



## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

# Romantic Friendships: Boston Marriage Pt 2

### LEILA RUPP

When I try to explain to my friends why my Aunt Leila was so important to me, I usually say that I'm her namesake, that she taught history like I do, and that she lived with a woman, Diantha, for as long as I can remember. They were just like a married couple in our family. We went on summer vacations with them "down the shore," as we say in New Jersey, though they always rented their own apartment. They had one bedroom, with twin beds.

They liked to drive to a spot overlooking the ocean and sit in their car reading. Sometimes they took me, and I sat in the back and read, too. I wrote poems, and Diantha, who taught English in the same Pittsburgh high school where Leila taught—encouraged me. Diantha cooked and Leila washed the dishes, and they teased each other, both claiming to do most of the work. They had other women friends who lived as couples. When Aunt Leila first met my partner Verta after Diantha had died, she took her aside. She told her how glad she was that I'd found a friend and asked whether Verta knew she, too, had had a friend.

The last time I talked with Aunt Leila she was 89, in a nursing home and suffering from dementia. I hoped she would talk about Diantha, but when I mentioned her name, Leila didn't say anything. In some ways, she hadn't changed. She was still immaculately attired in a dress and pumps, her hair done and rouge on her cheeks. She had the same derisive chuckle that used to mean she thought you were a little crazy but now may have simply covered her confusion.

When I complimented her on her elegant dress, she plucked the fabric in the front, looked down, and said, "This old thing?" Then she looked me right in the eye and said, "There's something I've been meaning to tell you. But I can't remember. Maybe I'll remember later." Seven weeks later, she died. I like to think she meant to tell me about Diantha. But maybe that's just wishful thinking.

I tell the story of Aunt Leila because I still don't know if she was a lesbian. For me, she evokes all the complexities captured in the term same-sex love and sexuality. She was a "lady," and a conservative one at that. To the outside world, she was a "maiden aunt," or even an "old maid." I always assumed she would be horrified by the label "lesbian." In the past, she would have been described as having a "Boston marriage."

My uncertainty about whether I can name as a lesbian a woman who chose another woman as her life partner—but who as far as I know never embraced the identity—underscores the complexity of queer history. Her story evokes a long history of relationships between women, which, despite societal pressure for women to marry and raise families, were not considered deviant. Her story reminds us that intimate relationships have taken many forms, that women have made lives together without raising eyebrows,

and that same-sex unions are not a novelty of the 21st century. Intimacy, like love and sexuality, has a history that matters.

I'm Leila Rupp, and this is *Queer America*, a special series from Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. LGBTQ history has been largely neglected in the classroom. But it's necessary to give students a fuller history of the United States and to help them understand how that history shaped the society they live in.

This podcast provides a detailed look at how to incorporate important cultural touchstones, notable figures, and political debates into an inclusive U.S. history curriculum. In each episode, we explore a different topic, walking you through historical concepts, suggesting useful source material and offering practical classroom exercises. Talking with students about sexual and gender identity can be emotional and complex. This podcast is a resource for navigating those challenges, so teachers and students can discover the history and comprehend the legacy of queer America.

You might assume that same-sex relationships between women in the United States were always hidden and stigmatized in the past, but that isn't always the case. Building on the conversation we began in our previous episode, historian Susan Freeman will share stories of what came to be called Boston marriages—relationships between women who made their lives with each other in a very public way at the turn of the 19th century. She'll offer ideas for incorporating Boston marriage into U.S. history lessons to help your students understand the complex history of love and intimacy in our society. Here's Susan Freeman.

### SUSAN FREEMAN

**Boston marriages:** We might think of these as a kind of cousin of romantic friendships. Boston marriages came about in the late 1800s and into the early 1900s. And these were couples, two adult women who lived together and set up households together. And it was supposedly more common in the Northeast than elsewhere in the country, hence the name Boston marriages.

