

## Shifting the frame on 'femininity': fluidity in the history of women's education

### ISCHE 40 Pre-conference workshop

#### Convenors:

**Tim Allender (University of Sydney) and Stephanie Spencer (University of Winchester)**

**VENUE:** Room 1.102 on the first floor of the seminar building (Dorotheenstraße 24, 10117 Berlin). It is the same building where all of the conference sessions will take place.

**Date: August 28, 2018**

There is no fee to attend, and we would welcome participants. Please register your interest with [stephanie.spencer@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:stephanie.spencer@winchester.ac.uk) by 16th August.



Recently, deconstructions around the paradigm of femininity have been revealing in determining educational spaces that range from institutional contexts to family, to professional outlooks, to racial identity, to defining community and religious groupings. Furthermore, historians are seeking alternatives to linear analyses and resisting disciplinary boundaries around their research (Gleadle, 2013). There is much more scope for historians of education, particularly as recognition of the fluidity of constructions of femininity across time and place disrupt notions of homogeneity and consequently expand the nature of sites that might be described as educational (Liinason & Meijer, 2017).

This pre-conference workshop seeks to engage with this shifting frame to better understand how the ideal of femininity is referenced by the practicalities of female agency, as women negotiated rather than disregarded the constraints of their historical context by paradoxically enshrining the ideal of femininity when their circumstances demanded that they move away from it. These relationships and interactions can be exemplified by taking many directions. Some of these include:

- How did females and males in middle age, away from the aesthetics of the feminine body of youth, still direct this aesthetic in learning settings?
- How might femininity be determined through everyday sensory perceptions around touch, olfaction, vision and noise in the classroom? (G. McCulloch, 2011:601) citing A. Corbin (1986), and J. Steward & A. Cowan (2007)).
- Were the 'unnatural' acts of women encouraging other females to pursue careers in the masculine domains of Science and Mathematics away from the Arts, otherwise more aligned to feminine learning in the past? (R. Watts, 2007; C. Jones, 2009).
- How was the middle-class feminine learner, 'at the piano, in the parlour rather than the classroom... unequivocally belonging to the realm of culture' (Theobald, 1996) undone by the 'blue stocking' teacher in the classroom?
- How did colonial domains, and other transnational travelling, pervert Western feminine learning, as mostly male constructed paradigms of racial separateness and female respectability intervened to create newly marginalised spaces of feminine interaction? (R. Rogers, 2013).
- Did entering a religious order to educate, involving replacing individual feminine identity in favour of community life and piety, direct the way convent girls were taught? (Agatha, Newman, 2017)
- How did medical discourses intersect with formal and informal education and highlight the changing nature of, and supervision of, stages of girls' and women's lives as they moved from puberty to old age (de Bellaigue, 2017).
- How feminist theory interacts with paradigms of masculinity such as *bildung*, to complicate the boundaries between formal and informal education (Simon-Martin, 2016).

The pre-conference workshop invites submissions from those interested in this theme. They will be drawn upon to initiate broader discussions, especially around shifting the paradigm of femininity and how theoretical issues and archival discoveries also shift this frame to position differently the actualities and experience of learning for women and girls in the past. The audience will be encouraged to bring the findings of their research to these discussions. Furthermore, those interested in these topics will be given the opportunity to engage with these themes with a view to possible future collaboration.

### Presentation Timetable:

August 28, 2018.

No.	Presenter	Title	Time
1.	Kay Whitehead Flinders University	<b>Troubling gender relations with the appointment of 'that lady inspector' in post-suffrage South Australia</b>	11am
2.	Ruth Watts University of Birmingham	<b>'Unnatural' women and natural science: changing femininity and expanding educational sites through women's pursuit of natural science</b>	11.30am
3.	Tim Allender, University of Sydney	<b>Re-casting Eurasian Femininity in Warmer Climes: The British India Experience, 1790 to 1914</b>	12 noon
4.	Stephanie Spencer, University of Winchester	<b>Negotiating femininity through fiction in the 1960s</b>	12.30pm
	LUNCH		1pm-2pm
5.	Deirdre Raftery and Deirdre Bennett, University College Dublin	<b>'A great builder': nineteenth century convents as sites of female enterprise, economic innovation and architectural ambition.</b>	2pm
6.	Linda M. Perkins, Ph.D., Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA - USA	<b>"African American Women, Femininity and their history in Physical Education and Sports</b>	2.30pm

		<b>in American Higher Education: 1915-1945"</b>	
7.	Joyce Goodman, University of Winchester	<b>Encountering Suzanne Karpelès: multiple femininities, Buddhism and the French "civilising mission"</b>	3.00pm
8.	Meng (Stella) Wang University of Sydney	<b>Becoming the Feminine Ideal: Gendered Spaces, Everyday Life, and Sensory Experiences at St. Stephen's Girls' College-Hong Kong 1921-1941</b>	3.30pm
	DISCUSSION: FUTURE DIRECTIONS		4.00-4.30pm

