

Always Already Provisional: Category Work and Gender

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SNAC Annual General Meeting

29 September 2021



THE CANADIAN WRITING RESEARCH COLLABORATORY

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Pursue issues and interests through encoding underlying the text.

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<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>

- ~1300 biographies and contextual materials in feminist literary history
- Encoded with ~8 million XML tags

Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present

Featured Authors



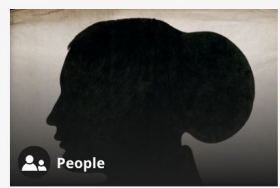
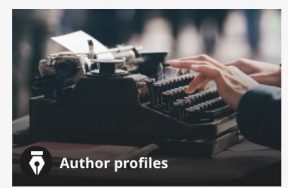
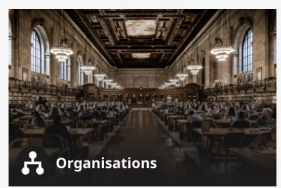
Jane Hume Clapperton
22 September 1832 - 30 September 1914
Jane Hume Clapperton wrote several works of social theory in the late nineteenth century that combined her feminist ethos with her concern for the social problems facing contemporary England. She advanced a philosophy of social...



Augusta Ada Byron
10 December 1815 - 27 November 1852
AAB's sole publication is "A Sketch of the Analytical Engine", her highly praised explication and illustration of Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine. Many now claim that her "Sketch" constitutes the first example of...

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Today in Orlando



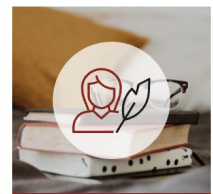
1654
ES says the Lord began to work in her heart, preparing a conversion experience, when the Quakers John Audland and John Camm shamed her about her fine clothes. »



By late 1877
Pearl Richards (later JDH) began her literary career at the age of nine by publishing under her own name two stories, "Lost, a Dog" and "How Mark Selby Won His Public House", both...



1903
WC's first book was one of poetry: April Twilights and Other Poems, published by a vanity press at her own expense.34613461



17 March 1981
QDL died in Cambridge at the age of eighty-one, of heart failure. »

Writing in the British Isles
Beginnings to the Present

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ORLANDO

Focus on authors' lives and writing careers, contextual timelines, sets of internal links, and bibliographies. With these materials creates a dynamic inquiry from a number of perspectives into centuries of women's writing.

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Canada's Early Women Writers Canadian Jewish Women Writers Canadian Women Playwrights Online



Digital Diversity English-Canadian Women's Poetry to 1867 Feminist Caucus Living Archives



Her Story: Women Trailblazers of Guelph and Wellington County History of the Francophone Newspapers in Western Canada Inside the Bag



L. M. Montgomery Collection Louise Cruppi et Romain Rolland. Correspondance, 1905-1925 The Digital Page



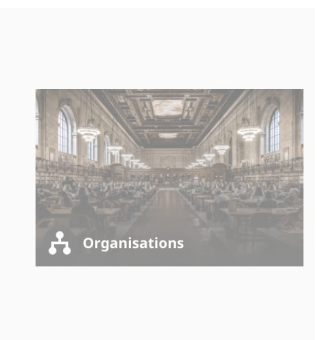
The Orlando Project The People and the Text Winnifred Eaton / Onoto Watanna - The Alberta Years

ORLANDO Women's Writing in the British Isles from

Orlando: V from

Jane Hume
22 September 1832

Jane Hume (1716-1790) works of social t nineteenth centu feminist ethos w social problems England. She ad social...



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By late 1877

Pearl Richard literary career publishing un stories. "Lost, Selby Won His

Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present

search for...

CWRC

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Today in Orlando

1654

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L. M. Montgomery

The Orland



Linked Infrastructure for Networked Cultural Scholarship

LINCS will create the conditions to think differently, with machines, about culture in Canada. Human brains work through a vast web of interconnections, but the web that researchers increasingly use to understand culture and history has few meaningful links. LINCS will convert and interlink Canadian research datasets on cultural identities and cultural heritage, making them accessible as Linked Open Data for the benefit of scholars and the public.