There's not a need to draw a strict line between romantic friends on the one hand and Boston marriages on the other. In fact, we might think of some relationships that women had as both. But if we want to draw a contrast, what we might point to is that romantic friendships often involved young women who exchanged love letters, had intimate and close relationships, and also one or more of the partners may have married a man after or while expressing and engaging in same-sex love. On the other hand, Boston marriages—those are epitomized by women who opt out of heterosexual marriage altogether, and they often co-habit for a period of several decades, if not a lifetime. This is in contrast to a more familial and economic arrangement of marriage that had prevailed for earlier times.

Heterosexual marriage increasingly became sentimentalized as a way for a couple to unite their souls in the 19th century. In this context of thinking about marriage as a place where two people meet and find the one to spend their life with, that is the context in which women formed Boston marriages. If we think about the environment of separate spheres or the spaces where women spent a great deal of their time with other women, developed deeper emotional intimacy, it's not surprising that women might find their one in a community of other women.

And besides finding a partner, a loved one, someone they wanted to build a life with, women in Boston

marriages often found a broader base of support. There were other women couples forming in this era, especially around groups of women who were professional, educated and advocating for women's rights. We begin to see the emergence of fledgling communities and networks of these women-loving women who support one another emotionally, become friends and also become champions of each other's public activities. Coupled women in so-called Boston marriages belong to a generation referred to as New Women, or they were one of the generations of New Women, pioneering opportunities for women in higher education and professions and in public life. These women's intimate relationships with other women are often left out of the story.

The love stories and life successes of women in Boston marriages have the potential to appeal to all students, and they especially will appeal to those who fear that they might be held back by prejudice in pursuing their goals because perhaps their identity falls outside of one of the norms of society. Not fitting into the norm is not always a liability as we'll see in the case of several Boston marriages. It's important to note, though, that nearly all the known couples in Boston marriages were white, middle- and upper-class, so as you explore the meanings of their lives and their loves, the social and economic status they held is really important to address. And in two particular ways it's important.

First, in the past as well as today, we can't allow one single person to stand in for the entire queer community. And likewise, when people use the acronym LGBTQ, no single letter—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer—can represent the wholeness of that community and the diversity of same-sex love and gender-transgressive identities. And then second, the professional successes of women in Boston marriages very much relied on their white privilege as well as their access to financial independence. So, the capacity to set up a household together, to pursue a professional life, to engage in organizing for a variety of causes—these activities were possible because of the privilege that these women held.

Your students in U.S. history are likely to be learning about—for the 19th century, the women's rights movement as it forms, including the campaign for women's suffrage, and growing opportunities for women to pursue educational, professional and other social opportunities. As you introduce these topics you can also help students to historicize the institution of marriage. Marriage in the 19th century is definitely a state-sanctioned arrangement, and it's one that upholds patriarchy—the idea that men are heads of household, that they are the legal representative of the family, and that women are subsumed within and underneath their husband. It's also true that women are subsumed underneath their fathers before they marry. So marriage is an institution that upholds patriarchy, and it's also hand-in-hand with the arrangement within households, especially white households in the urban industrial world, a division of labor where responsibilities for household tasks and the maintenance of family is heavily placed on women, and men are alleviated of any responsibilities of significance in terms of the care work that goes into maintaining a family.

Both the patriarchal, legal and social aspects of marriage, as well as the gender division of labor within the home, made it very difficult for women to exercise autonomy. You can observe that some of the women abolitionists and suffragists who were involved in those movements tended to make their strongest contributions after they had married and raised families, and their children were grown and gone. That these latter decades of their lives were really rich opportunities to engage in civic activity. So, for women who loved women, it was more than just avoiding the environment where a man is in charge

of your life, and it was more than just avoiding the parenting responsibilities that were the norm for women in the 1800s and into the 1900s that informed their choices.

It was more than those absences, but actually the presence of a female companion—someone that they could spend their time with and enjoy life with, as well as someone who would support and propel their personal and civic aspirations and connections. By the 20th century, such couples were increasingly acquainted with others like them. Often, they found some connection to other women who shared commitments to social justice causes: things such as opposition to men’s dominance in politics, violence in the home and opposition to wars between nations as well. So, there are many progressive-era women—activists, educators, artists, performers and writers—whose same-sex relationships have come to light.

