the Attorney General, 2000/10/2921.

[[5]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftnref5" \o ") McInerney, M. H., ‘The Souper Problem in Ireland ’, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, (1921) p143.

[[6]](http://humanities.uwe.ac.uk/swhisnet/01events/conferences/papers/2006abstracts.htm" \l "_ftnref6" \o ") Public Record Office, Kew , ASSI 52/635.

**REDMOND, Jennifer, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, ‘Sinful Singleness?:  The ‘morally problematic’ emigration of single Irish women, 1922-1948’**

During the 19th and 20th centuries the numbers of Irish women immigrating to England from Ireland in search of work was often higher than the number of males. This gave rise to a panoply of concerns over their moral and spiritual welfare, most particularly because of their vulnerability as young, single women who generally migrated from rural locations to the metropolises of England . It seems that their singleness was the prime reason for the concern evinced predominantly by the Roman Catholic Church, but also by lay organisations and the Irish governments. It was perceived that there were multiple sources of danger for these girls, from their journey ‘across the water’ to their places of employment, from which they were in need of help and protection, if not prohibition. To this end many organisations were set up to aid them in travelling and selecting ‘suitable’ employment.

 Catholic and secular newspapers frequently reported on the terrible dangers to Irish girls from promoters of the ‘white slave trade’, and on the moral dangers of living in a city and/or working for non-Catholics. It is interesting to note that no such cautionary advice was given to male migrants, who were generally of similar age and background, thus singleness was a gendered ‘problem’. The single status of these Irish female emigrants also meant that the country was losing future wives and mothers, which led to rather hysterical discourses on ‘the empty cradle’ in Ireland, by which was meant the imminent decline of the nation due to the emigration of women.

There were constant warnings to girls not to emigrate, and to stay at home where they would be safe, although economic necessity meant that these pleas were often unheeded. However, although there is evidence to show that some Irish female immigrants did slip in their moral standards, oral history testimonies of Irish female migrants also reveal a much more mundane experience than was conveyed in the press. It is also evident that many Irish girls came to England because they were already pregnant, thus migration processes had nothing to do with dangers to morality, and in fact Irish girls were no less safe from moral danger at home than abroad.

This paper will discuss the various discourses on female emigration that emanated from the Catholic Church and the Irish governments, as well as the newspaper coverage and oral history evidence on Irish female emigration, in order to examine the ways in which their singleness was the lynchpin of the concern over them.

**SIMONTON Deborah, *University of Southern Denmark:*‘Doing it for themselves: negotiating the commercial world in eighteenth-century towns’**

Over the last few years two powerfully written portraits of eighteenth-century businesswomen have raised questions about how women operated in the commercial worlds of eighteenth century Europe.  Hester Pinney, whose commercial role in London and the southwest of England was constructed by Pam Sharpe, demonstrates some of the ways a single woman could utilise an array of resources not only to navigate but to derive a good living from this world.  The other, the story of Glückl of Hamelin, most aptly drawn from her diaries by Natalie Zemon Davies, illustrates the ways and means widows frequently operated in towns, in this case in present day Germany.  Such detailed stories are rare, and represent only the tip of the iceberg.  The purpose of this paper is to look at the variety and range of ways single women (interpreted broadly) negotiated these commercial worlds, looking at their approach to business and the strategies they employed to operate in this world. It will draw on towns in England and Scotland as well as in commercial centres of continental Europe, including the Nordic countries.  Its main focus will be on how the structures of towns facilitated or hindered women’s activities together with how being single might have made a difference.

**SIMPSON  Roona, *Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh*,**Accounting for Spinsterhood: Changing Discourses around Partnership and Parental Status

An increase in singleness is one aspect of familial change in recent decades that has been subject to much academic attention.  Several theorists of social change contend that a greater degree of choice is a defining feature of late modernity, with individuals having more freedom in contexts where traditional norms no longer apply.  Alongside this, increasing diversity in familial practices in recent decades suggests that the marginality attached to singleness and childlessness might be waning.  This paper, based on in-depth interviews conducted in 2002 with never-married single women aged between thirty-five and eighty-three, uses narrative analysis to explore the ways in which they account for their partnership and parental status and how these may have changed over time.  Rather than straightforward ‘explanations’ of singleness however, these accounts are considered as particular constructions of identity.  This research finds considerable dissonance between dominant discourses available to spinsters to explain their partnership and parental status, and the accounts provided by the women themselves.  Most participants in this research did not account for their singleness in terms of deliberative choice, interpreted in this paper in relation to the enduring influence of heteronormative discourses in which spinsterhood is situated as a stigmatised subject position.  Nevertheless, the varied ‘repertoire of stories ’provided by participants included explanations relating singleness to contemporary gender relations and accounts of a satisfaction with singleness, explanations not accommodated in dominant discourses predicated on presumptions of partnership. These narrative accounts both challenge available discourses around singleness and contest explanations prevalent in contemporary debates about familial change.  The paper argues that certain narratives evident in this research reflect wider societal changes that have not just enabled some women more options over which relationships they wished to maintain, but are also constitutive of shifts in the identities available to women in late modernity

