

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN NOTES

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Thank you for your interest in 'The History of Women'--it is a vast and complex topic but one that we believe will be rewarding to explore.

You will find suggestions below for presentation topics, divided by time period and theme as well as book review options; the variety should allow for plenty of learning and discussion. We would like the focus to be on the latest research and findings. There are many films, books, articles, and discussions available free of charge via the public library, Kanopy, etc. along with online sources such as TVO, YouTube and podcasts.

There is considerable flexibility in presentations; for example, you may choose to present a book review or your findings on a topic, followed by a group discussion or you could select some publicly available materials related to your topic and share it with the group in advance, opening up all of the class time for discussion.

Presentation formats are up to you - there is no requirement to use slides if you prefer some other method. We have twelve classes in total - we will use the first session for everyone to introduce themselves and for the facilitators to provide an overview of the topics and engage discussion. The last class will be used as a wrap-up to discuss what we have learned and perhaps where it might lead us.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION TOPICS (Suggested books are listed below under 'Source Material')

BY TIME PERIOD - THE ROLE OF WOMEN THROUGH THE AGES

Prehistoric Era – the first humans approx. 2.5 million years ago up 600 BCE

The Agricultural Revolution – about 12,000 years ago

Classical Antiquity 600 BCE to 476 CE

Middle Ages / Medieval Era 476 to 1450 CE

Early Modern Era 1450 to 1750 CE

Modern Era 1750 CE to Present

BY TOPIC – WOMEN'S PLACE

Patriarchy and Misogyny

Religion and Traditional Values

Sexuality and Gender Roles

Motherhood

Women & Money

Women and Technology

Women and Work

Women as Artists, Thinkers, Writers, and Scientists

Feminism

Healthcare

BY TIME PERIOD - THE ROLE OF WOMEN THROUGH THE AGES

The study of human history relies on written records and archaeological evidence. But who gets to decide on the interpretation? Who decides what is worth keeping and recording? How do assumptions and biases distort reality? Most importantly: Where are the Women? New research is changing accepted thought in all fields and eras of study.

Prehistoric Era – the first humans approx. 2.5 million years ago up 600 BCE

- What do we know about the role of women as hunter gatherers?
- What assumptions have been made about the women in this era?
- How do these assumptions inform our beliefs about women today?

'Lady Sapiens' a BBC documentary, on TVO.org and in book form reveals that, based on recent archeological findings, women were also big game hunters.

The Agricultural Revolution – about 12,000 years ago

- Examine how the role of women changed during this era and the impact of moving away from hunter gatherers
- East / west perspective—what was happening around the world?
- When and why did the patriarchy begin?

<https://www.science.org/content/article/strong-women-did-lot-heavy-lifting-ancient-farming-societies>
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/how-the-agricultural-revolution-made-us-inequal#:~:text=Generally%2C%20men%20did%20the%20majority,women%20became%20second%20class%20citizens>

Classical Antiquity 600 BCE to 476 CE

- During the rise and fall of the great Greece, Roman, Persian, and Byzantine empires, women had many roles, but were also slaves. How did this happen?
- What was happening in other parts of the world e.g., China, India, Africa? How did gender roles play out among Indigenous civilizations in the Americas, Australia?

<http://www.womenintheancientworld.com/women%20and%20slavery%20in%20ancient%20rome.htm>
<http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.pbworks.com/w/page/124714571/Women%20and%20Slaves%20in%20Ancient%20Athens>

Middle Ages / Medieval Era 476 to 1450 CE

- The Catholic church was at the height of its power and Islam was rising in Middle East – religions had increasing power to dictate not just the role of women but their very worth in many parts of the world. How did this impact the role of women?
- How did religious beliefs influence other parts of the world, such as Africa, China and India?
- Do women have a soul?