In her 1999 book, *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America*, Lillian Faderman collects numerous such stories. She argues that suffragists, civic leaders, and educated and professional women shaped U.S. history in ways that have been underappreciated. Faderman’s the author of numerous books and articles on women’s same-sex relationships and she, in the book *To Believe in Women*, opts to use the term *lesbian* not as a noun to describe the women, but she does use the adjective *lesbian* in ways that many queer historians would choose not to.

So, to give you an example, she titles a subsection of one of her chapters “The Virtues of Lesbian Domesticity,” and she uses this to describe Boston marriage households of the early 20th century—women living together and sharing a home. Many of us would hesitate to use something like *lesbian domesticity* as a term to describe that time period. So, I don’t recommend adopting the language and conclusions necessarily, but Faderman’s book is a really great starting point for examining love affairs and long-term relations between women.

She builds on numerous primary sources and shows that from the early suffragists and continuing through the progressive era, there were many women whose accomplishments and contributions to society were enhanced by the fact that they were in Boston marriages and shared love relationships and supportive relationships with other women.

Next, I’m going to introduce three couples as examples of Boston marriages. The first couple I’ll introduce you to—Pastor Phebe Coffin Hanaford and Ellen Miles. It wasn’t so common in the 19th century for a woman to enter the ministry. And even today, many faiths exclude women from the highest leadership positions. Phebe Coffin Hanaford was not only a pastor and a feminist raised in this era; she also lived openly with a partner, Ellen Miles. Hanaford was raised a Quaker. She became a schoolteacher at age 16. She got married to Joseph Hanaford at age 20, and they raised two kids. She wrote and published books during these years. One’s about her cousin Lucretia Mott who was also a Quaker and women’s rights activist. She also wrote a book about Lincoln as well—Abraham Lincoln—after he was assassinated.

And then in her mid-30s with her children grown, she sought ordination as a Universalist minister. Then beginning in 1870, she served as a preacher in several northern communities where she was able to earn a solid income. And actually, she was selected to be the chaplain for the Connecticut state legislature. This was a first for a woman. Hanaford was also an active speaker and campaigner for women’s suffrage as well. Her ambition in these areas—particularly the feminist—displeased her husband, and they separated

shortly after her career in the ministry began. Ellen became her life companion and they lived together for three decades.

Tender and supportive words in Ellen's letters are the opposite of the kind of accusations that were typical of her husband's letters prior to their separation. "My loved one," Miles wrote. "My first written word shall be to you my darling, who comes first to my waking thoughts, and last before my eyes close to sleep. It seemed to me that I left all the world behind me when I left you in that depot, and I could not keep the sobs down all the way out."

Over time, the couple existed in a growing community of women who lived independent from men. After Phebe's death, one of these women, the humorist and novelist Marietta Holley, wrote to Ellen, "I know how lonely and desolate life must be to you if you should think of her as utterly gone from you. But I do not believe that. I believe she is with you, the one she loved best all the time."

Ellen and Phebe's life together was not entirely without controversy. At one of the later congregations Hanaford led in Jersey City, the church voted not to renew her contract. According to the newspaper clippings that Hanaford collected, there were two problems. First, her women's rights advocacy—they didn't all the way approve of that. And second was the presence of "the minister's wife," As the papers referred to Miles. Following the vote, Hanaford established a second Universalist congregation in a rented hall. Six years later, she and Miles returned to New Haven. Then, after retiring in 1891, Phebe and Ellen relocated their home to New York City where they remained active in women's rights causes and lived together until Ellen's death in 1914.