**SKEETERS, Martha C.,  University of Oklahoma:  Single Mothers Surviving:  Evidence from early modern English Witchcraft Cases**

The lives of single mothers in sixteenth-century England are not easy to document beyond the circumstances of pregnancy which often appear in court records or sometimes in parish accounts, especially poor relief accounts.  Some witchcraft pamphlets, however, offer a window into the lives of mothers without husbands who were making it on their own, apparently without benefit of poor relief.  This paper examines how they survived economically and comments on their position in the community.  It draws on *A True and Just Record*, a pamphlet about the cases published in 1582, and written by or under the direction of Brian Darcy the investigating justice.  Although the pamphlet concerns  several cases in the Tendring hundred of Essex, the two considered here were completely separate, one in St. Osyth and the other in Little Oakley, connected only by the investigating justice and his interest in making a name for himself.  Other evidence has been gleaned from the court records of the Archdeaconry of Colchester, the pertinent parish registers, and wills.  Although the “informations” and “examinations” in the pamphlet do not survive in the legal record, they are almost certainly based on that record.  I have also drawn on records of the Archdeacon of Colchester’s court, parish registers, and wills.

Both of the women under consideration, Annis Herd and Ursula Kemp, were the mothers of base children, although Herd apparently had been married and also had a son.  At the time of the accusation Herd’s base daughter was seven and the mother was living in a different parish from her husband.  Kempe’s son, Thomas Rabbet, was eight “or thereabouts.”  While both of the younger children testified against their mothers, undoubtedly with Darcy’s prompting, they also appear in the pamphlet running errands for their mothers, and thus, in a small way at least, were part of the economic arsenal utilized by the women.

The two accused women reflect two somewhat different strategies of survival which in turn suggest different personal talents.  While Annis Herd did rely on the community’s “moral economy”, which dictated neighborly aid, particularly with regard to food, she generated cash for herself by spinning for the proto-industrial textile industry and for at least one other female villager.  Ursula Kemp, on the other hand, was more fully engaged in the “makeshift economy” of poor women.  While she also spun in some capacity, her work as a healer, wet nurse, lying-in maid, and healer are more prominently in evidence.  She also attempted to barter her services as a dyer.

That neither of these women was on poor relief and both were caring for their base children indicates that they had negotiated the difficult terrain of shame and poverty which their circumstances seem usually to have dictated.  The accusations of witchcraft against them may reflect the vulnerability that dishonor and impoverishment brought, but they may also reflect hostility to their relative success in overcoming their circumstances.

**SREENIVAS, Mytheli,    The Ohio State University, UK:  Between divine marriage and mundane prostitution:  *Devadasis* and categories of singleness in late colonial India**

This paper investigates categories of singleness in modern South Asia , a region with one of the highest rates of marriage globally.  Specifically, I focus on *devadasi*women in Tamil Nadu (southeastern India ) during the first half of the twentieth century.  Ritual specialists who were figured as the “wives” of deities in Hindu temples, *devadasi* women could not marry mortal men; however, many of these women maintained sexual relationships with upper caste Hindu patrons.  Although their association with sacred spaces and royal authority in pre-colonial India offered *devadasi*women certain possibilities outside of marriage, this unique status considerably eroded under the colonial regime.  By the early twentieth century, *devadasis* were regulated as a separate caste of “prostitutes” by the colonial state; at the same time, Indian reformers sought to abolish the *devadasi*institution by eliminating these women’s divine marriages in favor of weddings with mortal men.  Thus occupying a liminal position between unmarried/married – between “divine wife” and “mundane prostitute” – *devadasi* women offer a fruitful vantage point from which to examine the multiple links between gender and marital status in late colonial India .

Existing historical research on *devadasis*has both investigated their work as ritual specialists in Hindu temples and interrogated their changing legal status vis-à-vis the colonial state.  This paper seeks to open new directions in scholarship by focusing on the figure of the *devadasi*in relationship to developing categories of wifehood, prostitution, and singleness in the early twentieth century.  With some attention to the interventions of nationalists and feminists – both important groups in debates about abolishing the *devadasi*institution – much of the paper examines the interventions of *devadasis*themselves.  In so doing, I situate the demise of the *devadasi*institution as a distinct status for women in relation to a broader history of the transformation of marriage, family life, and categories of singleness in modern India .