<https://www.getty.edu/news/what-was-life-like-for-women-in-the-middle-ages/>

Early Modern Era 1450 to 1750 CE

- Major transformations in European philosophical thought such as the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment broke with religious and scholastic teachings. How much changed in the perception and inclusion of women?
- How did the advent of the printing press impact on women—notably a very popular book, aside from the bible, was ‘Malleus’ on how to spot a witch.
- Were there comparable changes in Arabic, African, Chinese and Asian regions?
- The impact of colonization of the Americas on the role of women
<https://sfoonline.barnard.edu/introduction-women-and-community-in-early-modern-europe/>

Modern Era 1750 CE to Present

The influences of both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment led to a technological revolution. The world of politics was rocked by wars, revolution, and regime change. How did this change impact women?

- East – West roles of women-the world-wide perspective
- 1st & 2nd Industrial Revolutions / Imperialism/ urbanization
- Female slavery – conditions and emancipation
- Suffragette movement and the first and second waves of modern feminism, the pill
- World wars and civil wars - impact on women
- ‘Scientific’ assumptions regarding gender, now debunked, used to support male superiority
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/03/210325115316.htm>
- How the Information Age, technology, digital platforms, and social media has impacted on the modern view of women and women’s role.
- Regime change - women’s right outside of the western sphere e.g. Iran, Afghanistan
- Advances in medicine, pharmaceuticals, education, religious control
- Reproductive rights and bans on abortion
- Economic upheaval – she-cession, gig work, work from home combined with childcare
<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/03/03/COVID-19-She-Cession-The-Employment-Penalty-of-Taking-Care-of-Young-Children-50117> IMF paper
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/she-cession-employment-recovery-1.6299162>
<https://cabe.ca/webinar/women-and-the-post-pandemic-economy-perspectives-on-she-cession/> Armine Yalnizyan, Toronto economist
- CPP and how aging women in Canada wind up living in poverty
- Day care and its significance

BY TOPIC – WOMEN’S PLACE

Patriarchy and Misogyny

- Why not a matriarchy?
- Why do women support it? What are the benefits?
- Why are women seen as inferior and/or a threat, the ‘other’?
- Why do men and women refuse to see/acknowledge the costs?
- Discrimination, open hostility, resentment, Incels, harassment, disenfranchisement

Religion and Traditional Values

- Male prerogative as a god-given right
- Obsessed with control of females: witches, whores and madonnas; shaming/venerating/erasing
- Woman as source of original sin, temptation, and chaos
- Benefits to society of a gendered hierarchy

Sexuality and Gender Roles

- The male gaze / violence
- Pornography vs erotica / female pain / sex dolls
- Alternate sexuality, gender identification
- Nice girls finish last, or do they? Costs and benefits of accepting the good girl role
- Society’s fear and punishment of female anger and criminality versus the acceptance, even encouragement of male violence
- Society and men expend huge amounts of effort to ensure that women are “contained” and access to autonomy denied. Why?

Motherhood

- Maternal healthcare / societal support /constraints / the double shift
- Surveillance and criminal prosecution
- How women’s reproductive rights are controlled

Women & Money

- Poverty - access to money, lack of financial autonomy, stigma (either inept or gold-digger)
- The elderly poor, mostly women - why? e.g. pension plans set up for male career patterns
- The workplace – pay, career options, built for men, harassment, exclusion
- Forbidden knowledge / enforced ignorance (structural, societal)
- Shoes vs stocks / Resistance to and fear of / avoidance of financial responsibility
- Privileged blindness to other women’s real concerns and constraints, lack of access

Women and Technology

- Eradication of recent history of women's essential contributions
- Product design based on males / gendered toys and (pink) tools
- Virtual assistants with female voices/ chore/sex robots
- Social media and industry hate and danger (Gamergate) / privacy and protection
- Expulsion from lucrative fields / lack of funding & support for education, innovation

<https://www.globalapptesting.com/blog/the-women-who-changed-the-tech-world>

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/1/20/20808875/gamergate-lessons-cultural-impact-changes-harassment-laws>

