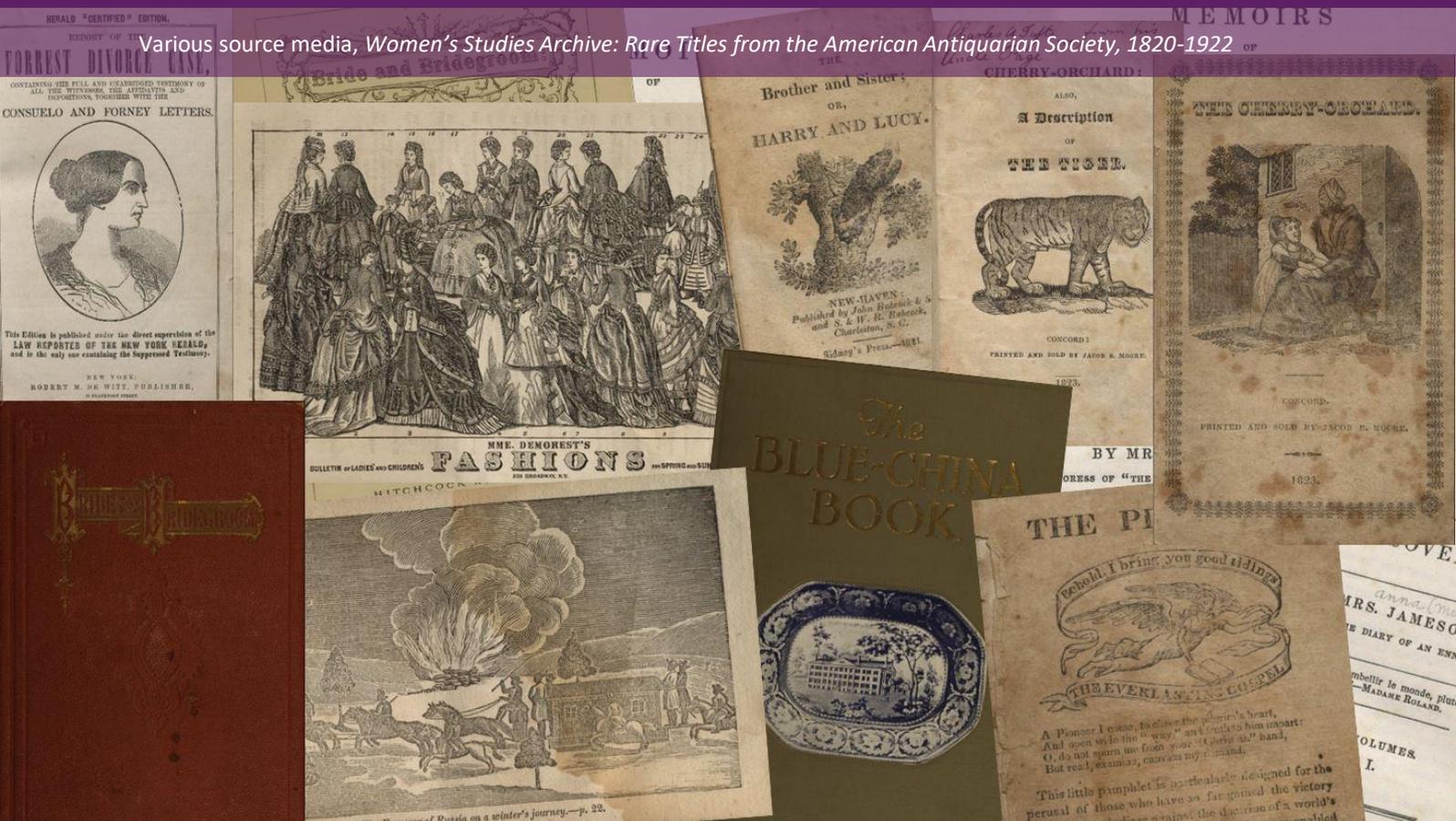


The Author Gender Limiter in *Women's Studies Archive*

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Various source media, *Women's Studies Archive: Rare Titles from the American Antiquarian Society, 1820-1922*