**STIRLING, Martine, University of Nantes , France :    Images of Spinsters in British Parliamentary Debates during the Interwar Years**

This paper proposes to examine the image of spinsters in British parliamentary debates during the inter-war years and to see how the political discourse of the time influenced legislation and their social status.

 Today, from many points of view, single women are often considered to be a privileged social category which is well-represented on the upper rungs of the professional ladder. Indeed, spinsters are among the highest earners, often seen as free to spend their time and money as they please; as opposed to mothers, they have been able to pursue their career without having to deal with the problems and the expense of childcare and the constraints of marriage.

 However, this post-seventies portrayal of the single woman, emancipated and assertive, is a far cry from the inter-war image of the spinster who was, in many ways, a “non-person” or a social outcast; spinsters generally fell foul of a system in which to be a woman meant, sooner or later, to get married and become a mother.

Legislation, on the whole, disregarded them or put them at a disadvantage in terms of social cover, income tax and salaries; to be a woman was to be “the dependant” either of a father or a husband; but in fact, many single women also had dependants – children, elderly or disabled relatives – which the law, however, did not recognise as such. Consequently, many battled against dire poverty all their working lives, only to find themselves destitute in their old age.

They were, however, increasingly mentioned during parliamentary debates, as a growing number of women MPs tried to plead their case in the face of a frequently indifferent and sometimes hostile male majority for whom spinsters were often seen as rabid feminists, family-haters, sluts or plain Janes, worthy of pity if not of contempt. The discussions in Parliament give us a surprising insight into the situation of a group of women who were to gain steadily more importance against all odds as World War Two loomed closer and with it, a lead role for single women.

**SWANSON, Gillian, School of Cultural Studies, University of the West of England:  ‘The Gratification of the Moment...the Limit of their Mental Horizon': Eugenics, Psychology and the ‘Problem Girl’**

In 1930s Britain, a set of interdisciplinary dialogues were conducted with the aim of addressing problems of cultural experience and everyday life. While eugenic research over the next two decades is directed towards the ‘problem family’, whose degenerate features manifest in social pathology, psychological inquiry into the factors creating delinquency in girls starts to associate ‘sociopathic’ behavioural features with an irregular developmental environment.  The convergence of these interests results in the identification of the ‘problem girl’: the unstable adolescent girl who has no interest in work, is beyond parental control and involved in sexual adventure or petty crime.  The problem girl’s apparent contentment with the single state, and her failure to develop ‘parental sentiments’, is understood as itself pathological, signalling a developmental arrest.  The problem girl becomes fixed in a pre-adult, non-maternal femininity, suspended in the gap between the past and future that characterises adolescence.

In the exchange between eugenics and psychology, the problem girl’s attachment to ‘the gratification of the moment’ becomes overwritten with the atavism of anti-modern familial cultures.  Her failure to progress to socialised, adult femininity, and to found a modernised family life, is traced to a radical disruption of subjective coherence and consciousness that threatens psychic disintegration.

**TALLENTIRE, Jenea, University of British Columbia, Canada:  Thinking through marital status as a category of analysis**

The advent of this much-needed conference confirms the growing importance of single women in historical studies, and the impact that taking single women into account can and should have on how we envision women’s history.

Taking single women into account means more than ‘add single women and stir’; it also requires us to re-examine our methodological and theoretical approaches to women’s lives and to broader historical contexts of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Just as Joan Scott envisions gender as ‘a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes’ and ‘a primary way of signifying relationships of power,’ marital status fractures the gender of women into identities that are deeply structured by relations of power and privilege. Building on Scott’s logic, I argue that marital status is a ‘useful’ and vital category of analysis for women’s lives and histories.

In this paper I want to highlight some of my struggles and successes as I sought to apply this framework to my research on ever-single women in the British Columbiacontext.

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**TIERNAN, Sonja, University College Dublin , Ireland :  ‘Engagements Dissolved;’ Eva Gore-Booth, Urania and the Challenge to Marriage.**

The first wave suffrage movement witnessed the birth of the 'New Woman':  women who were educated and financially independent from men.  These New Women often chose to pursue careers and avoided marriage, many formed partnerships together;  generally perceived as platonic friendships.  Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926) Irish poet, playwright, philosopher;  and an influential political activist in England formed a lifelong relationship with fellow suffragist Esther Roper.