So, with Phebe Hanaford and Ellen Miles, you might ask your students to explore how their relationship has been acknowledged by members of the Universalist faith. Are they surprised to discover such openness about a same-sex couple from the 19th century? Also, what does the historical transparency about Hanaford's love life suggest about the denomination? And also, how does the finding challenge the kind of blanket statements you might hear people make about religion and homosexuality? You can send them out to search—and Phebe Hanaford is an especially Google-able name. It's P-H-E-B-E, last name Hanaford, H-A-N-A-F-O-R-D. So you could send them out to search or you could provide them with some online sources. Several of the ones that I located that include information about their relationship are, one, a digital Unitarian Universalist archives, which documents a website called [HarvardSquareLibrary.org](http://HarvardSquareLibrary.org). Hanaford's same-sex, long-term relationship with Miles and the online biography they provide on the site. In addition, several congregations have posted online tributes and sermons that include details of her life including her relationship with Miles.

#### LEILA RUPP

We're listening to Susan Freeman discuss Boston marriage and the history of same-sex relationships between women and girls in the United States. This is *Queer America*. I'm your host, Leila Rupp. While we're busy launching this podcast, another Teaching Tolerance podcast is wrapping up its first amazing season. Hosted by Hasan Kwame Jeffries, it's a detailed look at how to teach important aspects of the history of American slavery in your classroom. You can find our sister podcast, *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery*, in iTunes, or visit [tolerance.org/podcasts](http://tolerance.org/podcasts). Once again, here is Susan Freeman.



## SUSAN FREEMAN

Our second couple is Jane Addams and Mary Rozet Smith. Jane Addams is one of the historical figures we know who used to wire ahead to hotels when she was traveling with her companion to request a double bed. And when Addams traveled alone, she sometimes bundled up a large painted portrait of Smith with her luggage—far from discreet. A few years into their relationship Addams wrote to her sister that, “Smith was so good to me that I would find life a different thing without her.”

In 1895, Addams penned a poem attesting to her first impression of Smith. “One day I came into Hull House / (No spirit whispered who was there) / And in the kindergarten room / There sat upon a childish chair / A girl both tall and fair to see, / (To look at her gives one a thrill). / But all I thought was, would she be / Best fitted to lead club or drill? / You see, I had forgotten Love / And only thought of Hull House then. / That is the way with women folks / When they attempt the things of men; / They grow intense, and love the thing / Which they so tenderly do rear, / And think that nothing lies beyond / Which claims from them a smile or tear. / [...] So [I was] blind and deaf those years / To all save one absorbing care, / and did not guess what I know now— / Delivering love was sitting there!”

Later, during a separation in 1902 Addams wrote to Smith: “You must know, dear, how I long for you all the time. There is a reason in the habit of married folks keeping together.” And from 1914: “Dearest, I had a real wave of homesickness for you. I wanted you very much.” Volumes of letters between Addams and Smith attest to their loving relationship. Addams is, of course, best known for her public accomplishments, not her private intimacies. And we have not only her relationship with Mary Rozet Smith, but also her earlier companion and co-founder of Hull House, Ellen Gates Starr.

Addams’ accomplishments were many. She was a tireless advocate for social reform, for children’s welfare, and workers’ rights and peace. She was a co-founder of organizations like the NAACP and the ACLU and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1931, she was the first American woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize. And through all these accomplishments, Smith remained by Addams side. Upon Smith’s death in 1934, Addams received many condolences from friends and associates acknowledging her grief as like that of any widow who had lost a spouse.

So as an activity to work with your students around Jane Addams and Mary Rozet Smith, what you can do is have them explore how well-represented that relationship is in public documents about Jane Addams’ life. It will be helpful for your students to know that, although Boston marriages have been well-documented by queer historians, these findings are not always well-regarded by the broader public. Biographers, for example, often “straighten” up the story and dismiss the queer themes in their subjects’ lives. Perhaps the more famous they are, the more so they do this. And Jane Addams is a good case of this.

In Chicago, the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum came around to incorporating Addams’ committed relationships with women into their exhibits within the past decade. According to a WBEZ public radio broadcast from 2013, one of the ways the museum opted to be forthcoming was to tell visitors—as a student intern explained she would do—the LGBT community embraces Jane Addams as one of their own. During the directorship of Lisa Yun Lee of the museum, the staff decided to create a new label to accompany the large painting of Mary Rozet Smith. And without using the term *lesbian*, they acknowledged exactly how central Mary Rozet Smith was to Addam’s life. And you can locate the exhibit

label's text about Smith, along with a poem that I quoted earlier, on the archived WBEZ story if you want to look that up.

