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RETHINKING GENDER IN HISTORY: PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of gender history in shaping social and cultural transformations, focusing on the contributions of feminist theorists and historians in revising historical narratives. It explores the works of Joan Kelly and other scholars who analyzed gender roles, social structures, and women's participation in historical processes. The study delves into the ideological and methodological approaches of gender history, highlighting its impact on social justice, moral philosophy, and historiography. By analyzing the intersections of gender, power, and historical identity, the paper emphasizes the necessity of integrating gender perspectives into mainstream historical research. Additionally, the evolution of masculinity and femininity in different historical contexts is examined, revealing the broader implications of gender studies for understanding societal development.

KEY WORDS: *gender history, feminist theory, social transformation, historiography, gender roles, women's rights, masculinity, femininity, patriarchy, enlightenment, social justice, philosophy of gender, historical identity, microhistory, biographical analysis.*

The study of women's history, particularly in the early modern period, has been significantly influenced by the work of American feminist theorist and historian Joan Kelly. To examine the impact of social changes on women across different social groups, Kelly developed a theoretical model assessing the quality and degree of women's freedom. She identified four interrelated criteria: the regulation of women's sexual lives in relation to men, their economic and political roles (including access to property, power, education, and professional training), their participation in the cultural life of society, and the perception of gender roles in collective consciousness as reflected in art, literature, and philosophy.

Kelly's analysis revealed that the gender status of Italian women in the 15th and 16th centuries led to dependence and decline. As a result, she concluded that *"There was no Renaissance for women, at least not in the Renaissance itself."* Historians studying women during the French Revolution applied this methodology and rejected the notion that the revolution had significantly improved the status of women [1].

In 1791, following the publication of one of the key documents of the French Revolution, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, women's rights advocate Olympe de Gouges issued her manifesto, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen*. However, this document did not inspire revolutionary enthusiasm among her contemporaries. Instead, de Gouges was accused of ties to counter-revolutionary forces and was executed by guillotine in October 1793. Consequently, she became an iconic figure in French feminism. The inclusion of women's voices in social history raised questions about revising traditional historical narratives.

In general, gender scholars argue that an individual's identity is shaped by contradictions within the social system, where direct and clear interactions cannot always be established. The development of gender relations follows a unique logic within cultural traditions, which serve as the backdrop for these relationships. As a result, in representations of women, *shapa* (stereotypical) characteristics come to the forefront. This perspective suggests that the history of everyday life and personal experiences holds significant promise for gender studies [2].

Gender historians have not only formulated new theoretical perspectives but have also contributed to the development of the *New General History* project. This approach integrates micro- and macro-level analyses of personal, local, structural, and systemic processes in social and cultural history. Gender history seeks to achieve historical synthesis within the conceptual framework of social processes, including socio-cultural and sexual dynamics. It has demonstrated that general history can be written in a non-gendered manner while also incorporating gender relations as a component of the *New Social History*.

In the 1980s, an alternative approach emerged under the term *men's gender history*. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, men did not acknowledge the possibility of women escaping patriarchal rule. Even among the reformers and revolutionaries of the Great French Revolution, the idea of women's political independence was not seriously considered. In the early modern period, masculinity encompassed political responsibility, whereas women's roles were primarily domestic and economic. This gender division was even reflected in the language of the time—associations of like-minded individuals and cooperative economic enterprises were referred to as *brotherhoods* and

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friendships. A true man was expected to maintain control over his wife, daughters, female relatives, and even domestic servants.

However, some women sought to influence their husbands, challenging patriarchal norms. A failure to uphold patriarchal authority could lead to a man losing his ability to govern his daughters' public lives. By the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries, shifts in social class structures led to variations in masculinity across different social groups. British historian John Tosh studied these trends in British historical materials, identifying key elements of masculinity in the 19th-century English middle class. These included stable employment, the ability to support a family, and the capacity for unrestricted interaction with other men [3].

John Tosh opposed the strict division between public and private spheres in human life. According to him, gender history contributed to an artificial separation between the state and private identity in historical research. He cited *The Family Fortunes* by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall as a major achievement in British gender historiography. These authors argued that the division between public and private life did not fully explain personal motivations. For example, in 19th-century England, a man's entrepreneurial activity was primarily aimed at providing for his home and family. For the middle-class man, this was a daily necessity. This analysis revealed the interconnectedness of gender and social class.

Tosh identified a limitation in gender studies: while the field effectively analyzes human characteristics from both biological and social perspectives, it often lacks a conceptual framework encompassing the broader structure of society [4]. Nevertheless, he argued that gender studies possess theoretical tools capable of explaining social dynamics [5].

The goals and contexts of gender politics are shaped not only by traditional biography but also through a personal perspective. Within this framework, systematic structural foundations are examined, and socio-cultural and psychological factors are empirically tested. Dissatisfaction with macrohistorical explanations in the 20th century led many historians to shift toward microhistory, which gained prominence as a leading approach.

This shift was motivated by the realization that even scholars of moral culture could not fully resolve the complexities of historical analysis. For instance, historians of language initially focused on stable, impersonal structures of social consciousness, while later research emphasized the transition from abstract individuals to real persons. In this approach, individuals were not viewed as passive actors but as decision-makers capable of navigating difficult situations.

The rise of microhistory in the 1980s led to an increase in biographical studies. However, biography as a historical genre remains constrained by the availability of source material, particularly when studying lower and upper social classes. As a result, elite figures are often better suited for biographical analysis.

Gender and social components are frequently interconnected in historical consciousness. In contemporary personal history, individual biographies are analyzed from a macro-analytical perspective to clarify the broader social context. The biographical method has been enriched by microhistorical principles, allowing gender historians to explore questions such as the role of marital status in social acceptance, psychological characteristics at different life stages, role expectations and reductions, and societal attitudes toward deviant behavior.

The fundamental purpose of conducting gender history in a chronological framework is to identify and analyze the mechanisms that shape and reflect differences in social roles and functions between genders across different historical periods. This methodological approach connects gender history with social history, enhancing our understanding of the concept of *social categories* within society.

Alongside historians, philosophers also engage in the study of gender relations. In philosophical discourse, gender is often treated as an *existential* category, reflecting the unique characteristics of women's nature. These categories differ from the psychological structures of individuals across historical periods. Unlike historians, philosophers approach gender history by emphasizing its historical uniqueness.

Philosophers studying gender primarily focus on how gender identity has been understood across different historical periods. Western philosophy, particularly through the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, has long recognized the contrasts between masculine and feminine values.

The study of gender history highlights that gender is not merely a biological distinction but a set of roles, relationships, and values shaped by social and cultural contexts. Historically, morality has been constructed based on masculine ideals, leading to structural social injustices.

The development of gender ethics has followed different trajectories in Eastern and Western cultures. In particular, the rationalist masculinity of Western thought contrasts with the traditional gender relations of Eastern societies. By examining these differences, gender historians and philosophers contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of historical identity and social development [6].

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