In this paper I outline a remarkable journal Urania, founded by Gore-Booth in 1916 and  co-edited by Roper and four others.  Urania attempted to highlight the social construction of gender and argued that in order to dissolve gender categories the system of compulsory heterosexuality must be challenged.  Urania persisted in this opinion and represented marriage as an unhealthy institution.  When a country's marriage rates experienced a decline, the statistics were published in Urania as a cause for celebration;  even broken engagements were announced as a triumphant event.

Marriage was viewed with unpleasantness and seen as a flaw in the way society operated, it was not seen as necessary, even for the purposes of procreation.

Alternatives to heterosexuality are suggested in Urania; female same-sex relationships are placed in high esteem, which mirrors Eva’s own relationship with her partner Esther Roper.

In this paper I identify how marriage was seen as a major political issue for the early twentieth century suffrage movement and I detail how one woman radically challenged the institution.

 BIOGRAPHY:  Sonja Tiernan is Teaching and Research Scholar in WERRC, School of Social Justice at University College Dublin.  She is undertaking a PhD on the literature of Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926). Sonja has a Higher Diploma and an MA in Women's Studies from WERRC and was awarded the UCD Open Postgraduate Scholarship for 2005-2006 and has recently published an article; "Tipping the Balance with Historical Fiction: Tipping the Velvet as a Lesbian Feminist Device," in Irish Feminist Review, Ed Rebecca Pelan.  2005, Vol 1, pp. 161-85.

**TINCKNELL, Estella, University of the West of England, UK:**  **Jane or Prudence? Barbara Pym’s single women, female fulfilment and career choices in the ‘age of marriages’**

Since their rediscovery as minor comic masterpieces in the late 1970s, Barbara Pym's early novels, produced between 1950 and 1963, have been widely reassessed. Interestingly, the period of Pym's early success precisely spans what I will call the 'long 1950s', coming to an abrupt end in 1963 with the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* by Pym's regular publisher, Jonathan Cape .  In this paper I explore the conjunction of Pym's early creative period with the 'age of marriages' through three key novels, *Jane and Prudence* (1953), *Excellent Women* (1956) and *A Glass of Blessings* (1958). Pym's work carefully articulates many of the contradictions inherent in post-war binary discourses of femininity, in which the fulfilled housewife was set against the 'unfulfilled' career woman, and does so through a witty rehearsal and refutation of the tendency towards pathologisation.  Indeed, Pym's single women dominate her novels in terms of voice, perspective and habitus, even though their relative marginality within the social realm is also foregrounded. The novels thus effectively problematise an idea of the 'long 1950s' as a period in which the nuclear family was thoroughly hegemonic, reminding us that the modernisation of femininity also involved the further development of claims to social autonomy and citizenship for women, even if these were also contested.

**VIJAISIRI, Pryardarshini, Center for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India:  The Myth of the Consecrated Virgin: Defining Single women in a Hindu Regional Tradition**

The custom of sacred prostitution as a complex phenomenon encompassing women from discrete caste and outcaste groups predominantly manifests in southern part of India . The women functioned as ritual specialists, both in the rural and the urban areas, with a rich artistic and intellectual legacy. The proposed paper  focuses on a specific category of outcaste sacred prostitutes known as jogati/jogini, basavis in the southern part pf the country.  It is only in the 1980’s that post colonial Indiapassed legislation abolishing the remnants of the custom of sacred prostitution in the south. However the experiences of outcaste sacred prostitutes, since the late 20th century to the 1980s raise crucial issues of feminine identity, masculinity and power in caste societies. Embodying the role of ritual specialists, concubines, single parent the experiences of the women invoke the need for a redefinition of feminine identity and the models of alternatives such societies evolve for women ‘liberated’ from the normative roles. The narratives of such women with liminal identities challenge dominant discourses of masculinity, femininity and power.