## ABSTRACTS

### **1. Troubling gender relations with the appointment of 'that lady inspector' in post-suffrage South Australia**

Kay Whitehead, Flinders University

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid economic, political and social change in white-settler Australia. Occupations were being restructured and the individuation of wages impacted on patterns of white-settler family organisation. The male breadwinner wage was gradually normalised and married women were increasingly marginalised from waged labour. However, white middle class and working class single women were entering paid employment in increasing numbers, the former securing niches as teachers in expanding state school systems. The term 'new women' was coined to describe the first generation of socially and economically independent white middle class women and suffrage movements gathered momentum, achieving success in South Australia in 1894. Concomitant with these changes were anxieties about the increasing age at marriage and fertility decline, particularly amongst white middle class women. The late nineteenth century has consequently been portrayed as a period of crisis in gender relations as white men and women renegotiated their relationships within families, workplaces and society generally.

Given this context, I review the appointment of Australia's first woman state school inspector, Blanche McNamara, in post-suffrage South Australia in 1897. Before discussing McNamara's appointment, I explore relations between white men and women teachers as the state school system was restructured under the 1875 Education Act which introduced compulsory schooling. I show that the proposed appointment of a woman inspector was variously resisted and accommodated by men and women, as can be seen in headmasters' deputations to the Minister of

Education, a volatile meeting of the Adelaide Teachers Association and interventions by the local press including a cartoon entitled 'That Lady Inspector'. I highlight the latter which features various constructions of teachers' femininity and the ongoing challenges to male hegemony posed by women educators. The final section of the paper introduces the successful applicant, Blanche McNamara, who (perhaps) approximated the ideal of white middle class femininity.

## **2. 'Unnatural' women and natural science: changing femininity and expanding educational sites through women's pursuit of natural science**

Ruth Watts, University of Birmingham

The phrase 'woman scientist' long seemed an oxymoron in western history, those females who sought deep knowledge in the physical or natural sciences often being deemed 'unnatural'. Even botany, an aspect of natural history accepted as suitable to 'femininity' and for female education, was suspect above basic levels, especially as science became professionalized. A number of women, however, negotiated ways of entering scientific domains, implicitly challenging as they did so both 'masculine' notions of science and cultural notions of femininity. In natural history, particularly, they frequently used knowledge and skills that had been part of their female education, such as illustration of plants, to develop science and to educate others. Thus, through their very marginalization they crossed disciplinary boundaries between the arts they had learnt and the science they sought and offered a public education to others. Such activities are being promoted increasingly again today.

After a brief examination of the investigations of feminist historians, philosophers and educationalists into the gendered 'science' that deemed science and mathematics 'unnatural' for women, this paper will focus on how women entered the field of natural history in the nineteenth century by using existing expectations of femininity to enter science, often as educators of women and children and as scientific illustrators. How successful they were ultimately, however, was much determined by changing contexts of social, cultural, educational and professional life. The case of one woman in particular - Marianne North - will be explored to show how using art could take women into the outer realms of interpretive science. North travelled the world extensively to find, discover, and collect plant life and then educate the public through her art, affecting methods of plant illustration and notions of femininity as she did so. From examining the work of such women in natural science, it is argued that women's practical action and agency not only challenged expectations of femininity, female learning and masculine constructions of science, but also suggest the significance for including public education in history of education.

### 3. Recasting Eurasian Femininity in Warmer Climes: The British India Experience, 1790 to 1914

Tim Allender, University of Sydney

The feminine body of the mixed-race female was a powerful organiser of white men in colonial India. Her incarnations were many and she remained enmeshed in what Anne McClintock (1995) sees as the relational aspects of race, class and gender that were not distinct realms of experience in empire but came into existence in relation with each other. In the 1790s she might appear as the housemaker, acting as an emotional refuge for a European sahib, as he embarked upon an early life in British India, with all of its moral freedoms. In the 1820s she was on the periphery, neither accepted by the European expatriate community nor willing to merge with Indians, even when they were closely connected with British commerce. In the 1850s her race had become a danger, seemingly out of control in burgeoning numbers, yet still the subaltern, unharnessed from the broader colonial project.

By contrast, the second half of the nineteenth century saw some Eurasian females emerge as raj prototypes, as harbingers of a European transferred brand of femininity. They were never to be 'white' enough to join the European 'club', yet their race became a platform for 'whiteness' in terms of etiquette and the European way of doing things. Now the focus of statecraft, the medium for this transferral of Eurasian femininity was the classroom and the dispensary. The new standing of the Eurasian female, empowered her to draw lines of difference that she had long sought with her Indian sisters, and that also covered over her miscegenation when she was able to share state-favoured forums of learning with white females.

