

July 2023

## Gender in Cultural History: Gender and Education

Dimitra Kalodimou  
*University of Thessaly*

Maria Kapalika  
*University of Thessaly*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Commons](#), [Community-Based Learning Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Humane Education Commons](#), [Sexuality and the Law Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kalodimou, Dimitra and Kapalika, Maria (2023) "Gender in Cultural History: Gender and Education," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 7: Iss. 3, Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol7/iss3/3>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journal of Research Initiatives at DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Research Initiatives by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Fayetteville State University. For more information, please contact [ltreadwell@uncfsu.edu](mailto:ltreadwell@uncfsu.edu).

---

## Gender in Cultural History: Gender and Education

### Keywords

Female gender, Europe, rights, history, gender discrimination, society, family, education

### Cover Page Footnote

Our deep gratitude to our Professor Dr. Xanthippi Foulidi, for her patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful critiques of this research work.



## Gender in Cultural History: Gender and Education

Dimitra Kalodimou, University of Thessaly

Maria Kapalika, University of Thessaly

### Abstract

The position of women in the oldest societies has often occupied the scientific community, which is a great reason to study it. Today's societies put tremendous effort into highlighting the importance of women's contribution. In this text, we will deal with the position of women in the recording of history, with women's presence within the historical sources as well as the roles held in family business and education. In addition, the gradual changes regarding women's recovery in society will be presented and highlighted. The first steps to improve women's image started in Europe and continued worldwide. The critically studied articles containing the details mentioned in this review rely almost exclusively on a foreign language (English) bibliography and support the conclusions drawn.

*Keywords:* Female gender, Europe, rights, history, gender discrimination, society, family, education

### Introduction

In this study, we entirely focus on the evolution of women's gender rights throughout the centuries and with a varied geographical approach. Initially, women up to the 16th century were "non-existent." Women were followed by prejudice but also a denial of the exercise of rights. More specifically, women were treated by the father first, the husband then, and almost always by society with cruelty, their voice and speech repressed and never heard. Women were treated as wives and mothers in the house without any other role. It was not considered acceptable to express her needs and desires. There was undeniable gender discrimination, with the man of the house considered dominant, always having the upper hand.

Nevertheless, the conditions were reversed in Europe in the mid-16th century. Then, the female gender began to realize her existence's value and actively claim the "presence." Women began to demand physical integrity, a voice in society, claim work opportunities and equal pay to

men, be educated, have property rights, and participate in political participation. It was becoming clear that women's positions and contributions to society and families were crucial.

### **Women in Cultural History**

Our discussion will begin in 16th-century England. The number of women engaged in recording history was far fewer than observed in Europe. Historical texts were connected with the male gender because of their battlefield involvement. There was the belief that only men could record the historical events in which men participated. It has been observed that on many occasions, the female roles in history have been omitted or downplayed because, primarily, men were involved in recording history and due to their participation in historical events. It was typical that there would be no mention of women's actions since the men were the historians of the time (Woolf, 1997). Femininity had been associated with reading romantic stories and novels, which, according to men, indicated sensitivity and the need for salty conversations.

Nevertheless, the reality was different. Women pretending to be illiterate in front of society read texts about historical events and used them to discuss with relatives or record the events in personal diaries. Personal records arose independently of any bibliographic source. They often included oral traditions from the experiences of families and the experiences of the women's families to which they were talking.

It is noteworthy that men enjoyed the sight of women having difficulty reading and understanding historical texts due to lack of education, possibly because it fulfilled their most profound ego for superiority in education. They sometimes thought women used their own "language" while discussing women's issues, such as motherhood and parenting. However, in support of women, it was a case of preservation and continuation of historical events between women than trying to communicate the events to men. Before reading was established in the women's gender, mothers informed their daughters as much as possible, telling the past events and family history. These oral educational opportunities enabled a woman to narrate past events to her children, thus strengthening and preserving the role of the female in history.

### **Women and Education in Cultural History**

For many decades women could not acquire an education, and it was obligatory to stay at home. In many societies during the 19th century, women had limited access to formal education. Social norms and cultural expectations often dictated that women's primary roles were within the

domestic sphere, and education was not considered essential. Consequently, educational opportunities for women were scarce, and access to schools and universities was often restricted or denied. However, they tried hard to learn as many things as possible and feel confident about themselves. In cases where women were allowed to pursue education, it was often in separate educational institutions designated explicitly for women. Such institutions typically offered a narrower range of subjects and were seen as preparing women primarily for roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers. Women must be educated and acquire the necessary knowledge to meet society's demands.

