The Social Framework for Gender Experience (SFGE): Teaching Across Generations

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HAVING JUST COMPLETED A BOOK exploring the role played by misogynist discourses in the promotion of the intellectual and political authority of medieval European universities, I began teaching a class on medieval and early modern European queens in 2016.[1] At the time, a "European Queens" course seemed particularly relevant given the constant presence of misogyny in political discourse, the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, and the popularity in contemporary media of depictions of European queens and aristocratic women.[2] Indeed, the first two iterations of this lower-division, general education requirement course (in 2016 and 2018) generated tremendous student enthusiasm, and the course size was doubled from 60 to 120 students for the 2019 iteration. The course also helped students to understand the ways culturally specific gender norms reflect and shape larger political and cultural narratives.[3] By week five of my 2019 "European Queens" course, however, many of the 111 enrolled students had determined that the course was reinforcing the cis-heteronormative binary—which it was, albeit unintentionally. In addition to confronting me privately about this issue, students were withdrawing their attention

collectively from the lectures and readings. Fortunately, I was able to recover student trust and interest in the course within a week.

When first confronted with student concerns, I was completely surprised that a course that had been explicitly designed to destabilize seemingly transhistorical, misogynist, and cis-heteronormative binaries appeared to my students to be reinforcing oppressive essentialisms instead.[4] Careful listening, however, showed me that I needed to make two crucial changes. First, I needed to be more precise about my use of language. Second, I needed to demonstrate how medieval and early modern queens, whose political contexts encouraged them to conform to their culture's patriarchal gender expectations, often behaved or were represented in ways that were open to queer and trans readings.

I offer the following account of a potentially catastrophic teaching failure turned into success as an example of the intellectual growth available to both the professor and the student when an instructor uses engaged, responsive teaching to address apparently incommensurable understandings of a given topic. After outlining how the study of premodern queens relates to current debates about misogyny and gender, I explain how I arrived at a new term of gender analysis. This term, the Social Framework for Gender Experience/Expression (SFGE), fostered a fruitful dialogue between my concerns with the political deployment of gender norms and my students' primary interest in the lived experience of gender identities. It did so by calling attention to the historically specific cultural and political frameworks of gender expectations that shape individual negotiations of gender identity. As I introduced this term to my students, I used it as a tool for engaging in more inclusive readings of the overwhelmingly cis-heteronormative-slanted primary sources. This strategy allowed me to regain my students' trust and to reinspire their interest in the course material. My own journey, however, continued as the reflections that this teaching crisis inspired shaped and enriched my research, graduate mentoring, and wildly successful 2022 iteration of my "European Queens" course.

Why Teach European Queens?

Due to their roles as enforcers of patriarchy, religious persecution, premodern proto-racism, and colonization, medieval and early

modern European queens offer the historian several insights that are relevant to contemporary concerns about how structures of oppression work. At the same time, queens often acted with power and authority that their own societies would have denied most women. In this manner, they offer a relevant and thorny example of how complicated it is to study elite women's struggles for political and economic power. In proving their abilities to lead their societies and, thus, providing powerful examples of women's leadership, the elite women who had the rare opportunity to influence premodern European political history often exercised this influence while contributing to the most grievous injustices committed by their societies.[5]

Centering these issues, my "European Queens" lower-division general education lecture course explores the complex ways that premodern European queens manipulated, challenged, and reinforced gender norms (as well as other oppressive discourses) for their own benefit and often to the detriment of others. In the process, the course demonstrates how the gender norms that shaped and enabled queenly experience reflected and influenced the political and religious contests of their day. In other words, the course explores how the gender norms that informed queenship intersected with wider conversations about monarchy, social and political status, crusade, conquest, colonization, religious persecution, and constructions of premodern categories employed for the strategic dehumanization of oppressed groups.[6]

In the process of exploring historical interactions among queens, constantly evolving gender norms, and structures of oppression, the course provides students with an introduction to the history of Western Europe from 400 to 1600 CE, while highlighting the perspective of female rulers and gendered politics. In its exploration of the socially constructed, politically active, and complexly nuanced nature of gender norms, the course draws upon the theoretical approach to gender advocated by Joan Scott in 1986.[7] Although Scott wrote in dialogue with debates arising out of the late-twentieth-century feminist movement, her explicitly inclusive argument still serves as the basis of innovative and liberating work across regional and temporal historical fields, as demonstrated in the relatively recent retrospective published in *The American Historical Review*.[8]

Scott's 1986 call for historians to employ gender as an analytical category drew upon the grammatical function of gendered words as a means of undercutting and historicizing both essentializing understandings of the category "women" and the heterosexual binary.[9] Providing a state of the field survey of contemporary feminist inquiry, Scott's article critiqued all explanations of gender inequality that relied upon a fixed and thus ahistorical understanding of women as a category, a binary understanding of sexual difference, or a heteronormative understanding of sexuality.[10] For Scott, the power of the word "gender" was its ability to point to a structure, like the linguistic structures it evoked, that was historically specific and culturally particular.[11] As a term invoking social grammar, "gender" invited a collective exploration of the diversity of roles and expectations mapped onto perceived "sex" differences by historians of all geographical fields and time periods.[12] Its cumulative effect promised to show us the complex ways in which gender structures shaped and were shaped by economics, politics, and individual experience.[13] It also sought to demonstrate the impossibility of identifying certain skills, characteristics, or social roles as natural to any particular socially constructed gender category.[14]

The deployment of this conceptualization of gender as an analytical frame was immediately controversial. The potentially transformative power of Scott's and others' rigorous critiques of the constructed nature of gender norms, which explicitly authenticated fluid gender identities and gender diversity, found opposition among essentializing feminists and political advocates of patriarchal control alike.[15] This opposition proves the liberatory potential of Scott's theory and its continued applicability to current political and intellectual debates.