LINCS serves Canadian researchers by interweaving data from fields including history, communication, music, performance, and literary studies to transform how we engage with culture online.

LINCS will enable deep contextualization and new ways of understanding, empowering researchers and the public with the means to engage more effectively with a vast array of digital cultural content.

LINCS collaborates with stewards of cultural data collections and development partners committed to exploring the potential of Linked Open Data to contribute to a better open knowledge ecology.

LINCS benefits from and contributes to Canada's national network of expertise in research software development, research computing infrastructure, and research data management.

Linked Open Data for Canadian Cultural Research

Human brains work through a vast web of interconnections, but the web that researchers increasingly use to understand human culture and history has few meaningful links. Linked Infrastructure for Networked Cultural Scholarship will create the conditions to think differently, with machines, about human culture in Canada.

WHAT

The LINCS infrastructure project will convert large datasets into an organized, interconnected, machine-processable set of resources for Canadian cultural research.

WHY

LINCS aims to provide context for the cultural material that currently floats around online, interlink it, ground it in its sources, and help to make the World Wide Web a trusted resource for scholarly knowledge production.

WHO

With a team of technical and domain experts, LINCS will allow Canadian scholars and partner institutions to play a significant role in the developing the Semantic Web.

category work

- knowledge representation
- classification
- knowledge organization
- epistemology
- ontology

“historically and epistemically we are moving from the classificatory and naming functions of documentary structures to the assignment of personal and documentary identity as a *function* and *product* of sociotechnical systems”

Ronald E. Day, *Indexing It All*, p. 35

. . .the specificity, materiality,
and variety of sexual practices
. . . can be done better justice in
a context where the
impoverished abstractions that
claim to define sexuality can be
treated as not authoritative.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The
Epistemology of the Closet*, p. xvi

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Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The
Epistemology of the Closet*, p. xvi

Each standard and each
category valorizes some point of
view and silences another. This
is not inherently a bad
thing—indeed it is inescapable.
But it *is* an ethical choice, and
as such it is dangerous—not
bad, but dangerous.

Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star,
Sorting Things Out, pp. 5-6

making women count

most of the data and data models we've inherited deal with structures of power, like gender and race, with a crudeness that would never pass muster in a peer-reviewed humanities publication

Miriam Posner, "What's next: the radical, unrealized potential of digital humanities"

Orlando: identity as “cultural formation”

- situating identity categories within prose narrative;
- devising XML tags to indicate the discursive contexts such as religion, language, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, race or color within which identity descriptors occur;
- leaving the text within the tag unconstrained by a fixed vocabulary

“cultural formation” for sex/gender

Except . . . gender was not represented accordingly

- encoded “sex” at root element of profile documents, combine with nationality (British Woman Writer, Male Writer)
- Later broken out to own category “sex” and binary values expanded values to include male, female, transgendered
- Recently fixed confusion of sex and gender
- Drawing on CWRC ontology for terminology:
- Man, woman, transman, transwoman

Orlando tags for gender as “cultural formation”

Moved into Cultural formation tags

- discursive context
- multiple tagging
- nuancing attributes GENDERIDENTITY, CURRENT, ALTERNATIVE, SELFIDENTITIED [PRESUMED would be good addition]

Fixed confusion of sex (m/f) □ gender

□ Gender values:

- WOMAN □ NONBINARY for C21 writers who identify as such
- MAN □ NONCONFORMING for writers who trouble gender across historical periods, e.g. “cross dresser” or “female husband”
- TRANS
- UNKNOWN (e.g. writers using pseudonyms)

The ethics of interface

- Controversy over whether transwomen count as women
- Values appear as facets when they are available in the data

Refine

Result type

- Author Event (13)
- Person (40)
- Author (95)
- Bibliography (47)
- Organization (7)
- Freestanding Event (31)