However, if you go to the website for the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum today, under different leadership, you'll find a biography of Jane Addams that erases her love for women. The biography does mention Ellen Starr, her first long-term companion, but it only mentions her in the context of being a Hull House co-founder. Nothing is said about her relationship with Addams, and there's no mention of Mary Rozet Smith at all. What does this say about the power of an individual leader or a tour guide or a museum employee to help rewrite history? What do your students think of the way that the intern connects Addams to LGBTQ history, without directly naming her a lesbian, saying that the LGBT community "accepts and embraces Addams as a figure who is part of their history," rather than saying, "we identify Adams as a lesbian"? How does that sit with your students?

The third and final couple I want to share is Mary Woolley and Jeannette Marks. Woolley was the president of Mount Holyoke College in the first three decades of the 20th century, and she was an important pioneer in women's education. She began breaking barriers as the first female student to enroll at Brown University in 1891. By 1895, she'd obtained a master's degree in a position as a professor at Wellesley. She also met her life companion at Wellesley. That was Jeanette Marks, a student who was then 21 to Woolley's 37. They would go on to live together, but initially, they resided apart after they both relocated to Mount Holyoke in 1901. The campus was building a new president's house, and, when it was completed in 1909, the couple moved in together. They were together for 55 years, and thousands of their love letters have been preserved.

During her presidency, Woolley sought to change the campus reflecting her feminist views. As one example, she eliminated a decades-old housekeeping requirement that all students had to do some domestic chores on campus. And she also encouraged academic seriousness. She ensured that Marks obtained a teaching position in Mount Holyoke's English department. Perhaps we could think of this as one of the earliest known same-sex partner hires in higher education. And while away on a business trip in 1901, Woolley wrote to Marks: "I can picture you now in my room, and I so hope that you are not a lonely little girl. My love is with you, my precious. It seems weeks since I saw you. Now it will only be two days and then I will kiss you and kiss you until you are smothered with kisses. I love you so, and I miss you beyond all words. If only you were with me so that I could look into your dear eyes and kiss your sweet mouth and love and love you in a thousand ways. I will when we are together my dearest, and make up for lost time."

As with other New Women we're looking at, there was more to the relationship than kisses and mutual pleasures. Both Woolley and Marks were passionate about women's rights and Woolley took on especially prominent roles in suffrage, free speech and peace movements. There are, however, lingering questions about how unabashed the couple was in putting their love for one another at the center of their lives. Marks wrote in 1908 an unpublished essay about unwise college friendships, and at other times she expressed reservations about romantic love between women. Yet similar to the other Boston marriages we've considered, the couple's reception among like-minded women in progressive communities was significant. As Woolley approached her final years, a heterosexually married National Woman's Party colleague Carolyn Babcock wrote sympathetically to Jeanette Marks about the tug between caring for

one's loved one and remaining active in the movement. After Woolley's death, Marks published a lengthy biography of Woolley highlighting her many accomplishments.

So, yet another activity you could do with your students is to have them consider what a women's college today that formerly had a president who loved women—would they want to make this information public? Once more, you could have your students use Google or you could present the online evidence for them to examine. Two pieces you could use: One is Mount Holyoke's web page that gives a brief history of the college and includes a paragraph about the different presidents of the school. In the paragraph on Woolley's accomplishments while president, it includes her feminist stance on women's education and some other contributions she made. However, it makes no mention of Jeanette Marks. But to be fair, there's no mention of any of the other presidents' spouses.

In contrast, the Archives and Special Collections at Mount Holyoke—their website hosts a 15-page online exhibit called, “Mary Woolley and Jeanette Marks: Life, Love, & Letters.” It was an exhibit created by three undergraduate gender studies students in collaboration with the archives using their vast resources. If time allows, this is a terrific place to have your students learn more about the two women. They can look into the deeper questions about their biographies, their history, their privilege, their individual talents and accomplishments, as well as their romantic ties to one another and their relationship to the time that they lived in.