In the study of medieval and early modern Europe, Scott's emphasis on the political nature of gender norms continues to inspire innovative approaches to the history of queenship and aristocratic women's power.[16] The resulting studies, in turn, provide us with useful insights into the workings of monarchy as a whole, since their revelations about the extent of women's influence and authority expose the composite and complexly gendered nature of monarchical authority.[17] Significant to the critique of today's global shift towards authoritarianism, these studies prepare students to probe the connection between particular gender norms and authoritarian rule.[18]

Analyzing the role played by gender discourses in politics also invites scholars of medieval and early modern Europe to explore how gender, imperialism, and racialized/proto-racialized depictions of difference intersect in justifications for male and/or female rule.[19] In other words, the study of medieval and early modern gender discourses, as they existed in all of their premodern particularities, still offers insights that are relevant to twenty-first-century political struggles for equality and equity, as well as racial and social justice. Moreover, since Scott explicitly celebrated gender theory as a tool for destabilizing the cis-heterosexual gender binary, discussing culturally particular understandings of gender as radically situated historical forms of discourse has the potential to provide crucial theoretical support to struggles for queer and trans rights.[20]

Indeed, it was my own belief in the interconnected relationships between the weaponization of misogynist discourse to oppress women and the aggressive policing of politically motivated norms of gender and sexuality that convinced me that a class on premodern European queens would be relevant to students who were not primarily interested in the medieval and early modern history of Europe. For this reason, my "European Queens" course paid particular attention to the virulent misogynist discourses employed to undermine or co-opt queenly authority by advocates of particular political factions or male institutions, who often hoped such polemics would allow them to encroach upon or limit monarchical authority.[21] Significantly, some of the most virulent arguments forwarded against queens that associated women with sin, the devil, and the destruction of children—either royal or metaphorical—occurred on the eve of Europe's infamous witch hunts.[22] Uncanny echoes of such polemics often pollute modern discourse about female or otherwise feminized leaders and women-identifying individuals in general.[23]

In the late medieval European examples I studied, queens and other aristocratic women were also considered to embody the moral as well as political virtue of their families, kingdoms, and religion.[24] Self-styled defenders of these institutions, in turn, often portrayed their kingdoms or religious communities allegorically as virtuous aristocratic women in desperate need of defense against their attackers. They did so in dialogue with a long classical and medieval tradition of personifying the virtues and vices as women.[25]

In this manner, gender discourses about queens and aristocratic women were woven into early modern and modern European understandings of the abstract state, empire, truth, religion, and virtue, as expressed evocatively in the personification of France as Marianne during the French Revolution.[26] The continued ability of those interweavings to shape our thought and evoke our emotions has been demonstrated in contemporary cartoons, which have portrayed the Statue of Liberty as protecting immigrants, suffering violence on their behalf, or harming immigrant children herself during the course of recent outcry against inhumane immigration policies in the United States.[27]

Memories of actual medieval queens have also haunted the modern period. After the royalist and anti-secularist bishop of Poitiers aggressively promoted her cult in the mid- to late nineteenth century, French pilgrims appealed to the sainted early medieval queen, Radegund of Poitiers (d. 587), who was depicted as the "Holy Queen of France" and the "Mother of the Fatherland," on the eve of the Franco-Prussian War, the first World War, and World War II.[28] Similarly drawing upon the medieval past as a means of cultivating a particular kind of religious nationalism, Spanish Fascists rallied around the figure of Isabel of Castile during their rise to power and throughout Franco's rule.[29] Such celebrations of medieval queens shape expectations of women who live in the societies that cultivate their memory as well as inspiring nationalist and fascist movements.[30]

For all these reasons, premodern European queens are relevant to how we navigate the intersection of gender and politics in twenty-first-century European and European-influenced cultures. Studying them provides us with productively unfamiliar examples of the political deployment of culturally specific gender norms. It also exposes the ways that medieval discourses still haunt our present.[31] In designing my course, I wanted students to be able to (1) draw upon the example of medieval queens as proof of the political capabilities of women; (2) critique the role these queens played in religious and economic oppression within Europe and the territories it colonized; and (3) draw comparisons between the oppressive use of gender discourses in medieval and early modern politics and the misogynist, queer-phobic, and trans-phobic fear-mongering they witness in their own lives today.

Identifying the Disconnect

In the 2019 iteration of my "European Queens" course, I regained student trust and interest by working dialogically with my student interlocutors over the course of three lectures to reframe the theoretical foundations of the course. This process allowed me to ensure that the students understood the changes I was making and my willingness to do the necessary work to establish mutual understanding. This process also helped me to better understand the teaching and research potential of the original course material.

I began my revision with the hypothesis that most of my students were experiencing an emotional bottleneck every time I used the word "gender." In a book that argues for more transparent and student-focused teaching, David Pace defined an "emotional bottleneck" as a response to course material that troubles a students' personal or collective understanding of themselves in a manner that disrupts learning.[32] In my queens course, I had repeatedly used the term "gender" to refer to the complex set of relationships that connected politics, the norms that were forced upon socially sorted bodies, and individual queens' strategies for surviving and accumulating power within a patriarchal and misogynist framework. Since these queens performed their royal gender in a manner that often reinforced patriarchal norms, however, my own failure to offer explicit readings of how individual queens may have embodied genders or sexualities that challenged these norms likely encouraged my students to understand my unpacking of the intricate web of medieval gender politics as an attempt to reinforce an oppressive and historically inaccurate narrative construction of a transhistorical cis-heteronormative binary as part of a "transphobic imperative to consistently frame transness through the lens of novelty."[33]

Each time my students heard me say "gender" to refer to the cultural and political work that gender norms perform, I now believe that they heard me challenging their own understanding of gender as a personal and innate aspect of individual identity, which represents their generation's embrace of gender diversity and, with it, an ardent defense of queer and trans rights. Moreover, and I think this is important, the recent rhetorical, legal, and physical attacks upon queer and trans individuals and rights in the United States and in

Britain have rightly convinced this generation of students that their diverse understanding of gender is under attack.[34] As a result of these developments, my students are rightly suspicious of anyone who does not share their use of gender language. Although many essentializing feminists involved in the anti-trans movement call themselves "gender critical" as a means of explicitly rejecting the interpretation of gender forwarded by Joan Scott, which formed the basis of my class, I had not assigned or discussed Scott's article. It is likely that for these reasons, my students had begun to suspect that the course had a gender-essentializing goal by the beginning of the fifth week of the class.[35]

I had attempted to avoid just this sort of emotional bottleneck when I introduced the intellectual framework for the course by emphasizing that, while I accepted and celebrated the fact that a given person's individual gender identity is both personal and real, our historical sources do not give us much insight into the personal thoughts and feelings of individual medieval queens, who were forced to conform to their culture's cis-heteronormative gender norms in order to maintain their status and power. For this reason, I had explained, my lectures would question and deconstruct medieval European gender discourses by focusing on how medieval queens navigated existing gender discourses. At the same time, I invited the students to interpret the actions and words of the queens we studied as expressions of personal gender identity in their written work as long as they crafted these interpretations in dialogue with the assigned primary sources. This framing, however, was not successful because it asked students to be flexible about the meaning of a word that was too charged for them and because it placed the burden of doing gender-identity diversity work on the students. Moreover, the historical examples discussed in the first five weeks of class were overwhelmingly cis-heteronormative.