This paper examines the processes at work behind these shifting frames of femininity. Most especially, how the rise of the feminine Eurasian was coterminous with the high point of the raj in the 1880s, only to fall from view as the National movement created its own brands of Indian femininity in the early twentieth century.

### 4. Negotiating femininity through fiction in the 1960s

Stephanie Spencer, Centre for the History of Women's Education, University of Winchester

The paper draws on Diana Fuss's discussion of the "'Risk" of Essence', whereby constructed notions of femininity are inevitably underpinned by essentialist assumptions; reconfigurations of femininity over time rely on an unchanging essentialist base. This dichotomy is apparent in two well-known poems focusing on changing expectations of femininity over the life cycle. *Warning*, by Jenny Joseph, (1961) looks forward to old age as a time when, freed from the expectations of young and middle-aged constructions of femininity, the author would 'wear purple with a

red hat that doesn't go and doesn't suit me'. The other (attributed to Phyllis McCormack, 1966), is written from the perspective of a 'crabbit old woman' who demands that her nurse should look beyond the aging body to see 'that inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells'. Both poems yearn for a freedom for their protagonist from their current experience of performed femininity and the body. They either look forward to a future, or back to a past, but find discomfort in their present. The 1960s were a decade of extraordinary political, cultural and social change. On the one hand the rule book for young womanhood had been torn up, on the other, social expectations took longer to break down.

The paper discusses the informal education provided by the popular *Chalet School* series that championed a traditional, restricted femininity at odds with that presented in contemporary teen magazines *Jackie* or *Petticoat*. The central character, Joey Bettany/Maynard, grows from a 12-year-old in *The School at the Chalet* (1925, still in print in 1960s) to a wife and mother in the *Chalet School Reunion* (1963). In the *Reunion* Joey is in her mid-thirties but still described as fit and youthful. The years have not treated some of her school friends so well, and the reader learns of both the physical and mental health problems they have encountered. I discuss whether the books provide a form of informal education that enabled the readers to meet, in a fictional setting, a series of characters who present both a timeless secure essential femininity, while acknowledging that the path to maturity will not be plain sailing and will require constant revision according to changing circumstances.

##### **5. 'A great builder': nineteenth century convents as sites of female enterprise, economic innovation and architectural ambition.**

Deirdre Raftery and Deirdre Bennett, University College Dublin

KEYWORDS: Femininity; architecture; convent schools; nuns; building

It is not uncommon to find annotated photographs of nuns in convent archives; common annotations on the *verso* of images of nineteenth-century nuns who were founders of convents is 'A Great Builder', or 'The Builder'. These women challenged contemporaneous conceptions of femininity: though they dressed in the habit and veil, and modelled themselves on Mary, they were astute business women who engaged 'head on' with some of the premier architects of the day, including Pugin who was hired to work on several Presentation convents in Ireland.

This paper examines how these women negotiated the distinctly male spaces of architectural design and construction engineering. We will use archival data, images and drawings, to show how these women went about the business of expanding their network of convent schools, not only in Ireland but also in India, Australia and North America.

Below is Irish-born Mother John Byrne, the Presentation nun who pioneered the building and expansion of Presentation convent schools in Australia, commencing in Wagga Wagga in 1874. She holds in her hands the plans for one of her Australian convent schools, and was known not only in Ireland but in New South Wales for her intrepid approach to funding, designing and building. Mother Byrne was known in her Australian community as 'The Builder'.

We consider ways in which nuns – archetypes of Church femininity – adopted the distinctly 'male' role of builder, thus shifting the frame on femininity in a way that allowed them to occupy a male and a female space, simultaneously.



## 6. "African American Women, Femininity and their history in Physical Education and Sports in American Higher Education: 1915-1945"

Linda M. Perkins, Ph.D., Associate University Professor and Director of Applied Women's Studies, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA - USA

This paper will discuss the issue of femininity and African American women and their participation in physical education and sports in predominantly white colleges and universities from World War I through to the end of World War II. This period was viewed as the golden age of sports for college women. Yet racial bias often barred African American women from women's teams. African American women as descendants of slaves have always been viewed as being genderless. They were thought of as Black and not women. The famed Black female abolitionist - Sojourner Truth gave a passionate speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1951. When a man mentioned how women were helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and show other examples of courtesy and chivalry by men, Sojourner Truth got up and gave her "Ain't I woman" speech. She pointed out that as a black woman who was a former slave - no one had ever helped her into carriages or helped her over ditches - but she was indeed "a woman".



