Women, Gender, and Sexuality
November 18, 2016

For your prelim exam, three essays must be written. For each essay, your answer should incorporate a discussion of both historiography (including scholars’ names, titles, and publication dates) and historical events and content. Your answers should also, of course, include your own assessments and critiques of the scholarship in question. We are also interested in your thoughts on other questions and future directions for the field.

Select three questions to answer. At least one essay at least one of your questions should address a Scandinavian context. You may choose only one question from group 2. Be sure to avoid duplicating your discussion of specific scholars and books in your essays. If you think that your answers will be nearly identical, then you should choose a different question. The goal of the prelim is to display the breadth and depth of your knowledge and your own critical thinking. Please include the number and question on your exam.

Group I.

1. As the so-called “oldest profession,” prostitution may be one of the first areas of sexuality to have been studied historically. How have historians investigated this subject and from what perspectives? Trace the history of prostitution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When, where, and why did prostitution become a public concern? To the extent that you can, describe how and why the history of prostitution has varied geographically (whether in its practice, regulation, or other variable). What questions remain open?

2. You have been asked to write a brief essay entitled “Sexual Revolution? What Sexual Revolution (and for Whom)?” Since this is a historical essay, it is expected to cover the entire twentieth century (and may touch on the nineteenth as well) in Europe and North America.

3. The state has long attempted to exert control over the reproductive practices of its citizens, yet that interest has varied at different times and places. Outline when states have been especially interested in reproduction, among whom, and why in different national contexts (and, of course, the state’s level of success in achieving its intentions.) What have been the main drivers of change? In your answer, be sure to identify the major scholarly works that have engaged with this history.

4. How has race been an essential component of defining sexuality and gender and shaping its meaning and experience in the United States from early America through the twentieth century? Discuss how historians have investigated race, gender, and sexuality simultaneously in specific times and places and their findings. We would like to see a discussion that includes in-depth discussion of at least 2 works about early America, 2 on the nineteenth century, and 2 on the twentieth century.

5. The Swedish Welfare State is also known as “The People’s Home”: folkhemmet. Briefly explain the provenance of this term and the national and international context in which it
arose. We are interested in how you examine the discursive attributes of the concept in terms of gender, identifying and analyzing also the roles sexuality, distribution of household and wage-earning labor, and feminism have played during various iterations of the concept. A conjoining question to answer could be the following: what roles are women assumed to play in and for a construct such as the People’s Home?

**Group II. You may choose to answer only 1 (one) of the following two questions.**

6. The visual culture of sexuality has provoked a great deal of interest historically—among both those who wanted to see it and those who didn’t—and increasingly among scholars and historians. Trace the history of the visual culture of sexuality in Europe and America. How has scholarship on the visual culture of sexuality changed, challenged, or confirmed the histories of women, gender, and sexuality? Are there subjects and questions that were heretofore ignored that have been brought out or have been significantly revised as a result of research and attention to the visual?

7. Does sex need to be taught? Is it teachable? By and for whom? These questions are meant as a starting point for a discussion of the ideologies underlying and institutions invested in sex education. Specifically, we ask you to identify, discuss, and analyze major twentieth-century trends in sex education films from North America and Scandinavia. Your essay should examine the similarities, differences, and points of connection in their educational and media histories and in the methodological approaches taken by scholars studying this field. Specific aspects to address may include funding, production, circulation, reception (including censorship), and/or audiences (intended or secondary).