Author Gender

- Woman (86)
- Man (8)
- Trans (1)

Author Nationality

Home > Search

Refine

Result type


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Author Gender


- Woman (86)
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Author Nationality

220 results for morris Sort By Relevance 

 [Jan Morris](#)

 In the 1950s and 60s Morris was one of the most successful young British journalists, famous especially for an account of the conquest of [Mount Everest](#). Identifying as a woman by 1972, Morris was already making a name as a travel writer, celebrating particularly the life of cities, a commentator delineating the political cross-currents of the Middle East, and a historian, especially of the British Empire. During the later phases of her career she consolidated her reputation for travel writing and also made her mark as a memoirist and experimented with fiction.

 [William Morris](#)

 He came from a white, English, and [Anglican](#) family. His father was a successful financier who brought the family up in great comfort at their [Essex](#) mansion. The patriarch's death in 1847 left the Morris fortune in disarray, so the family moved into a smaller (though still grand) home.”

The ethics of interface

- Multiple metadata tags mean that Morris appears in facets for both “Woman” and “Trans”

Refine

Result type

- Author Event (11)
- Author (86)

Author Gender

- Woman (86)
- Trans (1)

Author Nationality

Genre

Period

Tag

Refine

Result type

- Author Event (11)
- Author (86)

Author Gender

- Woman (86)
- Trans (1)

Author Nationality

Genre


Period

86 results for **morris**

Sort By **Relevance** 

Author Gender: **Woman X** [Clear all filters](#)

 [Jan Morris](#)

 In the 1950s and 60s Morris was one of the most successful young British journalists, famous especially for an account of the conquest of [Mount Everest](#). Identifying as a woman by 1972, Morris was already making a name as a travel writer, celebrating particularly the life of cities, a commentator delineating the political cross-currents of the Middle East, and a historian, especially of the British Empire. During the later phases of her career she consolidated her reputation for travel writing and also made her mark as a memoirist and experimented with fiction.

 [Annie Besant](#)

AB's mother, [Emily \(Morris\) Wood](#), came of an Irish family. She died on 7 May 1874. »

 +5

CWRC ontology for cultural formation

- Retain emphasis on context
- Understand identities as historically contingent; substantial discussion in preamble and in definitions
- Refuse to reify legacy terms if they don't match the ethical imperatives of the project