The notions of African American women not being perceived as woman, as feminine and having beauty was ingrained in the American culture. As African American women pursued higher education, various fields of study and extra-curricular activities were a part of the experience. The field of physical education emerged as an academic discipline in the early 1900s. By 1915, it had become a major in American higher education. In addition, colleges established women's sports teams.

This paper will discuss the experiences of African American women who majored in Physical Education and served on women's athletes teams – baseball, basketball, track and hockey at predominantly White institutions and the conflict African American women felt regarding women's competitive sports negating their femininity during the period being discussed.

Selected sources:

Archival Collections of the University of Kansas, University of Michigan

Verbrugge, Martha H. *Active Bodies: A History of Women's Physical Education in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

## **7. Encountering Suzanne Karpelès: multiple femininities, Buddhism and the French "civilising mission"**

Joyce Goodman, Centre for the History of Women's Education, University of Winchester

The paper draws on published material, correspondence and visual sources to discuss diverse configurations of femininities and their relation to a range of educative contexts in which Suzanne Karpelès engaged internationally during the 1930s as the only French woman to attain her degree of status in the French protectorate of Indochina as director of the Royal Library (1925-41) and of the Institute of Buddhist Studies (1930-41) and as chief publications officer for the École Supérieure de Pāli (1925-41).

The paper begins by exploring intersections of religion and femininities as Karpelès negotiated her authority with male colonial administrators for whom she was a "woman out of place" as the sole female amongst monks at the Buddhist Institute. Here the Buddhist monks and Karpelès (a self-described feminist) choreographed particular performances of femininities to accommodate the monks' view that women were impure and to ensure that when travelling by car, canoe, horseback or on foot to visit pagodas and pagoda schools that Western tenets of feminine propriety were maintained. The second section examines intersections of femininities and colonialism as Karpelès drew on the French "civilising mission" to situate herself differently in terms of class from other French women in Indochina. In

France she departed from more usual colonial narratives of indigenous femininities through her detailed knowledge of native women, while in Indochina she shaped Western and native relations of femininity in ways that both demonstrated and contested colonial power. The final section considers Karpelès' performance of feminine expertise when presenting accounts of the work of the Buddhist Institute at the Congress of Orientalists at Leiden and to the League of Nations Committee of Major International Associations in Paris. It also touches on the conference at the International Institute of Educational Cinematography in Rome (which acted as a spur to her educational cinematography initiatives in Indochina) where Karpelès encountered configurations of fascist femininities.

The paper concludes by raising questions about configurations of femininities as Western technologies of self alongside notions of "no-self" in the Buddhist cosmologies Karpelès embraced.

### **8. Becoming the Feminine Ideal: Gendered Spaces, Everyday Life, and Sensory Experiences at St. Stephen's Girls' College-Hong Kong 1921-1941**

Meng (Stella) Wang, University of Sydney

This paper responds to ISCHE 40 PCW CFP on 'shifting the frame on femininity' by addressing the changing architecture of femininity in an elite grant-in-aid girls' school in interwar years Hong Kong. Through examining the production of feminine space at St. Stephen's Girls' College, I aim to reveal the intricate ways in which the female body interacted with the colonial school architecture, and most specifically, of how sensory experiences and activities in different spaces such as classrooms, dining hall, dormitory, and playground came to define the feminine body.

Girls' spatial experiences at school were in part shaped by the architectural layout of the school, and also, perhaps to a greater extent, shaped by the articulations of the classrooms, the corridors, the changes of level, the actual representation of the movements required by the timetables (Fass, Gutman, & De Coninck-Smith, 2008). The spatial encounters enabled by curriculum, and the activities and experiences girls participated in the indoor and outdoor spaces formed their everyday school life. Yet how girls inhabited and experienced school spaces remains less known. Merleau-Ponty (1996) suggests that we experience and remember spaces through senses. Building on this sensorial paradigm of space, in this paper, I focus on girls' movement through and sensory experiences of school spaces.

I further examine architecture as social technology-what girls saw, heard, touched, and felt in the designed spaces underscores the interplay between space, senses and activities, which in turn informed the process by which the body became disciplined and refined. Through revealing the everyday choreography and spatial encounters

of the body enabled by the timetable and the interactions in different school spaces, this paper underlines the institutional process of producing the imperial girlhood and the lived experiences of becoming the feminine ideal.

Concerning sources, this focus on girls' everyday life- their sensorial experiences in particular-at school, in colonial Hong Kong, necessitates specific archival practices. To restore the schooling experiences and address the role of school architecture and curriculum in shaping girls' spatial practices, I draw upon a range of archival sources, including: education reports, school newsletters and magazines, photographic records, newspapers, and diaries.