#### **LEILA RUPP**

This is Queer America, and I'm your host, Leila Rupp. Teaching Tolerance has learned a lot about what LGBTQ students need to thrive—how even small policy adjustments and curriculum changes can make a big difference in the lives of queer and nonbinary students. We also know that LGBTQ-inclusive schools benefit all students. Our new LGBTQ Best Practices Guide can help educators and school leaders ensure that all students feel safe, seen and capable of success. By creating a curriculum as complete and representative as possible and cultivating a school climate that fosters open and respectful dialogue among all students and staff, you're preparing your students to engage and thrive within our diverse democracy. You can find it at [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org). Again, Susan Freeman.

#### **SUSAN FREEMAN**

So collectively, looking at the stories of Hanaford, Addams and Woolley and their love lives and legacies, how well they've been remembered as women who had female partners, and how much this has been erased, I have two additional suggestions for ways you can build discussion and engagement with your students around Boston marriage. One would be to discuss with students, having learned about these three couples, what do you notice that they have in common? You'll want to help your students recognize how their respectability and their reception within their communities was very much related to their whiteness and their class status and their level of education.

In addition, you could also address personality traits that led them to challenge the status quo, and how this might have affected choices that they made in their personal lives as well as their professional lives. Finally, see if your students noticed that, although the stories are about couples, they place the emphasis on the famous or more accomplished partner within the story. Does the greater acclaim of one member of a couple make her automatically the head of the household, and is her companion the wife? You can



note that Miles, Smith and Marks all had significant accomplishments of their own. Also, that partnering with an intellectual and social equal was a common feature of Boston marriages. Jane Addams, Phebe Hanaford and Mary Woolley weren't simply looking for a wife to handle the drudgeries of housework, but they wanted an equal—they wanted a companion.

This could lead to a conversation depending on the group of students you have, about whether marriage is an institution that has moved beyond its patriarchal history or not. You could also potentially address the question of sex in Boston marriages or in any marriage. If a straight couple who was married didn't have sexual relations for whatever reason, we wouldn't question their marriage. And yet, in some cases with Boston marriages, there's suspicion about whether we should consider these women in a same-sex relationship and a queer relationship if we don't have evidence of their having sexual relations. It's kind of a moot point in the case of heterosexual couples. It wouldn't be a subject of discussion, and yet it might be in the case of same-sex couples.

The second activity I've used with students can be a lot of fun, and it's have them read and consider the erasures that sometimes occur in obituaries. And there's this great resource from the past year you may have seen. *New York Times* has created this overlooked obituary series, and the editors to open the series explain why this was needed: to correct the over-representation of famous, white, straight men in the obituaries. And the many remarkable and neglected women and people of color and even trans people—Marsha P. Johnson is one of the people who's received a new obituary recognizing that, though they didn't rate in the *New York Times* obituary at the time of their death, they've made significant contributions to our society and should be recognized.

You can have your students choose a queer historical figure that interested them. Have them find out if the figure had an obituary in the *New York Times*. And you may need a subscription to search the archives, so you should check with your librarian about ways you can log in. If you do find an obituary in the *New York Times*, does it recognize the individual's same-sex love? If you find that it doesn't, you can actually submit through the website a request to the *New York Times* that they have this person added on their overlooked obituary series.

I'll sketch out what the *New York Times* has for Mary Woolley. On September 9, 1947, a notice of her death appears in the paper with the byline South Hadley and the title, "Mary Woolley Rites." The author notes that retired president of the College and an internationally known peace advocate has died and that a prayer service was taking place and offices were closed on campus. Immediately below, another paragraph with the byline Troy, New York, appeared, and it noted that Woolley's body was cremated and a "Quaker memorial service was held yesterday morning at the home of Ms. Jeanette Marks in Westport, New York, where Woolley had resided." How's that for a passive sentence for your students to unpack? "The home of Ms. Jeanette Marks, where Woolley had resided."