I solved these issues by introducing the Social Framework for Gender Experience/Expression (SFGE). The term works because it emphasizes the potential for disconnect between an individual's personal experience of gender and historically particular social expectations, while simultaneously recognizing the historical work done by laws, social expectations, art, institutions, traditions, popular stories, theater, film, literature, theology, moral codes, and religious teachings to shape, frame, challenge, and inspire individual

experience and expression. As a result, centering SFGE fostered a more inclusive structuring of the course materials and lectures because it signaled to the students that the medieval gender norms under discussion were imposed by society rather than representing individual identity, and it signaled to me that I needed to explicitly explore how individuals with oppositional identities might have existed and negotiated the norms we were studying.

Significantly, employing SFGE revealed to me how my own cis-heteronormative bias had been built into the original version of the course. While my intellectual training prepared me well to dissect and dismantle discourses of power, my own privilege as a white cis-heterosexual woman allowed me to be less aware of the need to pay careful attention to the individual experience of those most harmed by the oppressive discourses I dissect in my research and teaching. This has been my central challenge as I try to make my own teaching more inclusive, and one that the current generation of students is helping me to overcome so that I can put my ability to read polemics critically to good use.

Prior to my 2019 course revision, my analysis of queenly behavior in lecture had focused on how medieval queens challenged and reinforced cis-hetero-normative gender standards that shaped their roles as brides and mothers of kings.[36] A recent special edition of *Medieval Feminist Forum* dedicated to trans feminist medieval studies demonstrated that the available primary sources about medieval European queens and aristocratic women can and must be read in a more sophisticated and inclusive manner.[37] Indeed, literary scholars have been applying such inclusive reading strategies for decades.[38] Assisted by the demands of my students and the incredibly useful models offered by this special edition of *Medieval Feminist Forum*, I was given the opportunity to apply these insights to my research and teaching.

Introducing SFGE

It took me three class meetings to arrive at a term that would allow the students to explore their own understandings of gender identity in a nuanced dialogue with the historical complexities offered by medieval queens' rejection, embrace, and adaptation of the gender norms that shaped their world. I've described each day

of this journey in some detail to demonstrate how I explained the meaning of SFGE to my students and how I then used SFGE as a tool for integrating LGBTQ+ readings of our historical sources. Since my lecture style is interactive and I consulted with the students and teaching assistants in between lectures, what I have recorded here as lectures represent a dialogic process between myself, my students, and my teaching assistants.

Day 1: An Apology and Affirmation

I began my revision by apologizing to my students for using the term "gender" in a manner that did not make sense to them and perhaps signaled to them that I did not share their understanding of gender diversity or their commitment to equal rights for all genders and sexualities. I then affirmed my commitment to my institution's principles of inclusive excellence and explained to them that my interest in the politicization of gender expectations in the medieval period reflected my long-standing commitment to gender justice. Politics, I explained, served as an important frame and incubator of oppressive definitions of gender because those seeking to exert power over others often use oppressive gender discourses as a means of gaining support for their authoritarian claims. At the same time, I recognized that my exclusive focus on structures of political power had resulted in my failure to pay attention to the way my course's focus on the cis-heteronormative examples so readily available in the primary sources on medieval European queens implicitly excluded the history of LGBTQ+ people from the story I was telling about queens and politics.

After this attempt to regain the students' trust, I began clarifying my own understanding of the concepts underlying the class. Since I had not yet developed a replacement for my use of the term "gender," in this first lecture, I used the term "~~gender~~"—purposely striking through the text of our disputed word, whenever I meant to discuss gender as a political and social discourse rather than a personal identity. I portrayed my understanding of gender as crossed out for the purpose of indicating that I was recognizing that the term, as I had been using it, did not work for many of my students and that I was still looking for a better term. As I replaced this term with the concrete descriptions of what I had initially meant by the word

"gender," I discovered what aspects of my vision for the course had been inadequately explained to my students, as well as what I had really wanted to say.

A specific example may be helpful here. The previous lecture had concluded a discussion of a particularly rich letter written on behalf of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and addressed to Pope Celestine in 1193. In the letter, Eleanor performed an extreme version of stereotypical female grief for the purpose of excusing her otherwise insubordinate demand that the pope work toward the release of her son, Richard I of England, from captivity.[39] I returned to this letter, which I had already thoroughly discussed, as a means of illustrating how queens were required both in person and as portrayed in writing to conform their behavior to historically specific external expectations, which I described as follows on a PowerPoint slide:

> …historically and culturally specific expectations about queenly behavior, which in turn operate in dialogue with historically and culturally specific understandings of royalty and ~~gender~~ (medieval expectations/social pressures widely shared by those in power and deriving from widely shared and generally oppressive idealization of the masculine and the feminine).[40]

By focusing on queenship as performance, I was able to remind the students that one of the major goals of the class was to examine how queens negotiated their lives and legacies within an oppressive frame of idealized femininity and that we needed to know how that frame worked to understand whether an individual queen's acts pushed against or reinforced that frame. Moreover, the performative act of queenship prevented us from knowing definitively what motivations inspired queens' actions or the way that others portrayed them. For instance, this particular letter, which was likely written by Peter of Blois as a literary experiment for demonstrating his skills, reveals the extent to which queenly behaviors were so overdetermined that they could be imagined in such convincing detail.[41] Queens, like Catherine de Medici, who wrote their own letters, however, demonstrated their ability to use these expectations consciously to their political advantage.[42]

After recalling the performative and composite nature of queenship, I reminded the class that because of the resulting historical difficulty of accessing the individual experience and motivations of queens, the course lectures and readings had largely

ignored individual experience to focus on politics. I then emphasized that this historical uncertainty about individual motivations could more productively be seen a resource allowing for multiple, complementary approaches to the evidence, including the recovery of erased trans and queer historical perspectives.[43] To illustrate this point, I explained that possible historical approaches to our topic and sources included: (1) mapping "the cage of expectations these queens live in" and the resources available to them for resistance; (2) using this map to contribute to a history of ideas about the categories "women" and/or "femininity"; (3) trying to understand what forces shape or challenge prevailing understandings of the categories of women and/or femininity; (4) examining how those categories intersect with political, social, and religious life; and (5) examining how individuals worked within and against the frames that encircled them.[44]

Once I had outlined this framework, I suggested that when my students were reading pathbreaking feminist articles from the late twentieth century, that they translate the late twentieth-century term "gender studies" to mean:

> …studies in the 80s and 90s that were trying to correct simultaneously both essentializing feminism and patriarchal essentialism about women and their roles by showing comparatively, both throughout time and throughout the world, that in relation to dress, occupation, appearance, character, ascribed abilities, and social roles that expectations for people denoted as men and women are not consistent, and not being universal are therefore not natural and can be challenged to the point of allowing individuals to do what they want.