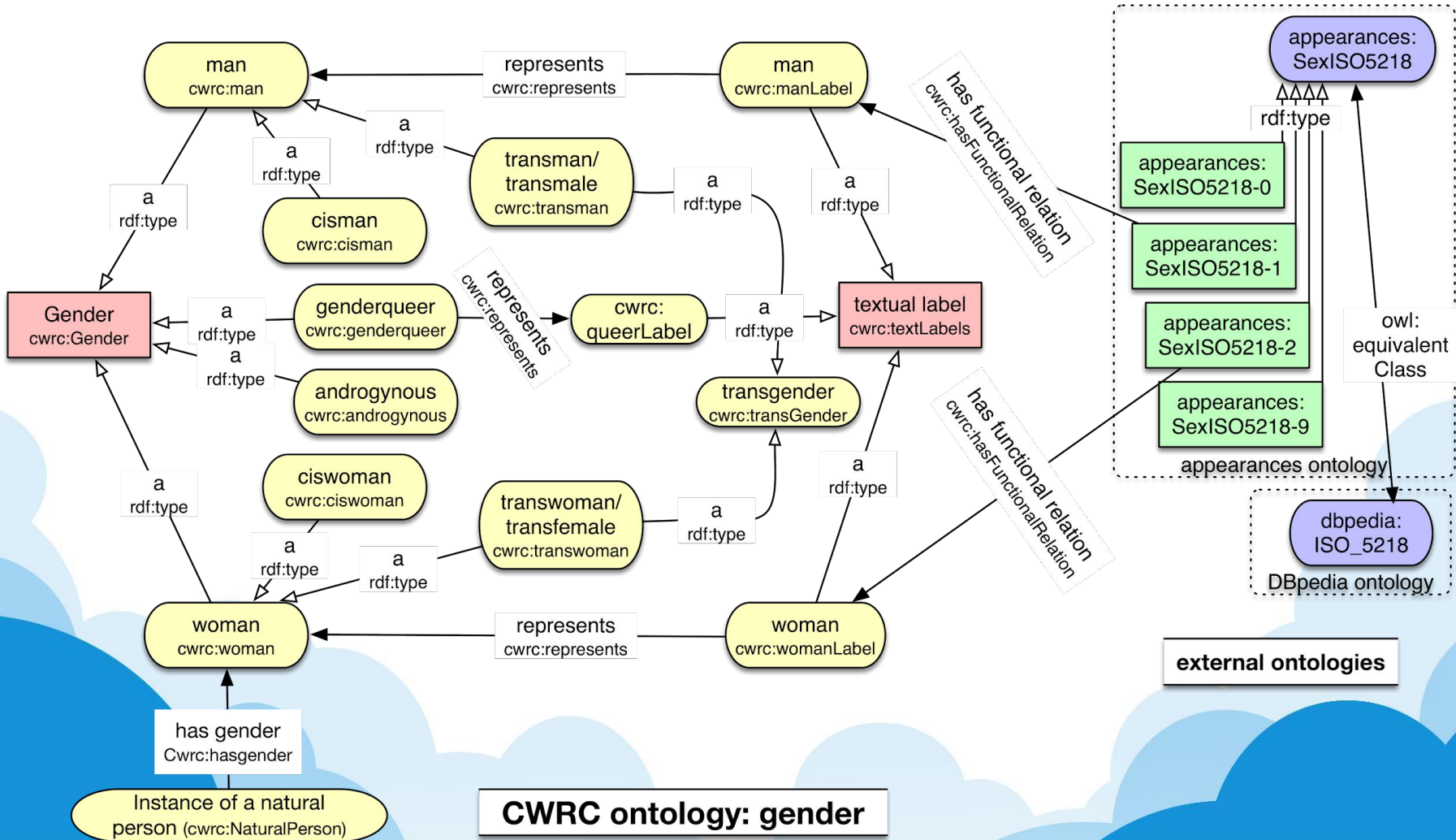
gender, a subclass of ***cultural form*** for indicating a person's gender, whether attributed or self-reported, with accompanying context, where present, provided by ***gender context*** annotations. Although in popular culture gender and biological sex are conflated and understood to be binary, the concept of gender stresses the relationality, constructedness, and performativity of gendered identities and gendered behaviour, whose categories are historically contingent and shifting, and the boundaries between them blurry. Simone de Beauvoir (1973) stated "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," a belief that has been taken up by many other theorists of gender including Judith Butler (1990). Gender studies to date has investigated the social construction of femininity more than that of masculinity. The multi-layered constructedness of gender is also underlined by Donna Haraway who understands it as a "socially, historically, and semiotically positioned difference" (Donna Haraway, 1988). Gender is understood as fluid, situational, and sometimes plural, and it is related to, though not commensurate with, sexual identity and orientation, just as it is related to but not defined by specific forms of embodiment. Rather than seeing biological sex as a pre-social or natural given, the body is understood as a site of inscription (cf. (Elizabeth Grosz, 1994) which is also socially constructed and indeed epigenetically shaped by environmental factors (N. Katherine Hayles, 2012). As articulated by feminist neurologist Gillian Einstein, (2012)"The world writes on the body." This ontology therefore does not provide separate terms for sex as distinct from gender. Instead, it privileges terms associated with gender, recognizing that they are conventionally but not necessarily associated with sex, and that there is constant slippage between gender and sex in the way that these categories circulate through discourses, actions, and institutions. Far from indicating a universal facet of experience, gender intersects with other identity categories and axes of oppression such as class, race or colour, or geographical heritage to produced quite different interests and experiences among people of the same gender, as with the intersection of religion and white masculine identity in the Muscular Christianity movement in nineteenth-century Britain. Being a woman of colour often compounds the impacts of gender oppression. Such interaction between different forms of oppression is termed "intersectionality" (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989). Where this class and its instances are concerned, readers are advised to consult ***gender context*** context annotations, if available. Where terms are applied to younger individuals, the gendered variants, such as "girl" for "woman", are understood to apply.

