

AMERICAN HERSTORY

introduction

From a historical perspective, women's roles and rights have advanced significantly over the past century in the U.S. Still, evidence of gender inequities and sexism isn't difficult to find.

While opportunities for U.S. women have dramatically expanded over the past 100 years, they still face a number of challenges like underrepresentation in certain professional fields, the gender **wage gap**, and lack of representation in government. According to a 2019 report from the American Association of University Women, the gender wage gap not only exists but increases with age. The difference between what older male and female workers earn is much bigger than that of younger workers.¹ At the same time, women lack representation in the bodies capable of enacting top-down change. In 2019, women constituted only 25 percent of U.S. Congress members, and representation in state governments wasn't much better: women were 26 percent of state senate seats and 30 percent of state house seats. These discrepancies become even more drastic for women of color, who hold less than 9 percent of federal congressional seats and 7 percent of state legislature seats.² This is due, in part, to prevailing perceptions of women as the primary caregivers for children and other family members.

Vocabulary: wage gap

materials

Part 1

- Sticky notes

Part 2

- Research Guide (provided)

Part 1: Gender Stereotypes

procedure

1. Select five professions from the list below and write them on the board. Without providing any context, ask students to imagine what a person who works within each profession might look like (clothes, hairstyle, shoes, etc.).



Studies For Our Global Future

concept

While women in the United States have gained more equality over time, observable differences in gender roles remain today.

objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify and discuss their own perception of gender roles.
- Conduct, analyze and present research on the role of women in the U.S. from 1900-present day.

subjects

U.S. History, English Language Arts

skills

Critical thinking, researching, synthesizing research, public speaking

method

Students examine their own perceptions of gender roles through two short mental exercises, then research and present on the role of women in the home and workplace throughout U.S. history.

- Doctor
- Firefighter
- Engineer
- Fighter Pilot
- Nurse
- Scientist
- Police Officer
- Kindergarten Teacher

2. For each profession, take a blind vote and on the board, tally the genders imagined for each role.
3. Have students turn to the person closest to them and discuss what trends they saw in the responses. Were there any professions that were seen as predominantly male? Predominantly female? Predominantly gender neutral?
4. As a class, discuss why these professions might be seen as more “male” or more “female.” Does this say anything about our larger society? If so, what?
5. Have students complete both of the following statements on a sticky note. Tell the students not to put their names on the statements.
 - a. In the United States, women must _____.
 - b. In the United States, men must _____.
6. Ask the students to stick the notes up on a wall in the classroom. Allow students a few minutes to walk around and read their classmates’ answers.

discussion questions

1. Do you agree with all the statements posted? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

2. Did you personally have trouble filling out either of the statements? Explain.

Answers will vary.

3. Imagine your parents or grandparents when they were your age. Would they have filled out these statements differently? If so, what would be different? Would there be anything that would stay the same?

Answers will vary. Students may note that gender norms have become more flexible over the years. There are more women in public office, higher education, sports, and in a variety of roles in the workforce, many of which were previously male-dominated. On the flipside, there are also more men in traditionally female dominated roles (nurses, teachers, childrearing, etc.).

4. Imagine you are a teenager in another country. Would you have filled out your statement differently? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Students may mention that in some countries, gender norms are less flexible. Men may have greater access to formal schooling so are more educated and thus are more likely to enter the workforce while women are more likely to be denied education, stay home with children, collect firewood, cook, etc. Some traits that may be viewed as more masculine or feminine in the United States have different connotations in other countries. For instance, men in many Latin American countries are much more comfortable displaying physical affection to one another than men in the United States typically are. Makeup in South Korea is widely perceived to be genderless and acceptable for anybody to wear. Similarly, women in parts of Kenya and Tanzania may be the primary breadwinners in their families, earning larger incomes than their husbands through farm work and other physical labor.

Part 2: The Past Informs the Present

procedure

1. Ask the students where our perceptions of men and women come from. (Answers may include: observing others, from our parents and grandparents, from stories we hear, from books, magazines, television, movies, music, etc.)
2. Tell students that they are going to complete a research project, looking at the role of women in the home and workplace in the U.S. from 1900 to present day. Divide students into six equal groups, provide each student with a copy of the Research Guide, and assign each group a time period:
 - 1900–1919
 - 1920–1939
 - 1940–1959
 - 1960–1979
 - 1980–1999
 - 2000–Present Day
3. Using the Suggested Resources on the Research Guide, have individual students investigate the role of women in the home and workplace during their specific time period. They should use the provided guiding questions to help focus their research.
4. Each group should examine the collective material and information gathered and prepare a presentation summarizing their findings. Groups should be ready to share this information with the rest of the class.

assessment

Student contributions to the discussions, as well as student presentations, should be graded for thoroughness and clarity.

follow-up activity

Gender roles within the U.S. are constantly evolving as new issues are discussed and both females and males expand areas of responsibility at work and at home. Ask students to consider how gender roles might continue to change in the future by answering the question in a short essay: “*How do you think the role of women in the United States might change in the next 20 years? The next 40?*” In formulating their answer, students can consider changing roles in the home and workplace, political representation, and changing perceptions of gender differences and identities.

Part 1 is based on the activity, “Understanding Gender,” *Gender and Development: The CEDPA Training Manual Series*, The Centre for Development and Population Activities, 1996.

¹American Association of University Women. (2019). The Simple Truth About the Gender Gap, Fall 2019 Update. Retrieved from https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Simple-Truth-Update-2019_v2-002.pdf

²Rutgers Center for American Women and Politics. (n.d.) Facts. Retrieved July 17, 2020 from <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts>

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Using the Suggested Resources provided, answer the following questions about your time period. Make sure to record all of your data sources and print out/save any images that you want to share during your group's presentation!

1. Were women employed outside the home during this time period?
2. What professions did women most commonly have during this time period?
3. What was the average family size during this time period? How do you think this impacted women's lives?
4. How did the role of women change over the 20 year span of your time period?
5. What improved for women during this time period? What stayed more or less the same?
6. Did anything get worse for women during this time? If so, why?
7. Did women's experiences in the home and workplace differ by race, ethnicity or socioeconomic level? If so, how?
8. What similarities did you see between this era and today? What differences did you find?

After each member of your group has collected the data needed to respond to the questions above, examine your findings together. What conclusions can you draw about the role of women during this period in time? As a group, create a short presentation that distills your group's finding. Present evidence to support your conclusions.

Suggested Resources:

[The State of Women in America](#) (Center for American Progress)

[Guide to Online Primary Sources: Women](#) (UC San Diego)

[United States History - Primary Resources: Women's History](#) (Southern Connecticut State University)

[Women's history primary sources](#) (The Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Inc.)

[Discovering American Women's History Online](#) (Middle Tennessee State University)

[Women's History Primary Source Set](#) (U.S. Library of Congress)

[Women's History in America](#) (Women's International Center)

[History At a Glance: Women in World War II](#) (The National WWII Museum)

[Women in the 1950s](#) (Khan Academy)

[Profile of Women in the United States in 2000](#) (ThoughtCo)