I then applied this translation to a reading of an article by Megan McLaughlin, which had been a source of student dissatisfaction. McLaughlin's article demonstrated that although women's participation in warfare had been disparaged in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it had been considered a natural activity for elite women in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[45] I explained how this argument undermined misogynist attempts made both by medieval thinkers and modern historians to naturalize women's exclusion from warfare and, as a result, political leadership. I then conceded to my students that, like many feminist works written in its time, McLaughlin's article did not ask how individuals may have

experienced these situations as providing opportunities or obstacles to their fulfillment of personal gender identities. In other words, the article did not ask explicitly if people characterized by their society as women participated in warfare because they identified as men.

In response to my students' concerns, I explained that what my students had experienced as the article's failure to explore how medieval women's participation in warfare could serve as an important resource for transmasculine history in part reflected the article's primary goal of undermining misogynist assumptions about women's inability to fight. Moreover, the author's focus on women's ability to fight reflected contemporary feminist medieval historians' determination to destabilize patriarchal assumptions about women's historic capacities and, perhaps more significantly, the considerable medieval evidence that fighting was completely acceptable behavior for elite women prior to the twelfth century. In this sense, the article makes an important historical argument that misogynist prescriptions about women's involvement in warfare are inconsistent over time and thus reflect the norms and politics of a particular moment rather than a natural order. Moreover, as the polemics questioning presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's ability to lead the U.S. armed forces demonstrated, McLaughlin's argument is still relevant.[46] I then observed to my students that, given our current understanding of the importance of excavating possible erased LGBTQ+ histories, the most liberating reading of the evidence addressed by McLaughlin would highlight all interpretive possibilities, and, as a result, simultaneously recognize the historical record's support of both gender diversity and women's capacity to govern.

Day 2: Launching SFGE

In the second lecture of the revision, I introduced the term "Social Framework for Gender Experience" (SFGE) as the replacement for the use of the term "~~gender~~" to refer to my understanding of political and social gender discourses. The term "SFGE" had evolved from the previous lecture's characterization of the cultural and social forces that shape individual gender experience as a cage. While the cage image does not address all the various ways in which people lean into or push against the gender norms that surround them, I

found it useful for helping students to better understand that existing gender norms demand people shape their behavior in dialogue with them. I then illustrated how the term worked by using it to discuss recent trans and queer readings of medieval aristocratic trans and gender-fluid experiences expressed in two famous primary sources: *The Romance of Silence*, which was written in the early 1200s, and the *Life of Christina of Markayate*, about an individual who died in the mid-twelfth century.[47] For the sake of brevity, I will focus here on the *Romance of Silence*.

The Romance of Silence recounts the life journey of an individual named Silence, who was identified as a girl at birth and born into a legal regime that denied daughters the inheritance of property. To avoid disinheriting their first child, Silence's parents raise their child as a boy. Though troubled by nagging debates among the personifications of Nature, Nurture, and Reason about whether he should be able to retain his male identity, Silence becomes a renowned musician and an unmatched knight. He even attracts the unwelcome advances of the king's wife, who is executed for her adulterous desires. Only the magician Merlin can discern Silence's secret and put in motion events that force Silence to assume a public female identity and marry the king.

As Caitlin Watt indicated, however, this tale, which reinforces cis-heteronormative identities and misogynist interpretations of femininity through its conclusion, also simultaneously destabilizes the gender identities it attempts to reinforce. According to Watt, the long debates about Silence's status among Nature, Nurture, and Reason, when read together with the fluid understanding of biological and moral gender offered by the humoral theory popular among medieval thinkers, demonstrate a medieval European awareness that nurture and individual experience could influence an individual's gender identity.[48] Watt observed, moreover, that while the text contrasts prevailing medieval medical and moral understandings of the fluid processes influencing individual gender identity with the rigid social expectations governing the reception of individual behavior, Silence succeeds in inhabiting male social and professional space without detection for most of the tale. Indeed, Silence is recognized as the best knight in the realm.[49] Silence is such an exemplary male that it takes a magician to uncover the secret of his female birth. Moreover, if Watt's reading is correct, the social

critique *The Romance of Silence* forwards about the vulnerability of young musicians and knights only becomes fully visible if we take Silence's male identity seriously rather than dismissing it as a temporary disguise.[50] I shared Watt's interpretation of Silence's gender identity with my students as a means of demonstrating how SFGE allows us to interpret texts both along and against the grain, as is necessary for all questions about queens and historical sources in general.

Day 3: SFGE and Royal Performances

I concluded my introduction of SFGE in a third lecture focusing on the marriage of Isabella of France and Edward II of England. In this lecture, I suggested that the eighteen years of cooperative rule that Isabella and Edward performed as part of their political marriage demonstrates both the power of the medieval SFGE and its inability to describe or fully determine individual aspirations and desires. Edward II sought close relationships with male favorites, suggesting to some the possibility of romantic involvement. At the same time, he was willing to maintain a marriage with Isabella—as long as those two desires did not conflict—because he was well aware that he had to do so if he wished to remain king, produce an heir, and keep peace with France.[51]

Isabella also was willing to fulfill her role as Edward's queen as long as doing so afforded her some political clout. Once Edward excluded her from power, however, she found a lover among his rebellious barons and raised the army that deposed and executed her husband. Isabella then claimed the throne and ruled as regent for her son, Edward III, until her son was able to seize power, execute Isabella's lover, and force his mother to live out her life as a pious widow. When Isabella died, Edward III had his mother buried in her wedding garments.[52]

As these brief accounts suggest, both Edward and Isabella demonstrated their ability to skillfully navigate the gender expectations placed upon them, which were particular to their rank. Both also were willing to openly disregard those expectations and accuse each other of sexual misconduct when doing so helped them to achieve self-fulfillment.[53] As I explained to my students, Edward and Isabella's performances show how medieval individuals were

able to work within an established SFGE without accepting that SFGE as a fixed aspect of their lived reality, much the same way a skilled speaker or writer works within or violates grammatical rules as suits their rhetorical goals. Their behavior calls attention to the performative nature of premodern gender roles and the inability of these roles to fully describe or contain individual identities.