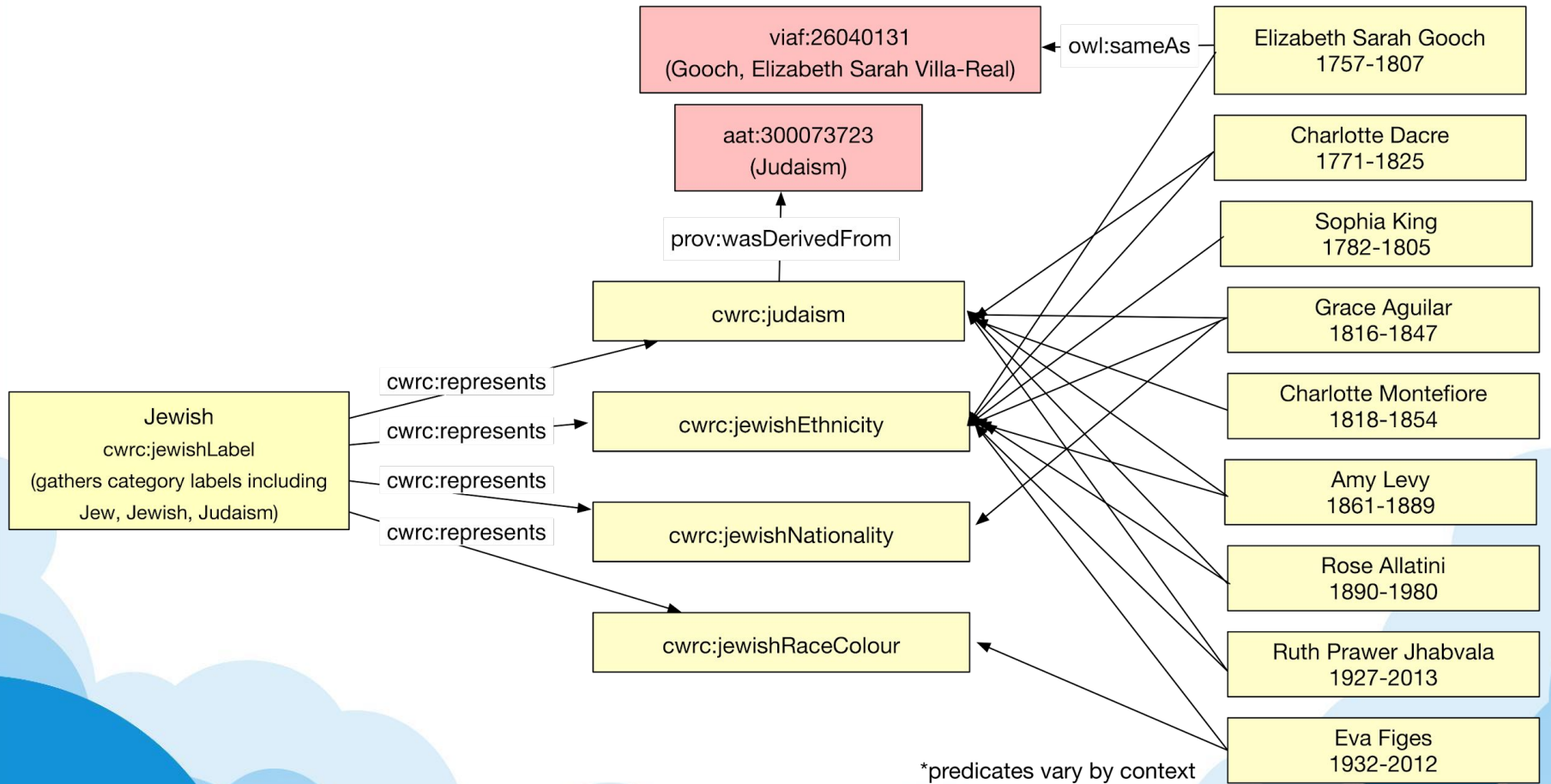
URI:	http://sparql.cwrc.ca/ontologies/cwrc#Gender	
Tag:	cwrc:Gender	
rdf:type:	owl:Class, skos:ConceptScheme	
rdfs:subClassOf:	cwrc:CulturalForm	
Within Range:	cwrc:gender, cwrc:genderReported, cwrc:genderSelfReported, cwrc:hasGender, cwrc:hasGenderReported, cwrc:hasGenderSelfReported	
Within Domain:	cwrc:genderOf, cwrc:genderReportedOf, cwrc:genderSelfReportedOf	
Instances:	<p>Androgynous</p> <p>GenderQueer</p> <p>blackWomanRaceColour</p> <p>cisGender</p> <p>cisMan</p> <p>cisWoman</p>	<p>man</p> <p>transGender</p> <p>transMan</p> <p>transWoman</p> <p>undefinedGender</p> <p>woman</p>