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| By Rachel Holt, Acquisitions Editor, Gale Primary Sources |

With the launch of the third part of our award-winning *Women's Studies Archive* series, *Rare Titles from the American Antiquarian Society, 1820-1922* Gale is proud to announce a unique new search functionality, the Author Gender Limiter. The addition of this new product feature opens a world of possibilities for undergraduate study and scholarship in the fields of women's history, gender studies and beyond.

What is the Author Gender Limiter?

As the name might suggest, the Author Gender Limiter tool limits your search to monographs that are authored by a person(s) of the selected gender.

The four limiters currently available within this series are:

- Female
- Male
- Unknown [Alias]
- Unknown

The metadata required to enable this function was initially created by running the author names through software to identify whether the author was *Female*, *Male* or *Unknown*, based on their name and/or epithet. This was an efficient approach to gathering the data, and created a preliminary list, but the process understandably led to some incorrect attributions. For example, well-known pseudonyms, such as George Eliot, were frequently misidentified by the software. As such, Gale manually went through the data set created and checked for any anomalies. Names were checked against our internal database of terms, alongside additional searches, to ensure that the data was as accurate as possible before being included in the archive.

At this stage we also added an additional category called *Unknown: [Alias]*. *Unknown [Alias]* is here used to indicate authors that we believe are likely to be artificial constructs created by the publisher. Unlike pseudonyms (such as George Eliot) which are often intended to disguise the author's identity, *Unknown [Alias]* is used to give artificial credibility to the writer, or group of writers, often by assuming a specific gender or role. Good examples of this are agony aunt columns, where the title 'Aunt' is used to denote comfort and female wisdom and the same name might endure through multiple authors – becoming, in effect, a brand name as much as an Alias. A modern example of this is *Slate's Dear Prudence*, where the persona of Prudence covers the work of multiple writers of different

genders. We felt that these formed an interesting subset in their own right, and that making them easily identifiable would be beneficial to researchers, particularly those working within the digital humanities.

For the time being, the Author Gender Limiter is only applicable to monographs within *Women's Studies Archive: Voice and Vision* as well as within the *Rare Titles from the American Antiquarian Society, 1820-1922*, although there are hopes to extend this functionality beyond this resource and content type to other Gale digital archive resources.

How Does it Address the Diversity of Gender Identities?

Gale is aware that these limiters currently present a binary approach to gender. Gale is a supporter of the LGBTQIA+ community, and we strive always to be inclusive. However, after much discussion, this decision was taken because it best reflects the nature of the material itself, which currently only includes, as far as we have been able to identify, authors who have self-identified as or otherwise historically been attributed to a particular gender based on known information about them. In an effort to prevent non-viable searches we have not included non-binary, gender non-conforming, genderfluid, intersex, or agender limiters at this point in time. We felt that including limiters that yielded no results would be misleading to users and to the people we strive to support. In Gale products where a gender limiter is provided we will actively review the limiter options offered to ensure they encompass all author genders identified in the material.

If you notice that an author has been incorrectly classified based on known information about that person, please do let us know. We endeavour to make the *Women's Studies Archive* an accurate and inclusive resource and are very happy to make changes to both our metadata and our limiter options to ensure that this remains the case.

