

Gender, Authority, and Trust in the United States (Heidelberg, 10-11 Jul 26)

Heidelberg Center for American Studies, Jul 10–11, 2026

Deadline: Jan 31, 2026

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In recent decades, research on authority and trust in the US has seen a considerable increase across various disciplines (cf. Leypoldt and Berg 2021). However, in comparison, there has been much less scholarship on aspects of gender since Anette Baier dedicated her influential 1994 collection of essays *Moral Prejudices on trust (and related issues)* to her “women students, past, present, and future.” Our workshop addresses this lacuna, both from a theoretical perspective, and in the light of current cultural, social, and political developments in the US, and of (once again) contested definitions of gender(ed) identities, practices, performances, and ethics.

When the category "gender" is added to the study of authority and trust, this allows an exploration of the entanglements between more or less explicit gender expectations and the political, cultural, and also private life in society. For example, the fight for women's suffrage questioned, among other things, the supposedly essential features of womanhood that would be under threat should female suffrage become a reality. We would like to take such views and discussions as a jumping off point to explore what can be said about expertise or authority regarding certain political and economic topics, urban and migration dynamics, and forms of cultural or artistic expression. For example, we are interested in exploring in what regard gender shapes views on (the production and reception of) cultural or artistic value. Issues of power, participation, space, ethnicity, and class invite intersectional perspectives, both past and present. We are also interested in the inter-relationship between gender and trust, and in questions such as: In what regard can certain views on gender be seen as a remedy against perceived individual and national feelings of distrust? Or do they contribute to individual or collective sentiments of distrust, insecurity, and instability? We are further looking for contributions on the multiplicity of relations between gender, authority, trust and literary, cultural, or social developments.

The complex entanglements between gender, authority, and trust in the United States are of course not new as they have accompanied the United States since the beginning. We are therefore interested in exploring not only current phenomena and developments, but understudied aspects throughout American literary, cultural, and social history. As scholars have pointed out, the Declaration of Independence in the early Republic only granted white, free males the authority to remake themselves the way they saw fit whereas females and other marginalized groups primarily had the function of supporting white males on their way to self-realization and happiness. This holds particularly true for Black and Indigenous women, and in general female members of marginalized groups, which have been neglected so far in this context. Simi-

larly, although our focus lies on the United States, we are also interested in the entanglements, flows, and developments between the United States and other countries in the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

The international workshop will discuss and orient all contributions specifically for a book project (Gender, Authority, and Trust in the United States). For this reason, we ask all participants to align their contributions specifically to the keywords/issues of the forthcoming book. Each contribution should address gender and at least one of the following keywords/issues: authority, trust, cultural and artistic products, space, place, migration, and mediality. We welcome proposals from emerging and established academics, creative writers, graduate students, independent scholars, and activists that address these topics. We would like to pre-circulate papers to leave ample time in the sessions for discussion and suggestions to improve the texts.

Our workshop will take place July 10-11, 2026, at the Heidelberg Center for American Studies in Heidelberg, Germany. We will provide accommodation for two nights; some travel funding will be available.

Please submit your abstracts for the book chapter that you will present at the workshop (300-350 words) along with a short bio (150 words) to the workshop organizers by January 31, 2026, to gat2026@hca.uni-heidelberg.de. Participants will be notified of our decision by February 28, 2026. Papers for pre-circulation are due June 15, 2026. We expect participants to submit their presentations as articles for the book project at the latest by October 1, 2026. For inquiries, you may contact the organizers Margit Peterfy, Anja Schüler, and Susana Rocha Teixeira at gat2026@hca.uni-heidelberg.de.

Reference:

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