One of the prevailing opinions at the time was that the woman could not separate the important from the unimportant matters or choose which were appropriate to be seen in public rather than private. This may have been one of the reasons why the female gender was discredited from the writing of historical texts. Continuing the mentioned point of view, the male-dominated society did not want women removed or hindered from their "duties" as mothers and housewives. Indeed, despite establishing primary compulsory education for girls, the diffusion of these racial notions would be legitimized and used by school institutions to create gender-specific lesson plans. The curriculum for girls is imbued with classical virtues such as chastity, modesty, and self-discipline. New gender-specific courses were introduced for girls by 1880, for example, sewing, hygiene, and cooking, whereas education for boys focused on math and technical planning. Courses such as "decorative" education, "home economics," and "the elementary gender-appropriate tasks" became the core of women's education for many years, showing, without a doubt, the main objective of this type of learning, the selfless contribution of women to the happiness of others. (UNESCO, 2020). Women's access to history and education studies took time as these courses would limit women's time for family responsibilities and the tasks society had established.

During the 17th century, the acceptance of women reading historical texts began to take hold and was justified as women attempted to learn about the world. The recording of diaries, mainly by aristocratic women, flourished in this specific period. At the beginning of the 18th century, women's preference for historical reading was evident, while women wrote a more significant number of novels. About 1770, the simple reading of historical texts in English and modern languages by women was accepted. However, further engagement with the story carried

risks. However, reading historical texts was less an individual task than a group one. It was done in the context of fun between a couple or friends. Also, women began to engage in literature in their attempt to express what they felt. The greatest literary texts that glorify love, selfless love, were written by women writers (Woolf, 1997).

### **Women's Educational Role in the Family in Cultural History**

The institution of book lending also played an essential role in preserving history, initially within the family from mother to daughter and from daughter to grandson or through the inheritance of a deceased person. Widowed women donated many historical books of their husbands in the social circle, thus once again helping the preservation of historical facts. In addition to the books, however, they generously offered knowledge of running a business, knowledge passed on from unmarried parents and spouses while alive.

Regarding women's involvement in family businesses, literature shows that women were characterized by flexibility and adaptability according to the prevailing economic conditions (MacKinnon, 2004). The image associated with female nature was one of the women waiting for the husbands to return from business duties and one in which she was a passive consumer of the family property. In practice, however, the woman had a much more important and critical role in maintaining the economic marital status (Fletcher, 1995). First, she was the connecting link through the marriage that united two families with joint aspirations, thus increasing the power of the two families together. In addition, each woman transferred the knowledge from her own family business to her husband's, so knowledge was spilling over from family to family for the benefit of the new business. Men relied mainly on their wife's business knowledge. The female contribution to the prevalence of the good reputation of a business was very important. Through the women's social networks and discussions, the woman could "advertise" her family's business and maintain its good reputation. Remember that the good reputation of a family and, consequently, of a family business has had a domineering role in the societies we are considering; hence its preservation was sometimes a purpose.

### **Civic and Voting Rights of Women**

Regarding the right to vote, in Great Britain, in 1866, the possibility for women to vote happened for the first time in Parliament; many years passed until 1918 when finally, women

could vote and publicize their opinion about the Commons. In France, things were similar. In 1876, the first women's organization was created regarding the right to vote. In France, women managed to be heard and win the right to vote in 1913. An important example of women's mobilization is the French woman Antoinette De Salvan, who fought for educational opportunities in a society where women's social activities were limited (Stuurman, 1999). A similar effort was observed in Germany in 1902, where working women sought involvement in the voting system to expand the existing social power they had fought hard for. In other words, they used the right to vote to join and become a greater part of society (Kennedy, Tilly, 1987).

Focusing on Germany, in the 18th century, only soldiers' wives had recognizable authority in martial law. Women lived under surveillance while their men were at war, and the remainder of the women were treated as everyday citizens. Women who had extramarital affairs with soldiers were characterized as prostitutes. Notably, there were areas where women were used for entertainment and to offer carnal pleasures to soldiers during times of rest until they continued in battle. Women's jobs in the war included providing and preparing food, medical treatment, and additional work such as cleaning and providing sex services (Wilson, 1996). So, we conclude that women's involvement in warfare was more than helpful for the soldiers and crucial for the war's outcome, even though women were treated as mere support personnel.

Changing the geographical context, let us examine the position of women in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, regarding the historical record and the effort to highlight their personal opinions. In these countries, a more elastic situation was observed, and there was a climate friendlier to women's involvement in public. The education levels were relatively high, which allowed women conditional participation in social discussions. The Netherlands has the reputation of being the birthplace of radical women.

