

One-day event: Gender in Global Perspective

When: June 12th, 2025

Where: Room 12.21/12.25, Social Sciences Building, University of Leeds

[Book your place here](https://sexgennorth.org/events/) or visit <https://sexgennorth.org/events/> to book

Schedule

9.00-9.30	Coffee and Welcome
9.30-10.50	Panel 1 - Chinese Women in the Digital Age (Xiaoyu Zhang, Yaquan Liang, Zexuan He)
10.50-11.10	Coffee
11.10- 1.00	Panel 2 – Masculinities and Violence in Global Perspective (Luna Yihan Fu, Molly Taylor, Stella Gonzalez-Arnal, Alison Phipps)
1.00—2.00	Lunch (provided by the University of Leeds)
2.00-3.50	Panel 3 - Reproductive Futures in Global Context (Ruth Holliday and Qiqi Huang, Matilda Fitzmaurice, Xingyi Li, Xinzhe Hu)
3.50-4.00	Coffee
4.00 -5.00	Keynote – Professor Toni Haastrup
5.00-5.30	Close

Abstracts

Feminist Power, Resistance, and Global Politics (Keynote by Professor Toni Haastrup)

In an era of resurgent militarism, democratic erosion, and intensified anti-gender mobilisations, gender in global perspective demands more than critique — it requires a radical reimagining. This keynote reflects on the limits of dominant gender agendas in global governance and highlights Global South feminists' contributions through practices of resistance, co-creation, and institutional engagement. Drawing on my work on feminist foreign policy, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and Pan-African feminist movements, I argue for an approach that centres racial and epistemic justice and takes seriously the institutional and affective labour of feminist reworlding. From policy to pedagogy, this intervention invites us to confront the co-option of feminist gains, interrogate the silences in global norm-making, and hold space for transformative alternatives rooted in solidarity, care, and collective power.

Toni Haastrup is a Professor and Chair in Global Politics at the University of Manchester. Grounded in critical feminisms that draws on decolonial thinking and Pan-African perspectives, her work interrogates how power operates within global politics with her current research focused on how feminist actors resist, reshape, and reimagine the world. She has published on these themes. Toni is also actively engaged in shaping research impact and knowledge exchange practices across the UK higher education sector, and she regularly advises on gender and international affairs in academic, policy, and civil society spaces.

Panel 1 - Chinese women in the digital age: identity, empowerment, and feminism

The rapidly evolving landscape of digital media in China has reshaped how Chinese women experience and embody gender while also facilitating grassroots digital feminism. Social media platforms such as *Weibo*, and *Xiaohongshu* (*Rednote*), have become key spaces for Chinese women to assert agency and engage with feminist discourse. In this context, this panel draws on diverse theoretical perspectives to investigate how Chinese women actively engage in digital spaces to navigate their identities, challenge traditional gender norms and expectations in the digital era for empowerment, whilst also facing the challenges of censorship, consumerism, and rigid heterosexual norms.

Xiaoyu Zhang, *Renegotiating women's identities: the tension between media consumption and feminism in contemporary China* (University of York)

Ode to Joy is a groundbreaking Chinese television show that centrally features five female characters in a portrayal of contemporary urban femininities. My research is based on in-depth interviews with young female users of the social media platform 'Xiaohongshu' (*Rednote*)—fans of the show—whose lives are reflected, to varying degrees, in the program. In exploring the show's characters and themes, participants articulate their understandings of key social issues they recognise in their own lives and in broader society and try to use *Rednote* to assist in understanding and interpreting the TV show. This research explores how the specific cultural-political and historical landscape of China, Western feminist theories and neoliberal individualism, and the distinctive characteristics of social media have collectively shaped contemporary Chinese women's identities and feminist practices. Renowned theories and concepts such as Foucault's 'biopower' (1975), Stuart Hall's 'encoding/decoding' model (1973), and Gibson's 'affordance' theories (2017) are employed to construct a theoretical framework to analyse viewership, platform dynamics, and gender discourses. From an interdisciplinary perspective of cultural studies, media theory, and feminism, this work underscores the complexities of contemporary feminism and cultures of femininity in China, revealing their entanglements with capitalist ideologies, technological mediation, and persistent traditional norms.

Yaquan Liang, *Resisting 'Feminine Compromise': How Only Daughters Challenge Patriarchal Power in the Family through Naming Practices* (University of Edinburgh)

This study focuses on how urban only daughters in China perceive, understand, and respond to persistent patriarchal preferences within the family. Although the one-child policy positioned them as the centre of familial investment and seemingly empowered them, the patriarchal system has not been dismantled but rather continues through more covert forms. Drawing on in-depth interviews with only daughters aged 25 to 35, this paper introduces two core concepts: 'cyber son' and 'PUA'. These discursive practices reveal how imagined male-centred fantasies and structural emotional discipline jointly produce a sense of displacement and subordination, making daughters feel like outsiders within their own homes. These terms reflect emotionally driven reflexivity and constitute a critical naming practice. They not only give linguistic form and visibility to previously blurred experiences of oppression but also expose how 'veiled patriarchy' continues to operate beneath superficially empowering structures. This paper argues that emotion functions both as a tool of patriarchal control and as the starting point for women's awareness of injustice and the production of resistant knowledge. Understanding how women reconstruct gendered orders in intimate relationships through emotional experience is a key lens for studying contemporary gender dynamics.