It is important to recognise however that silences in the archives are meaningful in themselves and can allude to a hidden, historical narrative. Whilst examples of gender non-conformity can be found in cultures worldwide since ancient times, it has not always been possible to live openly as a non-binary person, or with any gender expression/identity that varies from what a person was assigned at birth. The *Women's Studies Archive* primarily concerns eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century materials, predominantly from western societies where gender nonconformity could lead to ridicule, violence, or incarceration. It is possible that non-binary individuals exist within the archive, but they were not identified or catalogued as such. Terminology to define non-binary people can sometimes be fairly modern, with many terms originating from the 1980s onwards, so binary genders may have been inappropriately assigned due

to an inappropriate vocabulary at that time. It is also conceivable that non-binary authors were discriminated against and their works were not published or collected by traditional avenues. Whether these are the reasons for a lack of non-binary authors in the *Women's Studies Archive* is hard to ascertain, but it is important to address why they are not represented. Lack of representation of minorities is an issue for many, if not most, archives and it is important to recognise why the gaps occur so that scholars, teachers, and students can encourage a wider conversation on such issues.

Why is the Author Gender Limiter Important for Undergraduate Study, Postgraduate Scholarship and Teaching?

The decision to build the Author Gender Limiter was driven by repeated requests from librarians and instructors to Gale's editorial team for the ability to identify an authors' gender within our resources. There is a clear research need for this functionality in the fields of women's history and gender studies to further empower learning and research.

One of the primary goals of the *Women's Studies Archive* is to provide female narratives which have historically been underrepresented. The tradition of women's writing has often been ignored due to the perceived inferior position that women have held in patriarchal societies. It is still common to find anthologies, taught on courses at Higher Education institutions around the world, in which women are outnumbered by male writers or even entirely absent.

The ability to search within the *Women's Studies Archive* using one or more key words and then limit the search by authors of a particular gender enables users to gain a gendered perspective on a particular topic. For instance, a user interested in women and the First World War could do a basic search using the key word "war" and then filter results by the appropriate date range, 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918, as well as by the authors' gender so that only female writers appear in the results. Although this is likely to throw up some irrelevant results (e.g. a female author writing about ancient wars, or using the word "war" to describe a campaign they are championing etc.) this should supply the user with a corpus of primary sources that provide a female perspective of the First World War.

Why is studying a topic from the female perspective important? Because women's history is human history. We cannot understand our past if we cut out the experience, viewpoint, and contribution of half the world's population. For much of history there has been a wider trend of historians not including women in their accounts of the past. For centuries, history has not only been recorded, told, and taught from a male perspective but women's part in it has often been downplayed, ignored, or recast to fit a male

agenda. Primary sources provide a window into the past by giving insight into how an individual or group experienced the times they were living in, hence why the ability to locate female authored works is so important. Greater access to, and discoverability of, the works of women writers allows for a new viewpoint of history.

What Implications Does it Have for Digital Humanities?

Digital Humanities is an area of scholarship applying computer-based technology in the humanities. For researchers, digital humanities scholarship is fuelling new ways of interrogating content, analysing insights, and outputting discoveries. The Author Gender Limiter offers further exciting possibilities, especially the development of feminist digital humanities.

The ability to create a data set of female-authored works within a precise date range or surrounding a particular topic enables greater opportunities to explore women's writing in new ways. As well as providing a female perspective on a specific event (wars, technological advancements, governments etc.), time periods or topics (education, health and medicine) such data sets support the ability to track the development of female language and ideas.

It is also not as difficult or inaccessible as you might first think. Undergraduate students or early career researchers can easily use *Gale Primary Sources* inbuilt tools to interrogate this data further. Researchers can use the Term Frequency tool to see the frequency of search terms within sets of content to begin identifying central themes and assessing how individuals, events, and ideas interact and develop over time. For instance, a user interested in women's role in the abolition of slavery could search *Women's Studies Archive* for the word "slave," use the Author Gender Limiter to limit the search to women authors and then apply the Term Frequency tool.

This not only shows that women were talking about slavery but creates a visualisation of when this was most and least prevalent, and for how long. For instance, in 1876 the word "slavery" appears the most in women's writing so students looking to write a paper or researchers doing in depth analysis may focus in on those materials. They may also want to consider what else was going on at that time which might have caused this spike, as 1876 experienced not only a presidential election but a summer of race riots in South Carolina.

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gale.com/womens-studies-essays