Gender has played a significant role in the cultural history of Africa. However, it is essential to note that Africa is a diverse continent with a wide range of cultures, languages, and traditions, so the role of gender varies across different regions and societies. In many African societies, gender roles were traditionally defined by cultural norms, often assigning specific responsibilities and expectations to men and women. These roles were often based on agricultural practices, social organization, and religious beliefs. For example, in some societies,

men were primarily responsible for hunting, warfare, and providing for the family, while women were involved in farming, childcare, and domestic tasks.

### **Women in America in Cultural Gender History**

Women's education in America during the 19th century underwent significant changes and advancements. Women's educational opportunities were limited at the beginning of the century and often focused on domestic skills and basic literacy. However, as the century progressed, various movements and reforms led to increased access to education for women. One of the crucial developments in women's education came with the establishment of "female seminaries" in the 1820s and 1830s. These private institutions provided education to young women and offered a broader curriculum than traditional schooling. Female seminaries, such as Troy Female Seminary in New York and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts, emphasized academic subjects like history, literature, mathematics, and sciences. They aimed to prepare women for teaching careers and expanded the notion of education beyond domestic skills.

In the 1860s, the migration of women was combined with prostitution, even though it was done for their own or their family's survival. In Holland, for example, the legislation stipulated that if a female citizen married a foreign man who lost his citizenship, in the event of his expulsion from the country, he had to be followed by her (Andrijasevic, 2009). The conclusion is that the US imposed marriage conditions and sexually exploited women at the borders to allow them to enter the country.

The woman at that time who espoused radical views had to integrate and operate in a system that was not helpful. The female gender was intertwined with maintaining the household, and even in an economic crisis, women were encouraged to stay at home as much as possible (Schimd, 2011). It was necessary to find a way to free herself within the social group, however, to an extent that would not affect or endanger society. Through the study of articles, we conclude that mechanisms emerged that were used by women of that time to express opinions in an environment that was not supportive (Paijmans, 2021).

According to the first mechanism, women adapted to the social context and discussed topics that "suited" women's nature, such as motherhood, educational pedagogies, and personal



religious beliefs. Regarding women's sexuality, female sexual satisfaction was incriminated, a fact that often led to self-gratification. This resulted in one prevailing concern about women's sexual preferences. Society believed women were likely to sexually "extrude" the male sex and turn to homosexuality (Driscoll, 2003). Regarding religion, however, according to society, laywomen could not reveal religious beliefs because they did not have the necessary training in theology.

The second mechanism lies in women's effort to join the public environment through moderate retreat and momentary isolation whenever necessary. They participated to some extent in discussions that did not include subjects that suited the female nature, expressing their radical views. Their attempt to be heard is very intelligent but, at the same time, risky. The third and final mechanism used the prevailing view, according to which, for a woman to be taken seriously, she had to walk alongside God. The women, being descendants of Eve, had to remain and appear pure to atone for original sin (Willen, 1998). To explain, a woman who had the reputation of a saint and was characterized by her purity was trusted by society. A woman's chastity often strengthened her husband's honor and reputation (Breitenberg, 1996). The radical women of The Netherlands, therefore, took advantage of this fact, maintaining their good reputation, but at the same time, they expressed their perceptions with the "voice of God"; therefore, they had nothing to lose. At that time, women could not talk about their rights.

### **The Women's Presence**

According to Joost van den Vondel (1667), Urania, one woman who participated in the biblical tragedy of Noah, lived in a palace next to where Noah built his ark, and she is a fictional figure of the author who constantly contradicted Noah's religious fanaticism and provoked him to succumb to earthly carnal pleasures. According to Urania, man cannot resist life's desires and pleasures. In the same way, he is also not competent to resist female nature. This example proves the supportiveness of certain people and the promotion of female participation in recording historical data. These elements would give a different style to the historical records, making them more accessible to the general public. Men's letters during the First World War are noteworthy, according to which they thanked their mothers who kept them warm and alive with what they sent them. Cases of "maternal" support and care among men during injury/death indicate a strong presence of gendered concepts even in women's physical absence (Roper, 2005).

The female presence in recording historical texts could have been more present, at least at levels of public recognition. Women did not participate in recording the facts, but this did not prevent women from seeking to learn about past events. The ways of fulfilling the educational goal varied as long as there was the will. Children were introduced from a young age to preserving historical identity through family and parents. The mothers with oral traditions sought to educate daughters, who would continue the tradition in their families. In other words, women have always had an active but involuntary and hidden role in education. Therefore, women may not have been writing, but they functioned like the rhapsodists in Homer's works; they preserved it orally. Sometimes they wrote, perhaps secretly, diaries that were saved and shed light on many historical gaps.