Zexuan He, *Chinese women's online dating: being progressive or conservative* (University of Leeds)

When I was conducting interviews with unmarried young professional women who have been using dating APPs to find their ideal husbands during 2022 and 2023, one of the main features regarding their self-presentation as progressive feminist stood out, while they also showed an internalized ideology of rather traditional expectations for their future marriage life. Specifically, when asked regarding house labour distribution, 8 out of 10 participants emphasized that they consider sharing the house labour is a fundamental responsibility for husbands. On the one hand, they claimed to stand against traditional husband-wife relation in which the wives were fully responsible for house labour, and 6 of them directly believed that this changed is only possible with the instruction of feminism theories that encourage a more equalized gender identity of women. However, on the other hand, none of them thought their husbands will be taking more distribution than they would willing or unwilling do. This is only one dimension of women who find themselves trying to be more progressive in gender inequalities in marriage while being constrained to traditional ideals. Or, do they take conservative moves to succeed in marriage?

Panel 2 - Gender-based violence in global perspective

This panel addresses gender-based violence, which is often positioned within a one-dimensional frame focused only on patriarchy and gender inequality. In different ways, the papers all 'ask the other question' (Matsuda, 1991) about gender-based violence, situating it in an intersectional and decolonial frame.

Drinking As Part of Work? Navigating Masculinities in the Drinking Culture of State Sector in China (Luna Yihan Fu, University of Leeds)

China's state sector, commonly referred to as 'Tizhi', comprises civil service, public service units, and state-owned enterprises and is increasingly desirable among younger generations due to perceived status and job security. This paper exposes how drinking is deeply embedded in its working culture, and its relation to gender. Interviews from 11 employees highlight that drinking with superiors is an important context in which men perform and shape their masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity in this setting is marked by the masculine control of intoxication, tactfulness, sociability, emotional expressiveness, loyalty, and deference to authority. This performance of hegemonic masculinity involves emotional labour for men to build homo-social bonds and gain recognition from superiors. Men who do not fully embody hegemonic masculinity but are unable to openly contest it strategically craft complicit roles to continue benefiting from the patriarchal dividend. Overall, this research demonstrates how this organisational drinking culture is constructed as a space for sustaining masculine dominance and state-promoted hegemonic masculinity.

Cyclical discourses: safety, the right to the city and abolition feminism (Molly Taylor, Newcastle University)

This presentation examines the ways in which discourses of safety from gender-based violence act as limiting structures that restrict commons-building practices. It works to reconcile the Lefebvrian Marxist 'right to the city' with the abolitionist-feminist project of dismantling and producing alternatives to carceral systems, critiquing discourses of women's safety and pointing to lines of flight where urban space might be produced and organised in common rather than through oppressive governing structures. By exploring the work of 'women's organisations' in Newcastle, using a qualitative, creative methodology I examine the discursive cycles that emerge from initiatives aimed at making spaces safe for women and how these cycles interact with broader narratives of violence, threat, and oppression. These intersecting discourses often reinforce one another, ultimately restricting possibilities for transformative change. Where might points of resistance arise within these cycles that offer potential openings for disrupting and reimagining prevailing safety paradigms?

Intersectionality, Human rights and Violence against Women (Stella Gonzalez-Arnal, Hull University)

In this presentation we examine Kimberle Crenshaw's contribution to intersectionality in the context of Human Rights violations (2001; 2002), which she developed in collaboration with United Nations organizations. We argue that her understanding of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; 1989) is a most appropriate basis for addressing complex human rights violations as it is responsive not only to discrimination but also to inequality (Trust, 2016). We show how a model of intersectionality that follows more closely Crenshaw's proposals is preferable in dealing with complex human rights violations to others that diverge from it. We analyse a particular example of how this model has been used successfully, in addressing the protection of women from the consequences of the link between violence and HIV/AIDS, in the context of Human Rights within the United Nations. (Ertürk, 2005)

The coloniality of sexual violence (Alison Phipps, Universities of Newcastle and York)

This paper introduces a framework called the coloniality of sexual violence. Building on work by Fanon (1952), Davis (1981), Spivak (1988), Lugones (2007, 2008), Spillers (1987), and Segato (2016), this helps us understand more deeply how ideas about sexual danger are mobilised for strategic ends. The weaponisation of women's rights has been discussed in previous scholarship: for instance, on colonial feminism (Ahmed 1992), imperial feminism (Amos and Parmar 1984), and femonationalism (Farris 2017, see also Bhattacharyya 2008). However, this has not explored the specific rhetorical and political economy attached to imputations of sexual violence, in which racialised ideas about sexuality and borders intertwine across scales from body to community to nation (Phipps 2025). The coloniality of sexual violence blends sex exceptionalism (the idea that sexual violence is worse than other harms - see Gruber 2022) with sexual exceptionalism (the idea that sexual violence enters the national body from the 'outside' - see Puar 2007) in a variety of ways. In each blend, states of exception are created that allow populations to be vilified, geographically contained, economically excluded, expelled or even exterminated, apparently in the service of tackling sexual violence (Phipps 2025).