Women and Work

- Women's work as servers, cleaners and assistants
- Women as elected representatives
- Women professionals
- Barriers faced by women in the workplace
- The glass ceiling persists and how to address it

Women as Artists, Thinkers, Writers, and Scientists

- Attribution vs appropriation / Achievements without acknowledgement
- Bias, dismissal, rejection

<https://www.tv.org/programs/the-story-of-women-and-art> A three-part documentary

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51399835>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/ten-historic-female-scientists-you-should-know-84028788/>

<https://www.sciencefocus.com/science/10-amazing-women-in-science-history-you-really-should-know-about/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKtj3Z74s-E&ab_channel=Idler

<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/articles/12-female-writers-who-wrote-under-male-pseudonyms/>

<https://www.marieclaire.com/culture/g5026/female-discoveries-credited-to-men/>

Feminism

- Why is it a dirty word today? Is there a clear definition
- The mixed legacy of suffrage and the different forms it took around the world
- Can you have equal rights without reproductive rights?
- What did it get right / where did it go wrong/ where does it go from here
- Feminism as a branch of sociology

<https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-theory-3026624>

Healthcare

- Lack of medical research on females; doctor training, appropriate medication
- Mental health models created by men; sex-focused and mother blaming
- Medicalization of normal life process; dismissal of real health issues
- Criminalization of abortion—no money no choice
- Aging and health

SOURCE MATERIAL

Top Feminist Books

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/feminism>

<https://fivebooks.com/best-books/patriarchy-mona-eltahawy/>

<https://fivebooks.com/best-books/prehistoric-women-thomas-ciotteau/> Ciotteau is the director of Lady Sapiens

Bad Feminist, by Roxanne Gay 2014

Broad Band: The Untold Story of the Women Who Made the Internet, by Claire L. Evans 2018

Fed Up: Emotional Labor, Women, and the Way Forward, by Gemma Hartley 2020

Female Eunuch, by Germain Greer 1970

Feminist Manifesto, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 2017

Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood 1998 *

Headstrong: 52 Women Who Changed Science and the World, by Rachel Swaby 2015

Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields, by Wendy Lower 2014

Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men, by C. Criado Perez 2021*

Let Me Be Frank: A Book About Women Who Dressed Like Men to Do Shit They Weren't Supposed to Do, by Tracy Dawson 2022 *

Nickel and Dimed On (Not) Getting by in America, by Barbara Ehrenreich 2001

Nobody ever Asked Me About the Girls: Women, Music and Fame, by Lisa Robinson 2020

Proving Ground: The Untold Story of the Six Women Who Programmed the World's First Modern Computer, by Kathy Kleiman 2022

Rage Becomes Her: The Power Of Women's Anger, by Soraya Chemaly 2018

Second Sex, by Simone de Beauvoir 1949

Shrewed (essays), by Elizabeth Renzetti 2018*

The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, by Gerda Lerner 1993*

The Creation of the Patriarchy, by Gerda Lerner 1986*

The Patriarchs: The Origins of Inequality, by Angela Saini 2023

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir, 1949

The Sexual Paradox: Men, Women and the Real Gender Gap, by Susan Pinker 2008*

The Testaments, by Margaret Atwood 2019*

The Women's Room, by Marilyn French 1977

The Women's History of The Modern World: How Radicals, Rebels, And Everywomen Revolutionized the Last 200 Years, by Rosalind Miles 2021

Uncanny Valley: A Memoir, by Anna Wiener 2020

Vindication Of the Rights of Women, by Mary Wollstonecraft 1792

We Should all be Feminists, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 2014

We Were Feminists Once, by Andi Zeisler 2016 *

When Women Ruled the World: Six Queens of Egypt, by Kara Cooney 2018

Who Cooked the Last Supper: The Women's History of the World, by Rosalind Miles 2001

Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism, by Kristen Ghodsee

Women and Power, by Mary Beard 2017 *

Women in America Society, by Jay Kleinberg 1998

Women who run with Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype, by Clarissa Estes 1992

** Available to borrow from the facilitators*