While the example of Edward II and Isabella calls our attention to the individual's struggle to live within or break out of established SFGEs, it also demonstrates the way that gender performances intersected with and were controlled by polemics. Indeed, despite Edward III's attempt to sanitize his parents' memory and blame the disorder caused by their failed marriage on Isabella's lover, later "historical" and literary accounts of their reign embellished upon the failed royal marriage in a manner which reinforced culturally shared tropes associating political disorder with effeminate, tyrannical kings who engage in sodomy, and their scorned, vengeful, adulterous wives.[54]

This habitual use of accusations of presumed sexual deviancy as a means of undermining a ruler's authority is crucial to our understanding of medieval politics, medieval misogyny, and the history of sexualities. It is possible that Edward II could have been accused of taking male lovers even if he did not have male favorites. Isabella's father, for instance, began accusing Edward of avoiding Isabella's bed for the sake of being with his male lover as a means of undermining Edward's authority when Edward instead may have been avoiding Isabella's bed and attempts to produce an heir on account of the queen's young age.[55] Moreover, Edward's tense relations with his barons would have encouraged him to have a favorite upon whom he could count for loyalty to such an extent that this argument has been used by historians to suggest that Edward's relations with his favorites did not involve sexual intercourse, though this once popular interpretation has since been challenged.[56]

At the same time, these polemics, which employ allusions to homosexual relations as a means of communicating Edward's lack of kingly virtue, demonstrate how polemical allusions to proscribed sexual actions reinforce a cis-heterosexual norm. These polemics do so first by reinforcing a negative association between non-normative sexual acts and a lack of personal and political virtue, and then, as

a result, encouraging individuals to hide any behaviors that might call into question their capacity to rule.[57] For instance, Edward II's understanding of this political discourse would have encouraged him to perform marital concord with his wife as long as possible. Indeed, his falling out with Isabella could be explained as easily with reference to a deterioration of England's relationship with France as by Edward's relationship with his favorite.[58] These two would be remembered, however, only for their sexual impropriety and monstrous desire for power, with Isabella eventually gaining the title "she-wolf of France."[59]

Results

Adopting SFGE and performing trans, queer, and gender-fluid readings of the sources energized my students beyond my wildest hopes. They enthusiastically embraced SFGE as a useful tool in their written and oral analysis, improving the quality of their arguments in the process. For instance, we discussed in class how those opposed to a queen's rule might weaponize SFGE by publicizing discrepancies between a queen's authority or behavior and popular gender norms as a means of undercutting her power. We also discussed how individual queens might weaponize SFGE by authenticating existing gender norms to distract from their own untraditional claims to power, and, as a result, contribute to the gender oppression of others. Drawing on Teresa Earenfight's brilliant article, "Without the Persona of the Prince," we elaborated upon how the composite nature of monarchy—an institution that pretends that one person governs alone, while actually relying on a network of collaborators—naturally undercuts the particular SFGE upon which it depends for its authority.[60]

Throughout these conversations, the students synthesized their own commitments to gender justice with the historical observations informed by SFGE as a term. During our final exam group activity, a male-identifying student played Elizabeth I.[61] When questioned by other students about this choice, this student and his team answered with a well-argued rebuttal of gender essentialism that drew upon our class discussions of the gender fluidity of Elizabeth I's political performances, as well as the students' own understanding of contemporary gender theory and politics.[62]

Inspired by this success, I rebuilt my entire 2022 "European Queens" course around SFGE, paying particular attention to where the term allowed me to incorporate readings that advanced LGBTQ+ perspectives. For instance, we began the course with Roland Betancourt's analysis of the slut-shaming of the Byzantine Empress Theodora.[63] I also revised the course description on the syllabus to fully integrate individual experiences into our exploration of medieval queens.[64] Finally, I explicitly acknowledged when the framework of a reading assignment would appear to my students to be out of date in a manner that they would experience as oppressive, and explained why and how we would read that assignment.[65]

These revisions helped me to emphasize the shared frames of expectations that influenced individual queens. For instance, I incorporated the most accessible pages of Watt's article and the relevant selections from *The Romance of Silence* into a seven-lecture unit demonstrating how SFGE intersects with discourses about elite and royal women's autonomy, power, and gender experience as these pertain to active rule and involvement in warfare. These lectures paid close attention to the primary sources that urged Queen Melisende of Jerusalem to act like a man, castigated Empress Matilda for doing so, and explained the political instability that characterized the reigns of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Isabella of France as resulting from the queens' marital infidelities. Reading the relevant primary sources in dialogue with extra-credit readings, these lectures explored the ways that recent queer and trans readings of these powerful literary and historical figures complemented and corrected a long and important feminist tradition of reading these queens. This provided us with a more accurate, expansive, and inclusive understanding of how gender, power, and individual experience intersected in medieval Europe and continue to intersect in our modern world, especially through cinematic portrayals of these medieval queens.[66]

In 2022, I also incorporated short-answer Poll Everywhere questions into the middle of every lecture so I could see how the students were understanding what we were covering. I then shared a range of responses anonymously with the students at the start of the following lecture so that they would see how their classmates were understanding the material. For instance, in Lecture 13 (Week 6, Monday), I posed the questions: "How do we interpret queens

who act as kings? Is this the intersection of SFGE and individual gender experience/expression? Do they put aside the woman and become the man as Bernard urges Melisende? If so, what does this mean?" I then shared a range of student responses in lecture 14, demonstrating that some students (1) recognized the queens we were discussing as examples of gender fluidity that undercut the prevalent SFGE, (2) doubted the authenticity of these queens' apparent gender fluidity because of the political context in which it arose, (3) were uncomfortable ascribing masculine identities to these politically active medieval women, and (4) observed that traits that made a medieval woman seem manly to her contemporaries would only indicate a woman's strength and ambition today. These quick polls showed SFGE working to inspire some students and improve their understanding in real time, as students often incorporated the term into their answers. They also showed that the students who resisted the term still found it useful to think against.

Those who resisted the term were not in the majority, although, as their answers to the question posed in Lecture 13 demonstrated, they represented a variety of views. After reviewing the Lecture 13 responses, I asked the following question via Poll Everywhere in Lecture 14:

> Which approach to the study of queens is most interesting to you and why? History of SFGE, individual interaction with SFGE (especially when the individual pushes against it and does the unexpected), individual queens' lives (their challenges and accomplishments), individual possible gender queer or trans identities, other factors?

This question produced interesting statistical results. Of the 82 students who responded to this poll, 22 (27%) chose queens' accomplishments, 49 (60%) chose SFGE, and 11 (13%) chose gender identities. Five of the students who chose queens' accomplishments expressed disapproval of the term "SFGE," suggesting that it expressed a political agenda. Another student stated a preference for a feminist approach rather than focusing on SFGE. At the same time, students who selected gender identity as their chosen focus found SFGE an incredibly useful term. So, 60 (73%) of the students who participated in this poll given halfway through the term expressed enthusiasm for the revisions I had made to the course in 2019 around the term SFGE.