In 1947, students can see that the death of an accomplished university president was worthy of notice. Her partner wasn't entirely erased from the news, but she was diminished as simply the person who shared a residence with the deceased.

### LEILA RUPP

This is Queer America. And I'm your host, Leila Rupp. You can learn even more about romantic

friendships & Boston marriage in a valuable collection of essays called *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*. This podcast is produced in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press—publishers of this anthology, which I edited with Susan K. Freeman. It's the first book designed for high school and university teachers who want to integrate queer history into their standard curriculum.

From now until the end of the year, the University of Wisconsin Press is offering a 30 percent discount for Queer America listeners who order this collection. You'll find a link to purchase the book at [tolerance.org/podcasts](http://tolerance.org/podcasts). Just use the promotional code QAPODCAST, all caps. Here is Susan Freeman.

### SUSAN FREEMAN

As we reflect on the entirety of our topic from the smashing girls and romantic friends to Boston marriages and think about its relevance for students today, I want to end with a few considerations about why it's worth incorporating this material into your classes. In particular, I think about marginalized students whose lives are rarely reflected in the curricula of their schools. Many of the current slogans for gay rights emphasize the equality of love (“All love is the same,” “Love is love,”) and self-acceptance (“Love who you are”). As embraced by a new generation of queer movement leaders, these might seem like innovative ideas that belong to millennials. But evidence from the past shows how they pertain to our history as well. We have seen through women's same-sex love that society has not always been preoccupied with sorting people into categories of “hetero” and “normal,” and “gay” and “defective.” And we have seen that same-sex love between women has not always been hidden.

Back at the turn of the 20th century, medical and scientific men began investigating homosexuality and gender variance, creating notions like inversion and transvestism, and other antecedents for our present-day gender and sexual identity categories. Over time, what were once fairly socially benign variations and affections, identities and relationships, received greater scrutiny and judgment. The categorization of “normal” and “abnormal” planted seeds for viewing queer people as perverted and shameful—for viewing us as a *type* of human being that could be detected and possibly reformed. These prejudices have solidified over time and, unfortunately, they linger today.

So, for example, we see it in the current efforts to deny same-sex parents the rights to foster and adopt and care for their own children. We also see it in the ongoing practices called “gay conversion therapy.” Even though research and mainstream organizations such as the American Psychological Association have denounced claims about queer people being unfit parents, and they've also condemned programs claiming to convert a gay person to be straight. Yet, the hostility remains active and even revitalized in recent times.

In your school setting, teaching about queer history may be controversial or at least require some educational work. Let's acknowledge that it's a bit of an uphill battle and that we need champions to move forward in integrating queer studies into the curricula. Most parents are behind us. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, however, reports that upwards of one-third of non-LGBTQ-identified parents have objections to their kids learning about queer history in school. It's worth considering where the opposition comes from. In part, parents are likely to feel confident that their point of view—the dominant view that supposes heterosexuality is the normal and right way to be—is a legitimate point of view, and that LGBTQ minority rights are a fringe issue. Perhaps they would label this some effort toward

political correctness or claim that it serves special interests, and maybe even use moralizing language—religious language—to claim that queerness is just wrong.

But if this idea is prevalent in your school, it reveals exactly why young people need to learn about queer history at school. Learning about romantic friendships between women and other queer history topics allows students to situate particular family, community or religious beliefs into a wider tapestry of opinions—current ones and past as well. As teachers, we can help students to think critically about why, in some periods and in some communities, we see more or less acceptance. What do the stated objections reveal? And what are the unstated assumptions?

Also, there's a gender question to address here: Are women couples more acceptable than men? And if so, why? In the popular mindset and among some academics, there's a great deal of confidence that sexuality is something innate and probably biological. Were this to be proven—let me be clear, it is not proven—it would suggest that we could easily separate the queer from the straight. As we have seen, how women exhibited their love and lust for other women in the past, or in any particular moment, is not consistent.

