

HTS 3020, Fall 2026
Gender and Technology
MW 3:30 pm—4:45 pm; Skiles 314

Professor: Eric Schatzberg Office: Old Civil Engineering 124	Office hours: Mon. 5:00-6:00 pm or by appt. Email: eric.schatzberg@hsoc.gatech.edu
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Description. Gender and technology are two key concepts for understanding human civilization, but they are rarely discussed together. Yet as we will learn in this course, gender and technological are deeply connected both in mundane activities, such as housework, and elite technical work, especially computing. Unfortunately, the executive branch of the federal government has recently declared gender to be a dangerous concept. We will study the government's claims, but not let the government deter us from pursuing the truth. This course will argue that gender is an essential concept for understanding technology.

The course mainly uses historical methods to analyze our subject matter. The material is organized by topic, not time. The topics do not cover every facet of gender and technology, but students will get to choose what we study for week 14 near the end of the semester.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Give a broad definition of "technology" with examples of various types;
- Provide a nuanced discussion of the concept of gender;
- Analyze how human choices co-produce technologies and gender.

Requirements

This course does not require much written work outside of class. Instead, we focus on in-class activities that contribute to both learning and assessment.

Lecture. Paying attention to lectures is necessary if you want to succeed in the course. Some lectures will be delivered asynchronously.

Readings. There is a ton of reading for this course, but I've tried hard not to assign anything very boring or overly academic. Still, historical works tend to have a lot of detail. To avoid getting bogged down, keep specific questions in mind so you can focus on the most important points. Use the weekly reading overview on Canvas for guidance.

Discussion. This is a relatively small class, and the topic is good for discussion. Please come prepared to participate. I'm looking for one or two halfway intelligent comments from every student during each discussion.

Weekly assessments. Expect some sort of in-class writing each week.

Exams. I used to give take-home exams, but those don't work any longer in the chatbot era. Instead, I'm going to give an in-class blue-book final, with a couple shorter exams during the semester.

Attendance is required, and counts for 10% of your grade. If you need to be absent, please let me know in advance and I'll do my best to accommodate you. If you are absent because of illness or other unpredictable reasons, please inform me as soon as possible.

Grades. In-class essay exams, including the final, 40%; weekly quizzes, discussions, and other assignments, 50%, attendance, 10%.

Percentage grades will be converted to letter grades as follows: $100 \geq A \geq 90$; $90 > B \geq 80$; $80 > C \geq 70$; $70 > D \geq 60$; $F < 60$.

Canvas. Canvas serves as the course website and email list.

Course Books and Readings. The following books are required.

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books, 1983).

Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (University of New Mexico Press, 1991). (Currently out of print. Used copies available from <https://www.alibris.com/Taking-the-Wheel-Women-and-the-Coming-of-the-Motor-Age-Virginia-Scharff/book/6533577>)

All other assigned readings are posted to Canvas.

Academic Integrity. AI has basically wrecked academic integrity. Still, I expect students to maintain the highest ethical standards by following the Georgia Tech rules on academic misconduct, known as the “Honor Code”: <http://b.gatech.edu/2CjF1Ro>.

Here’s summary for written assignments. Don't copy stuff without 1) citing the source where you found the ideas, and 2) putting phrases in quotation marks when you use the exact words from your source. For a short guide to avoiding plagiarism, see <https://bit.ly/3Tg9XJE>; for more detail, see <http://unc.live/2CiHag9>. Any student suspected of cheating on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity.

Also see the Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement (<https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/21/>).

AI Policy. Generative AI has already transformed higher education, mostly for the worse. AI won’t teach you how to read critically, how to write in your own voice, or how to think cogently.

But I’m not going to try to police your AI use. Instead, I’m just making it hard to use AI for your work in the class. Most of your grade will depend on in-class tasks, including reading, writing, and participation in discussion. We will have bluebook exams. Consider learning cursive. Don't expect a good grade if I can’t read your handwriting.

Use of Electronic Devices During Class. Electronic devices, including phones, tablets, and laptops, are not permitted at any time during class, except for students with accommodations or when explicitly permitted by your instructor. No peaking at your phones.

Recordings and Sharing Course Materials. Classes may not be recorded without written consent of the instructor except when a student has an accommodation granted by the Office of Disability Services. Materials posted on Canvas are only for students currently enrolled in the course and may not be shared without the instructor’s permission.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. If you have a disability that might affect your performance in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services at (404) 894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/> as soon as possible. Also let me know about your learning needs, and I'll do my best to accommodate you.

Religious Holidays. You can take off any religious holidays you want, as long as you make up the work and inform me in advance, if possible by the second week of class. For more detail see <http://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>, ¶B.5.

Freaking Out. College life often involves a lot of stress. If you feel like things are getting out of hand, either for personal or academic reasons, please let me know. Help is available from the [Center for Mental Health Care](#), Stamps Health Services, and the Dean of Students Office. These offices offer both in-person and virtual appointments. For more information on these and other student services, contact the Dean of Students or the [Division of Student Life](#).

Commitment to Inclusivity. My classroom is a safe space for people and ideas of all kinds.

Boilerplate. The University System of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology require that I include the following bland language in this syllabus. Feel free to ignore this section.

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question: • How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Course Outline

Part 1: Key Concepts for Gender and Technology

Week 1 (Aug. 24, 26) Introduction – Why Gender and Technology?

Outline of course; the president's war on gender.

Reading: The White House, "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government," Jan. 20, 2025, Exec. Order No. 14168, 90 Fed. Reg. 8615 (Jan. 30, 2025);

Alicia Roth Weigel, "Trump's 'Biological Truth' Executive Order Is Not Based in Biology or Truth," *TIME*, January 23, 2025, [link](#).