My regular polls also allowed me to see when student understanding was shifting toward confusion because of the students' persistent emphasis on individual experience, causing me to have to remind them of the difference between their understanding of gender as an identity and my understanding of SFGE as a social framework. My students had begun to collapse the two terms and talk about an individual's SFGE. In this situation, the fact that I had been explicit about the meaning of my language allowed for a quick correction without creating an emotional bottleneck.[67]

Conclusion

In the process of creating and teaching with SFGE, I learned an important lesson about the crucial role played by language in teaching and learning. As instructors who have the ability to see the broad historical development of a discourse and understand the complexities of language, we gain so much more reach and precision if we can build explicit bridges between what we are trying to teach and the words and experiences our students bring into the classroom. I also learned that for bridge building to work, communication must be constant, as student understanding can shift over the course of a term. More significantly, I learned that by actively engaging my students to create a shared language, I improved my own understanding of the course material and opened myself up to new interpretations, which made the course more cohesive and relevant to myself and my students. In other words, my attempts to understand and meet the concerns of my students allowed me to imagine how I could improve my own class to make it even more transparent and inclusive. Adapting to my students' needs also positively affected my research. I incorporated SFGE into a conference paper in the spring of 2022 and received the best audience response of my career because my audience finally understood my argument. In changing my language to help my students, I found a better understanding myself.

This process was as challenging as it was exciting. It required me to concede some ground as an instructor that I would have had trouble conceding in my early days of teaching. For instance, SFGE does not encompass the full complexity of meaning of the term "gender" as Scott applies it. SFGE, however, reminds students of the complex social structures in which our actions take place in a

manner that offers an important corrective to their general tendency to see all individual actions as coming from an autonomous place. Using SFGE rescued my class from a pedagogical emergency and has inspired a subsequent cohort of queens students. In that respect, it is sufficient for now. When it no longer works, I will engage my students again to see where we can find common ground so that we can learn from each other.

While all teachers hope to avoid pedagogical emergencies by staying up to date with the concerns and needs of their students, a dialogic approach may help us best navigate our current historical moment in a compassionate, wise, and just manner that will benefit all of us. I hope that by sharing my own process for rebuilding a broken learning community that I will inspire others who are preparing to avoid or recover from pedagogical emergencies to listen to their students and create new language in dialogue with them. Such dialogue seems all the more necessary as words and interpretations become politicized by those who do not understand them. By naming SFGE, I identified the historical changes in gender expectations as the context for our discussion of queens, thus avoiding the misinterpretation that such discussions were political for all but a very small percent of the class, who remained suspicious of the process as a whole yet also still sought to learn about the royal women who broke the Social Framework for Gender Experience of their time in their pursuit of power.

Notes

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1. Nancy McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender: Rhetoric and Politics in Fifteenth-Century France*, Genders and Sexualities in History (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave, 2015).

2. For instance, Katrin E. Sjursen intervened in the debate about whether Hillary Clinton, as a woman, would be either an excessively passive or excessively

hawkish president. See Sjursen, "What the Middle Ages Show About Women Leaders," *The Atlantic*, February 8, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/are-women-leaders-hawks-or-doves-a-lesson-on-gender-equality-from-the-middle-ages/460386/>. For the roles played by premodern queens in the popular imagination, see Janice North, Karl C. Alvestad, and Elena Woodacre, eds., *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, Queenship and Power (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillian for Springer Nature, 2018).

3. Students expressed delight upon learning that medieval women served as effective leaders in their societies. Students also successfully learned how gender norms interact with political and cultural change as demonstrated by a General Education Assessment performed on the class in Winter 2018.

4. Throughout this article, I have adopted the terminology of my students because doing so played a crucial role in my ability to show them that we were indeed working together to upend oppressive gender structures, albeit from the seemingly opposed viewpoints of top-down and bottom-up. As a premodern scholar of gender who is aware of the context-specific and socially constructed nature of all gender norms, I agree with modern scholars of trans experience who have emphasized that labels such as "cis" identify relationships to existing norms rather than a particular fixed identity. For instance, see Jules Gill-Peterson, "When Did We Become Cis?" Sad Brown Girl [blog], June 4, 2021, <https://sadbrowngirl.substack.com/p/when-did-we-become-cis>. I am grateful to Chelsea Shields for this reference.

5. For instance, Isabel of Castile accentuated the exceptional nature of her own princely power in a manner that reinforced traditional gender roles for other women, while simultaneously justifying religious persecutions and colonization. See Peggy Liss, "Isabel of Castile (1451-1504), Her Self-Representation and Its Context," in *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (Aldershot, United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2005), 120-144. For a study of how European queens contributed to early modern colonization efforts both within Europe and throughout the world, see Estelle Paranque, Nate Probasco, and Claire Jowitte, eds., *Colonization, Piracy, and Trade in Early Modern Europe: The Roles of Powerful Women and Queens* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan for Springer Nature, 2017). For the shift among queenship studies from celebrating queens as symbols of female agency to noting their role in "sustaining patriarchal structures," see Dyan Elliott, "The Three Ages of Joan Scott," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008): 1403.

6. For instance, Catherine de Medici, along with other ruling aristocrats of Europe, kept human individuals characterized by her culture as monsters among her courtiers as a means of demonstrating her civilizing influence. See Touba Ghadessi, "Inventoried Monsters: Dwarves and Hirsutes at Court," *Journal of the History of Collections* 23, no. 2 (November 2011): 267-281. As Surekha Davies has convincingly argued, such monster-making played a central role in the violence of European colonization of the Americas. See Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Kim M. Phillips has also noted that the gender norms of medieval Europe influenced the

ideas of masculinity central to ideas about travel. See Phillips, "Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages," *History Compass* 14, no. 3 (March 2016): 81-92. Also see Phillips's 2020 Medieval Academy Plenary Address, "Gendering the Medieval Expansion of Europe: Men Washed Up," video, March 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XV7g0PRCHHc>.

7. Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053-1075; and Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?" *Diogenes* 57, no. 1 (February 2010): 7-14.

8. See the articles featured in "AHR Forum: Revisiting 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,'" *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008): 1344-1429, esp. Joanne Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender,'" 1346-1348.

9. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1053-1054, 1064-1065, 1067, 1068, 1073.

10. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1054 (rejecting biological determinism), 1059 (criticizing theories of patriarchy resting primarily on physical difference), 1064 (criticizing Lacanian approaches that universalize male-female relations), 1067-1069 (offering a theory of gender). For a longer view of the development of the concept prior to Scott's intervention, see Meyerowitz, "A History of Gender," 1353-1356.

11. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1053-1054, 1056-1057, 1066-1067.

12. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1054.

13. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1073-1074.

14. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1074.