Panel 3 - Reproductive futures in global context

This panel addresses concerns about futurism, especially reproductive futurism, in different locations and in the context of looming climate catastrophe, a cost-of-living crisis and growing gendered antagonisms. We explore the ways in which the state attempts to manage populations through biopower – often targeting women’s bodies – and the ways this is navigated and resisted by younger people.

What can Chinese reproductive avoidance strategies tell us about low fertility societies? (Ruth Holliday, University of Leeds, and Qiqi Huang, University of Macau)

This paper analyses China’s state-sanctioned pronatalism in the context of rapidly declining birthrates and young people’s online responses in the form of fertility avoidance strategies. Whilst many countries around the world are experiencing declining fertility rates (TFRs), China faces ‘ultra-low fertility’ cause by its ‘compressed modernity’ (Chang 2022) and the consequences of its now repealed one-child policy. Using China, which is changing faster and further than many other nations (its population is now falling), as a case study, we argue there are many lessons to be learned about the consequences of low fertility and how to manage them. In this paper we begin to address this topic by exploring online reactions to the implementation of China’s three-child policy in 2022, focussing in on three common, and gendered, memes – Fur Babies (pets), Little Milk Dogs (young men who date older more successful women) and Garlic Chives (people who are burned out and sacked by the companies they work for) – which we interpret as ‘reproductive avoidance strategies’. We demonstrate how reproductive cultures can rapidly change, undoing normative ideals of the aspirational, heterosexual, carer/ breadwinner family and causing “trouble” for gender and heterosexual couple relationships.

Neither childless nor childfree: nonreproduction as a research agenda in geography (Matilda Fitzmaurice, Lancaster University)

Voluntary childlessness, and the rise of alternative family forms, has been an important theme in sociological research on the family, but it has received less attention in human geography. Therefore, this intervention calls for human geographers to afford more prominence to childlessness and the childless figure, in view of ongoing demographic anxiety around the world, surging pro-natalist politics and intensifying ‘reproductive anxiety’ in relation to the climate crisis. The presentation proceeds in three sections. The first reviews existing sociological and other literature that touches on voluntary childlessness; the second reviews work relating to the Anthropocene as a shift into a new mode of being human; and the third reviews work within feminist and queer science studies and eco-criticism. In each section, I review significant work and propose paths forward for scholarship. In the conclusion, I set out a tentative research agenda for the discipline: one that argues for attention to a broad range of affects and embodiments, and a methodological commitment to deliberation.

Marriage and Childbirth Decisions among young generation in Urban and Rural China (Xingyi Li, University of Leeds)

This explores how the young generation makes their marriage and reproductive decisions across urban and rural China under the context of monogamous heterosexual marriage. The idea of “the one” (perfect match) helps young people imagine future marriage and ties the romantic couple together in their relationship. This paper examines the distance between marriage imagination and reality. Conducted with forty participants (mixed gender) from urban and rural China, this paper compares their views on childbirth decisions and marriage from gender and location perspectives. It focuses on how young people make their marriage decisions, whether marriage now matches their imaginations when they were single, and what marriage means to them. After discussing marriage, it further explores how they decide to have their first child in marriage, what factors influence their decision about childbearing, why they want to become parents, and whether they plan to have a second or third child under the third-child policy.

Chinese Queer Women Having Children via Assisted Reproductive Technology (Xinzhe Hu, University of York)

Since 2016, children born out of traditional heterosexual marriage in China can apply for permanent residence registration. Since 2024, more and more provincial governments in China have included assisted reproductive technology services in health insurance to promote fertility willingness, but couples will need a marriage certificate (which is only available to heterosexual couples) and proof of infertility to use this service. These policy changes offer Chinese non-heterosexual women who want to have children a greater degree of flexibility and allow children born through ARTs to become legal Chinese citizens. However, because of the absence of legal protection, disputed technology use, and cultural incongruity due to the traditional Chinese family structure, same-sex attracted parents using ARTs can be dragged into social and legal quagmires and thus become vulnerable. My paper aims to help create a more supportive and inclusive environment for this new type of family by exploring their family and social life during different stages of forming families, including conception, pregnancy, childbirth and parenting. Based on data from in-depth interviews with 31 non-heterosexual women who are or plan to become mothers, my findings indicated that the inequalities they encountered are both political and discursive. Structural discrimination and the lack of social scripts combine to create a sense of instability and influence their life decisions about the future.