 Surprisingly studies on gender and culture have been apathetic to the custom of sacred prostitution and the experiences of women within the tradition barring a few general works and empirical sketches that have inadequately handled issues of identity, sexuality and power in caste societies. Thus defining “single women” is fundamentally to state the need for a perspective that recognizes experiences of women beyond the domestic space instead of rendering experiences of such women as histories of deviance or eulogizing such customs as unconnected to larger historical processes. Firstly it will seek to critique the dominant notion that the sacred prostitute, epitomizing the ideal of single women, parallels the renouncer/ascetic.  Instead that the custom fails to evolve a transcended feminine identity (the par excellent ideal of *strijati,* caste of women) redeemed of caste identities can be explored by perceiving how such women continued to observe norms of purity /pollution, ritual distances and untouchability both in interaction among themselves and caste Hindu housewives. So also erotic identity of the women fundamentally contradicts the ideal of the ascetic/sanyasi who renounces sex/material life. Significantly while the family and community redeemed women from its authority the temple emerges as the primary site of authority at the macro and the structural level. The temple regulated the woman’s sexuality; norms for further sexual relations are subsequently patterned according to caste identity. Secondly the distinct kinship practices of the women were explained in terms of matriarchy. Since the early 20th century it was widely accepted within the evolutionist frame in colonial and Native ethnography that the custom was remnant of the primitive matriarchal societies. The perspective continues to influence postcolonial writing raising serious concerns on the manner in which histories of the cultures at the periphery are reproduced.  However such presumptions insufficiently explored the links between the varying caste and outcaste structures of patriarchy; the and fail to how such kinship practices were simply accommodated within outcaste patriarchal structure. So also it needs to be noted that such elements of matriarchy do not sustain as autonomous structures and operate only in a specific religious context in negotiation with the dominant patriarchy and norms of sexuality. However such narratives render single women anonymous and cast them at the periphery of mainstream discourses.

**WILSON, Deborah, Queen's University Belfast:** **Single women and property in the Irish wealthy landed class 1750-1850**

The purpose of this paper is to outline the experience single women from the Irish wealthy landed class had of property in the period 1750 – 1850, and to consider how this may have differed from their widowed contemporaries.

The experience single women had of property was influenced by legal, familial and social factors. Legally, single women and widows were *femes sole,*and as persons who existed in their own right in law they could own and control their own property, from both landed and non-landed sources.

The politics and power relations inherent in the landed family structure dominated the experience all women from these families had of property at this time. Single women, like all daughters and sons from the wealthy landed class, were financially provided for by their parents through private settlements and testamentary documents. In equity, parents had a responsibility to provide for all their children and the structure of family finances in this class kept all children tied to the family estate to a certain extent, whether or not they were married.

Single women had a complex relationship with the family. The status of a single woman within the family hierarchy depended on her independence, and therefore her personal wealth, as well as family personalities and circumstances. However, testamentary bequests made by single women suggest the importance of non-kin support networks. The single woman therefore potentially occupied a position outside the boundaries of the family power structure.

In order to explore this further I will focus on three aspects of single women’s experience of property: how women were provided for from the family estate; how women spent, or invested, their money and the testamentary behaviour of women.

**WRIGHT, Sheila, University of York, UK:** **Status and being a Single Woman in the Society of Friends - 1750-1850**

In this paper I want to explore how being a Quaker affected the status of single women within the Society of Friends.  Using letters and diaries from a range of single Quaker women (and some who ultimately married), I will suggest that Quaker practices and the emphasis on spiritual equality at the heart of Quaker doctrine allowed single women to achieve the same status as that accorded to married women and that as a consequence, the emphasis on the necessity for a Quaker woman to marry was less than in secular society.

**WYSE, Stephanie, Kings College, London, UK:   Gender, Wealth and Margins of Empire: Wealth of urban New Zealand spinsters and widows, c.1890-1950**

This research examines the role and agency of single female wealth holders between c.1890 and c.1950 in the New Zealand cities of Wellington and Dunedin .  It explores the importance of women as economic agents in new urban settings on the margins of the British Empire , and the range of institutional structures that influenced women's ability to create, maintain and dispose of wealth.

The paper is underpinned by two important conceptual ideas.  First, by effectively rendering them invisible in the processes of production in favour of highlighting their contribution to reproduction, ‘separate spheres’, domestic womanhood, and other theories of gender roles in the historical setting do not convey the demographic and financial importance of independently wealthy women, nor of the large number of women who supported themselves financially but were never regarded as 'wealthy'. Second, new urban settings within empire were environments conducive to women’s wealth holding, because they offered greater opportunities for employment, strategic choice of residence, and potential anonymity.

This research paper addresses findings from a database containing details of probate records (and wills where available) of approximately 1000 women, being all probated women living in Wellington and Dunedin in each of the years of 1891, 1921 and 1951.  By recording and analysing wealth amounts, testacy, marital status, and beneficiary patterns, the research provides important insights about changes in the amount and types of single women’s wealth holding and will-making as a reflection of active participation in economic decision making, especially for the future.

To date, it has been noted that never married and widowed women were more inclined to have made wills than married women.  Furthermore, while married and widowed women dominated the data set (as would be expected in a group of predominantly elderly women) in numbers, spinster women held a proportion of wealth that was larger than their proportional share of probated estates.  Further analysis expects to show that there were specific wealth strategies (e.g. property ownership and shared residence, share investments) that were favoured by single women.