Regarding the effort to highlight female opinions, the bibliography brings out the intelligent side of the female mind. Women adapted to the public eye in the role assigned by society. However, they used every means to emerge quietly, imperceptibly, while simultaneously so radically in the male-dominated society (Peiss, 1991). It is essential to mention that the history recorded by women has engaged with all sectors of society, even those in which women were not present. Women's history concerns the entire population, not half of it (Bock, 1989). The result of all these early mobilizations could not be other than the equal position women hold in today's society. A position that highlights her individuality and distance from the social stereotypes is created by both patriarchy and feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the importance of women's involvement in the family business was evident to the general public even though their work needed to be recognized. Women were called several times to continue and operate the parents' or dead husband's business for the family's sake, yet such a thing did not constitute a rule of the time; on the contrary, we would call it a "necessary need." The female contribution did nothing but harm the business. The educational curriculum for women in the 19th century was narrower than that offered to men. Women's education primarily focused on cultivating social graces, refinement, and religious instruction. The limited curriculum restricted women's career options, as they were typically barred from pursuing professions such as law, medicine, and engineering.

We conclude that female education was deemed necessary and helped in the development and improvement of society. The female mind was educated, knowledgeable, and prepared to face social challenges (Tinkler & Jackson, 2014). While progress was made during the 19th century in expanding educational opportunities for women, it was marked by significant gender disparities in education. The struggles and efforts of female education reformers and early feminists laid the groundwork for further advancements in the 20th century toward achieving greater gender equality in education.

### References

- Andrijasevic, R. (2009). Sex is on the move. Gender, subjectivity and differentia inclusion. *Subjectivity*, 29(1), 389-406.
- Banet-Weiser, S., (2018). Postfeminism and Popular Feminism. *Feminist Media Histories* (2018), 4(2), 152–156. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2018.4.2.152>
- Bloemendal, J., & Korsten, F.-W. (Eds.). (2012). *Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679): Dutch playwright in the golden age*. Brill. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76wbf>
- Bock, G., (1989). *Women's history and gender history: Aspects of an international debate*. Wiley- Blackwell.
- Breitenberg, M., (1996). *Anxious masculinity in early modern England*. Cambridge University Press.
- Driscoll, S., (2003). *The lesbian and the passionless woman: Femininity and sexuality in eighteenth-century*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fletcher, A. (1995). *Gender, sex, and subordination in England, 1500-1800*. Yale University Press.
- Gale. (2023). Women's education in America: Collections. *Women's Studies Archives, Women's History*. Accessed May 2023. <https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/womens-studies/collections/womens-education>
- Kennedy, M., Tilly, C., (1987). *Socialism, feminism and the stillbirth of socialist feminism in Europe, 1890-1920*. Guilford Press.
- MacKinnon, D. (2004). Women and family business in England, Wales, and the colonies c.1500-1800: Constructing a model for historical analysis. *Lilith*, p. 13.

- Paijmans, M., Dietz, F., Geerdink, N., Leemans, I., Morree, C., Veldhuizen, M., (2021). Pathways to agency: Women writers and radical thought in the low countries, 1500–1800. *Intellectual History Review*, 31(1), 51-71. DOI:10.1080/17496977.2020.1858389
- Peiss, K., (1991). *Going public: Women in nineteenth-century cultural history*. Oxford University Press.
- Roper, M., (2005). *Slipping out of view: Subjectivity and emotion in gender history*. Oxford University Press.
- Schmid, A. (2011). *Labor ideologies and women in the Northern Netherlands, 1500-1800*. Leiden University
- Stuurman, S., (1999). *Literary feminism in seventeenth century Southern France: The Case of Antoinette de Salvan de Saliez*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Tinkler, P & Jackson, C. (2014). *The past in the present: Historicizing contemporary debates about gender and education*. *Gender and Education*, 26(1), 70-86  
DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2013.875131
- Unesco, (2020). *Gender education and equality*, Unesco.org
- Willen, D., (1998). Gender, society and culture, 1500–1800-gender, sex and subordination in England, 1500–1800. By Anthony Fletcher. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995. Pp. xxii+ 442. *Journal of British Studies*.
- Wilson, P. H. (1996). German women and war, 1500-1800. *War in History*, 3(2), 127–160.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/096834459600300201>.
- Woolf, D.R. (1997). A feminine past? Gender, genre and historical knowledge in England, 1500-1800. *The American Historical Review*, 102(3), June 1997, 645-679.