<https://sparql.cwrc.ca/>

gender context

Gender Context is a significant subclass of ***context***. It is associated with the ***cultural form*** subclass ***gender***, and sometimes other intersecting Cultural Forms. Annotations typed as Gender Context provide information about and discussions of a person's





*predicates vary by context
of Jewish identities
(e.g. Elizabeth Sarah Gooch
hasEthnicity)

Jewish cultural forms

Thank you!

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@susanirenebrown

This argument is laid out more fully in:
Susan Brown. "Categorically Provisional."
*PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language
Association of America* 135.1 (2020): 165-174.

FEMINIST LITERARY HISTORY BALANCES COMMITMENT TO A DIFFERENT FUTURE, ONE BETTER THAN THE PRESENT WITH RESPECT TO GENDER, with an orientation toward the past, whose ways of knowing it seeks to supersede even as it engages with them. The revision of our cultural past through the lens of gender has, by drawing on past categorizations of authors as female, necessarily invoked problematic paradigms in the service of critique and epistemological change. The relation of the digital humanities (DH) to category work is similarly fraught. I offer here my take on the power and peril of classification based on category making in the pursuit of digital feminist literary history through the Orlando Project, an ongoing experiment in using semantic markup for online scholarship.¹ Orlando is known for its online textbase, published with Cambridge University Press, but the team has produced a number of exploratory interfaces and translations of the material into other forms. Over the course of a quarter century of grappling with "the *digital as difference*" (Wernimont and Flanders 430) alongside other feminist projects, I have changed my understanding of classification as my collaborators and I have tried to represent the difference that gender analysis makes when undertaken in a computational environment. I here argue that category work, always vexed, always provisional, is crucial to realizing the potential of DH for representing, analyzing, and fostering difference.

Other terms closely related to category work are relevant here, including *knowledge representation*, *classification*, *knowledge organization*, *epistemology*, and *ontology*. The array of such terms in fields ranging from philosophy to library and information science to computer science to sociology underscores the central role this kind of work plays. Reflecting on categorization in DH highlights a particular set of challenges for our times. We have moved, argues Ronald E. Day, from older documentary systems of classification and indexing to data-based ones that assign "personal and documentary identity as a *function* and a *product* of sociotechnical systems" (35), which is to say that social identities do not precede but are instead

theories and
methodologies

Categorically
Provisional

SUSAN BROWN

SUSAN BROWN holds a Canada research chair in collaborative digital scholarship at the University of Guelph. She is a founding editor of the Orlando Project and leads two infrastructure projects: the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory and the Linked Infrastructure for Networked Cultural Scholarship.