So, we can take, for example, the murderous Alice Mitchell. Is she a lesbian in the same way as Pastor Phebe Hanaford? Or women who had a succession of women as lovers—so we can take Charity Bryant as an example of one, or another 19th-century example is the actress Charlotte Cushman—are they the same as someone like Rebecca Primus, for whom we only know of a single female love interest? Does falling in love with a woman make you a *kind* of person? Who says so, and why? From the vantage point of our students, they may perceive the binary opposition between straight and gay as far less concrete than earlier generations did. Many of our students will place themselves on a spectrum in terms of gender or sexuality, perhaps identifying in terms of gender as genderqueer, non-binary. They might adopt a notion of fluidity to describe their sexuality, calling themselves sexually fluid, pansexual, bisexual. Some students actually see their romantic and sexual attraction toward people who are trans.

And then there's an emerging set of categories around asexuality. Some students identify as asexual, aromantic and other terms. To see these students and the fullness of their identities and the complexity of their lives, it behooves us as educators to become familiar with the terms that they use, to recognize students by correct pronouns and identities that they feel an affinity for, and to call into question the heterosexism of so much of what schools teach.

It also behooves us as historians to help students appreciate things that are taken for granted by their generation, or things that are taken for granted by ours—a lot of which is not transhistorical. A historically specific concept like “coming out” or “coming out of the closet” is perhaps unhelpful when we encounter someone like Jane Addams. If there's no evidence of hiding and no public pronouncements to the world—“Hey, I'm gay”—what would it even mean for her to come out?

There's also the fact worth considering—especially because we're working with young people—that one's relationships don't always define one's identities, and one's identities don't always determine one's relationships. Here's what I mean. If, say, a teenager comes out as a lesbian before she's ever had any sexual experience with another girl, she still has every right to self-define as queer, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or whatever term she prefers. Likewise, if a student falls for her bunkmate at summer camp and

enjoys flirtations or hanging out with someone that feels super special to her for that couple of months, we can't assume that she's a self-identified lesbian or bisexual. It's a broader combination of behaviors, feelings and choices over time that might solidify a particular kind of queer identity—but it might not.

Our current political moment is a confusing one. For young people, this coincides with what is often a confusing phase of life. Ironically, history can provide stability by showing just how unstable things are over time. Your role as a teacher is an important one. By introducing the history of romantic friendships and Boston marriages, you can help students observe the shifting possibilities and the moments of exclusion. Interpreting historic love letters and poems, thinking about what's included and what's omitted in an obituary, and contemplating the gender dynamics within same-sex couples—both as they perceive themselves and as others perceive them. All of this can widen students' historical aptitude. And more than that, they can also expand their capacity to be part of an informed, curious, inclusive and just society.

#### LEILA RUPP

Susan Freeman is an associate professor and chair of Gender and Women's Studies at Western Michigan University. She and I co-edited the anthology that is the basis of this podcast. This episode is inspired by a chapter on romantic friendship by Dáša Francíková. Susan is the author of *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education Before the 1960s*. Her current research examines the development of gay and lesbian studies classes beginning in 1969.

*Queer America* is a podcast from Teaching Tolerance, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press. They're the publisher of the award-winning anthology, *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*. In each episode, we're featuring a different scholar to talk about material from a chapter in that collection. Use the code QAPODCAST, all caps, to get a 30% discount when you purchase the book through [tolerance.org/podcasts](http://tolerance.org/podcasts). You'll also find additional tools—including resources we've mentioned, episode transcripts and an LGBTQ Best Practices Guide—to help your school create an inclusive curriculum and an open and respectful climate for dialogue among students and staff.

Teaching Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, providing free resources to educators who work with children from kindergarten through high school. You can also find those online at [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org). Thanks to Dr. Freeman for sharing her insights with us. This podcast was produced by Shea Shackelford, with production assistance from Russell Gragg. Kate Shuster is our project manager. Music in this episode is by Chris Zabriskie.

So, what do you think? Let us know on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Review us in iTunes. And please, tell your friends and colleagues about this podcast. I'm Dr. Leila J. Rupp, professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and your host for *Queer America*.