15. For a discussion of the debates generated around the use of the term "gender" by the United Nations in the late 1990s and also for objections to the historical and categorical fluidity implied by the term on the part of essentializing feminists, see Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category," 8-9 and 11. For further discussion of essentializing feminist opposition to the term, see Meyerowitz, "A History of Gender," 1347-1348.

16. For an example of how Scott's inquiry into gender as a social, cultural, and political construct has enriched queenship and monarchy studies by allowing feminist scholars to demonstrate the centrality of queens and gender norms to medieval and early modern constructions of rulership and virtue, see Susan Broomhall, ed., *Women and Power at the French Court, 1483-1563*, Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

17. Theresa Earenfight, "Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe," *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (April 2007): 1-21.

18. For instance, Donald Trump's reliance on his daughter as a close political advisor, which alarmed critics for its nepotism. See David Smith, "Trump Nepotism Attacked After 'out-of-her-depth' Ivanka Given Key Summit Role," *The Guardian*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jul/01/donald-trump-ivanka-g20-north-korea-nepotism>. In a similar manner,

early modern French kings Louis IX and François I relied upon female relations, whose authority derived from ideas about dynasty and their proximity to the king, as a means of consolidating power at the expense of the aristocracy and royal institutions. See "Part I: Conceptualizing and Practicing Female Power," in Broomhall, *Women and Power at the French Court*, 43-114.

19. See, for instance, Sandra R. Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus's Messalina," *Signs* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 50-82.

20. Scott celebrates the derivation of the term "gender" from linguistic studies because languages that gender words as male and female often also have a neuter category, suggesting that the term "gender" automatically sets up a non-binary frame of understanding. See Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category," 1954.

21. For example, Burgundian attempts to undermine the reputation of Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France, which then shaped subsequent historical interpretations of her reign. See Tracy Adams, *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

22. For examples of such vilification of Valentina Visconti, Duchess of Orléans and Catherine de Medici, see Nancy McLoughlin, "Silencing the Widow with a Prayer for Peace: Gerson, Valentina Visconti and the Body of Princess Isabelle (Paris, 1404-1408)," *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 19 (2014): 187-209; Tracy Adams, "Valentina Visconti, Charles VI, and the Politics of Witchcraft," *Parergon* 30, no. 2 (2013): 11-32; and Charlotte Wells, "Leeches on the Body Politic: Xenophobia and Witchcraft in Early Modern French Political Thought," *French Historical Studies* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 351-377.

23. For an argument comparing the current QAnon conspiracy to accusations made against the Roman Empress Theodora, see Roland Betancourt, "What the QAnon of the 6th Century Teaches Us About Conspiracies," *Time*, February 3, 2021, <https://time.com/5935586/qanon-6th-century-conspiracies/>.

24. For example, see Laure Fagnart and Mary Beth Winn, "Louise de Savoie: The King's Mother, *Alter Rex*," in Broomhall, *Women and Power at the French Court*, 85-114.

25. See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Dramatic Troubles of *Ecclesia*: Gendered Performances of the Divided Church," in *Cultural Performances in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Nancy Freeman Regalado*, ed. Eglal Doss-Quinby, Roberta L. Krueger, and E. Jane Burns (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 181-193; Daisy Delogu, "The King's Two Daughters: Isabelle of France and the University of Paris*, Fille du Roy*," *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 3, no. 2 (November 2013): 1-21; and McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender*, chapter three.

26. For the premodern contributions to the evolution of the personification of France as Marianne, see Daisy Delogu, *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 11.

27. For a few of many available examples, see the first three cartoons collected by Michael Cavna in "Cartoonists are Using the Statue of Liberty to Protest the Separation of Immigrant Children," *The Washington Post*, June 19, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2018/06/19/cartoonists-are-using-the-statue-of-liberty-to-protest-the-separation-of-immigrant-children/>.

28. Brian Brennan, "Piety and Politics in Nineteenth Century Poitiers: The Cult of St. Radegund," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47, no. 1 (January 1996): 65-66 and 80. I am grateful to Jennifer Edwards for pointing out the significance of Radegund's titles.

29. Barbara F. Weissberger, "*Tanto monta*: The Catholic Monarchs' Nuptial Fiction and the Power of Isabel I of Castile," in *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 56-59.

30. For the use of Isabel by a fascist women's organization during the Spanish Civil War, see Weissberger, "*Tanto, monta*," 57.

31. There have been several articles by medievalists exploring the theoretical frameworks we may employ to understand how the medieval past haunts the present. For a provocative discussion, see Ruth Evans, "Chaucer in Cyberspace: Medieval Technologies of Memory and The House of Fame," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 43-69. Also, for a provocative exploration of how much we as moderns are like medievals, see "Category Crossings: Bruno Latour and Medieval Modes of Existence," the Special Issue edited by Marilynn Desmond and Noah G. Guynn, *Romanic Review* 111, no, 1 (May 2020).

32. David Pace, *The Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm: Seven Steps to Increased Student Learning* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 11-13.

33. Serena Bassi and Greta LaFleur, "Introduction: TERFs, Gender-Critical Movements, and Postfascist Feminisms," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (August 2022): 327.

34. Jennifer Saul, "Why the Words We Use Matter when Describing Anti-Trans Activists," *The Conversation*, March 5, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/why-the-words-we-use-matter-when-describing-anti-trans-activists-130990>.

35. Bassi and LaFleur, "Introduction," 311.

36. See Theresa Earenfight's description of a queen's role in *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (New York, Palgrave, 2013), 6-9.

37. Dorothy Kim and M. W. Bychowski, eds., "Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism: An Introduction," *Medieval Feminist Forum*, Special Issue, 55, no. 1 (2019): 6-41.

38. As attested by the rich bibliographies supplied in this *Medieval Feminist Forum* special issue.

39. Eleanor of Aquitaine, "A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1193)," in *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, ed. Joan Ferrante et al., <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/140.html>.

40. "European Queens" Lecture, Friday, November 1, 2019.

41. H. G. Richardson, "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 291 (April 1959): 193-213. John D. Cotts notes that while Eleanor was working on Richard's release at the time, the style of the letters confirms initial historians' doubts about their status as real diplomatic documents and that these doubts are further supported by the fact that the author, Peter of Blois, although clearly a member of Eleanor's court at the time, was never named as her secretary. See Cotts, *The Clerical Dilemma: Peter of Blois*

and Literate Culture in the Twelfth Century (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 41-42.

42. Katherine Crawford, "Catherine de Médicis and the Performance of Political Motherhood," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 643-673.

43. Following a strategy outlined by Judith M. Bennett. See Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 1-2 (January/April 2000): 1-24. For a discussion of how applying this strategy to the historical investigation of premodern trans individuals allows for a more accurate understanding of their identities, lives, and networks, see Kadin Henningsen, "'Calling [herself] Eleanor': Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 249-266.