Joseph Biden, "Biden-Harris Administration Advances Equality and Visibility for Transgender Americans," White House Fact Sheet, March 31, 2022, [link](#).

Assignment: in-class reading response and discussion, Wednesday.

Week 2 (Aug. 31, Sep. 2) Gender Studies 101

To make sure we're all starting from the same place, we'll read some introductory chapters from a very good gender-studies textbook.

Reading: Lisa Wade and Myra Marx Ferree, *Gender: Ideas, Interactions, Institutions*, 3rd ed. (W.W. Norton & Company, 2023), chaps 1-3 (pp. 3-93).

Assignment: find a short video illustrating some aspect of the reading to share with the class.

Labor Day, no class (Sep. 7)

Week 3 (Sep. 9, 14) Understanding Technology

What technology is and isn't; how new technologies emerge ("innovation").

Reading: Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other," *Social Studies of Science* 14, no. 3 (1984): 399–441.

Yom Kippur (Sep. 21) No class

Week 4 (Sep. 16, 23) Technology and Gender: Major Issues

Framing the problems involved in studying gender and technology.

Reading: Judith A. McGaw, "No Passive Victims, No Separate Spheres: A Feminist Perspective on Technology's History," in *In Context: History and the History of Technology: Essays in Honor of Melvin Kranzberg*, ed. Stephen H. Cutcliffe and Robert C. Post (Lehigh University Press, 1989), 172-91;

Anne Weibert et al., "Gender and Technology: A Historical Perspective," in *Gender and Technology at Work: From Workplace Studies to Social Justice in Design* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 25-49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009243728.004>.

Part 2: Classic Works on Gendered Technologies

Week 5 (Sep. 28, 30) Domestic Technologies and Housework, part 1

A pioneering work in gender, technology, and housework.

Reading: Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books, 1983; repr. 2008), chaps 1-4 (pp. 3-101).

Fall Break (Oct. 5) No class

Week 6 (Oct. 7) Domestic Technologies and Housework, part 2

The rest of the Cowan book.

Reading: Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, chaps 5-7 (pp. 102-219).

Week 7 (Oct. 12, 14) Gendering a New Technology: The Automobile

Gender roles and the early automobile.

Reading: Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 1-88.

Week 8 (Oct. 19, 21) Taming the Automobile

Taming the automobile by redefining gender roles.

Reading: Scharff, *Taking the Wheel*, 89-175.

Part 3: Digital Technologies and Gender

Week 9 (Oct. 26, 28) Pleasure in Technology and Engineering

Is pleasure in technology gendered male?

Reading: Tine Kleif and Wendy Faulkner, “‘I’m No Athlete [but] I Can Make This Thing Dance!’—Men’s Pleasures in Technology,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 28, no. 2 (2003): 296–325, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243902250908>;

Ellen Ullman, “The Dumbing Down of Programming: Some Thoughts on Programming, Knowing, and the Nature of Easy,” in *Life in Code: A Personal History of Technology* (MCD, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 38-55.

Week 10 (Nov. 2, 4) Gendered Computing, Part 1

How did programming become so male dominated?

Reading: Nathan Ensmenger, “‘Beards, Sandals, and Other Signs of Rugged Individualism’: Masculine Culture within the Computing Professions,” *Osiris* 30, no. 1 (2015): 38–65, <https://doi.org/10.1086/682955>;

Clive Thompson, “The Secret History of Women in Coding,” *The New York Times*, February 13, 2019, sec. Magazine, <https://tinyurl.com/426u789s>.

Week 11 (Nov. 9, 11) Gendered Computing, Part 2: Transgender Internet

Transgender people have both created and embraced computer technologies.

Reading: Avery Dame-Griff, "Introduction: Laying the Foundations," in *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet*, Queer/Trans/Digital (NYU Press, 2023), 1-28;
Lynn Conway, "The Disappeared: Beyond Winning and Losing," *Computer* 51, no. 10 (2018): 66–73, <https://doi.org/10.1109/MC.2018.3971344>.

Part 4: Technology and the Other Kind of Sex

Week 12 (Nov. 16, 18) Technologies of Sexual Pleasure

The quest for sexual pleasure is among the most powerful forces in human history, but one that received little scholarly attention, except in the negative. Yet humans have been creating tools for sexual pleasure throughout history. As a guest speaker, we'll hear from one of the leading historians of sex in the United States, Hallie Lieberman, while also reading her work.

Reading: Hallie Lieberman, *Buzz: The Stimulating History of the Sex Toy* (Pegasus Books, 2017), 73-107, 131-160.

Podcast: Hallie Lieberman, "Joy Boy - Paperless | Podcast on Spotify," Spotify, March 4, 2022, 35 min., <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0liuxAQJ9j8vr0jAdtwv1k>.

Week 13 (Nov. 23) A Persistent Fiction: The False History of the Vibrator

Truth, history, and the origins of the electromechanical vibrator.

Reading: Rachel Maines, "Socially Camouflaged Technologies: The Case of the Electromechanical Vibrator," *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine* 8 (1989): 3–11;
Hallie Lieberman and Eric Schatzberg, "A Failure of Academic Quality Control: The Technology of Orgasm," *Journal of Positive Sexuality* 4, no. 2 (2018): 24–47, <https://doi.org/10.51681/1.421>.

Thanksgiving Break (Nov. 25) No class

Week 14 (Nov. 30, Dec. 2) Students' Choice

There's a lot I haven't covered in this class. Here a chance for the students to choose a topic.

Reading: tbd.

Week 15 (Dec. 7) Course Wrap Up

What lessons have you drawn from this course? What would make the course better?

Reading: none.

In-class Final: Friday, Dec. 11, 2:40 PM - 5:30 PM

I hate blue-book exams, but chatbots leave me no choice. Blame OpenAI.