44. I was likely inspired to describe SFGE as cage by Theresa Earenfight's description of monarchy as a sack. See Earenfight, "Without the Persona of the Prince," 10-11. My understanding of individuals pushing against the cage derives from Judith Butler's discussion of gender as a performance. See Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519-531. The cage metaphor has long been used to describe the oppression of women in feminist sources. An early and influential usage that also reflects on the oppression of race and class may be found in Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1983), 1-40. I am grateful to Judy Wu for calling my attention to this source.

45. McLaughlin makes this point in the first paragraph of her argument, though her wording is more subdued. See Megan McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe," *Women's Studies* 17, no. 3-4 (1990): 193-209.

46. Sjursen, "What the Middle Ages Show About Women Leaders."

47. For Silence, see Lewis Thorpe, ed., *Le Roman de Silence: A Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Verse-Romance by Heldris De Cornüalle* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: W. Heffer, 1972); and also in English translation, Heldris de Cornüalle, *Le Roman De Silence*, trans. Regina Psaki (New York: Garland, 1991); and Sarah Roche-Mahdi, *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1999). For Christina, see C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse* (Toronto, Canada: Medieval Academy of America, 1998). For a discussion of gender fluidity in *The Life of Christina*, which inspired my lecture, see Meghan L. Nestel, "A Space of Her Own: Genderfluidity and Negotiation in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 100-134.

48. Medieval conceptions of gender equated femininity with a lack of reason and virtue. For a summary, see Caitlin Watt, "'Car vallés sui et nient mescine': Trans Heroism and Literary Masculinity in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 140-145.

49. Watt, "Car vallés sui et nient mescine," 155.

50. Watt, "Car vallés sui et nient mescine," 168-169.

51. For a detailed study of the cooperative nature of the early phase of Edward II's and Isabella's marriage and the argument that Isabella only rebelled after Edward seized her property and withdrew his support from her political endeavors, see Lisa Benz St John, "In the Best Interest of the Queen: Isabella of France, Edward II and the Image of a Functional Relationship," in *Fourteenth Century England, Vol. VIII*, ed. J. S. Hamilton (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 21-41. For a summary of historical treatments of Edward II's sexuality, see W. M. Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II," in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, ed. Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: York Medieval Press, 2006), 22-25.

52. For an account of Edward III's attempt to promote the public memory of his parents as harmoniously married, see Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II," 45-46.

53. Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II," 41-43.

54. Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II"; Joanna Laynesmith, "Telling Tales of Adulterous Queens in Medieval England: From Olympias of Macedonia to Elizabeth Woodville," in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 195-214. For a more general treatment of the role played by speculation about royal sexuality in medieval politics, see Henric Bagerius and Christine Ekholst, "For Better or for Worse: Royal Marital Sexuality as Political Critique in Late Medieval Europe," in *The Routledge History of Monarchy*, ed. Elena Woodacre et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 636-654.

55. For Philip IV of France's use of these accusations in his political negotiations with Edward, see Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "The Political Repercussions of Family Ties in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Marriage of Edward II of England and Isabelle of France," *Speculum* 63, no. 3 (July 1988): 573-595. For the suggestion that delayed sexual relations reflected the queen's young age, See St John, "In the Best Interest of the Queen," 25.

56. Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II," 23-27.

57. Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II," 45-46.

58. St John, "In the Best Interest of the Queen," 38-39.

59. For Marlowe's characterization of Isabella as an adulterous she-wolf, see David Stymeist, "Status, Sodomy, and Theater in Marlowe's 'Edward II,'" *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 246-247. For a survey of such accusations in comparison with sources contemporary to Isabella that portray her as a charming queen, see Sophia Menache, "Isabelle of France, Queen of England—A Reconsideration," *Journal of Medieval History* 10, no. 2 (June 1984): 107-124.

60. Earenfight, "Without the Persona of the Prince."

61. The "Queen Olympics" was an extra-credit activity that took place during the regularly scheduled final. Twenty-six out of 102 enrolled students participated actively in the two-hour activity that required students to select a queen and demonstrate how she would solve a particular issue for a committee of judges composed of myself and the teaching assistants. The students' engaged, playful,

and savvy performances indicated to me that the students and I had overcome our earlier challenges and found a shared language of inquiry and expression.

62. For Queen Elizabeth I's skillful combination of masculine and feminine rhetorical positions for the sake of monopolizing "all dominant gendered subject positions," see Mary Beth Rose, "The Gendering of Authority in the Public Speeches of Elizabeth I," *PMLA* 115, no. 5 (October 2000): 1077-1082, esp. 1081.

63. Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 59-88.

64. From the revised course description: "We pay particular attention to how the social and political frameworks queens inhabited shaped their experience, how queens used and resisted these frameworks to pursue their own agendas, and what we might be able to recover or imagine about their own experiences or the identity possibilities of individuals living in this time."

65. For instance: "This is an old-fashioned feminist narrative that has many problems that you will recognize readily. I am sharing it with you because in mapping out the reported achievements and struggles of elite women, these late twentieth-century feminists are actually mapping the SFGE rather than real life. So, they are mapping the unspoken framework of patriarchal power. If you think of what X is saying as a description of the frame people inhabited and pushed against rather than a history of all women or women-identified individuals, you will be getting what you need from this reading for the class."

66. The following extra-credit readings were assigned and discussed at length in lecture: Coral Lumbley, "Imperatrix, Domina, Rex: Conceptualizing the Female King in Twelfth-Century England," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 64-99; W. M. Ormrod, "The Sexualities of Edward II," in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, ed. Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (Woodbridge, United Kingdom: York Medieval Press, 2006), 22-47; Michael R. Evans, "Queering Isabella: The 'She-Wolf of France' in Film and Television," in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, ed. Janice North, Karl C. Alvestad, and Elena Woodacre (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillian for Springer Nature, 2018), 263-282; Henric Bagerius and Christine Ekholst, "For Better or for Worse: Royal Marital Sexuality as Political Critique in Late Medieval Europe," in *The Routledge History of Monarchy*, ed. Elena Woodacre et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 636-654.

67. I defined the two terms on a slide as follows: "**Gender**—identity or prevailing understanding of self that belongs to the person and places them in dialogue with the SFGE that dominates their society as well as alternate SFGEs available in their local communities. **SFGE**—Social Framework for Gender Experience—The frame or cage in which people live that is constructed by the collective effort of those around them with those in power often having a larger say through laws, institutions, ritual, and behavior norms. This does not belong to a person. Although a person may understand it uniquely, it exists outside the person."