

Feminism Coalition Curriculum

Written and compiled by Lara & Anika, High School Feminism Coalition



Introduction

[Masterdoc of Foundational Feminist Media](#)

Integral to our development as young feminists was exposure to the ideas and media laid out in the doc below. This curriculum is designed as an introduction to modern fourth-wave feminism, covering history, activism, and the different social change movements that have characterized our environment today.

Through critical theory and informed compilation, we've aimed to present a comprehensive introduction to media and conversation. Each module is flexible and basic, yet recognizes the interconnectedness of race, class & income, sexuality, access to power, and other identity factors within feminist discourse and the experiences of women and people of marginalized gender identities. This could serve as your critical toolkit to combatting the injustices of our time and empower students to become advocates for change.

Essential to remember when using these curated resources is that this guide is by no means exhaustive—it's focused on many women's experiences in the United States, but there's so much else to learn about. We encourage you to find what interests you and explore more topics on your own, diving into subjects we didn't touch on. Feel free to get in touch with us (contact info on our website!) for ideas and feedback on future iterations of this resource.

Warmly,

Lara '25 & Anika '26, High School Feminism Coalition

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Feminism in History

The Path to Vote & Earning Our Reproductive Rights

Women have been integral to civic engagement and civil discourse since the founding of the United States in the 18th century, yet not recognized or granted the freedoms to vote or serve until modern history. The first Women's Rights Convention, focused on suffrage (the right to vote), was held in Seneca Falls, NY in 1848. The first proposal in Congress to grant women voting access was 30 years later, but the constitutional amendment allowing this wasn't ratified by the necessary majority of states and signed into law until 1920 ([National Archives](#)). The 19th amendment to our constitution thereby granted women the right to vote, but many, especially women of color, were often excluded from this until the 1960s. Racism within the suffragette movement was widespread, and systemic inequalities to voting access persist to this day, consistently affecting low-income Americans of color the most ([League of Women Voters](#)).

Directly tied to women fighting for the right to participate in our democratic process was the granting of basic freedoms. The [1973 Supreme Court Case *Roe v. Wade*](#) federally legalized abortion access, prioritizing the lives of women and birthing people across the country in their personal healthcare journeys. In recent years, the Supreme Court has been ruling more in favor of abortion restrictions, culminating in the 2022 [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#) case which overturned 50 years of precedent of *Roe* by banning abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy. In recent years, maternal mortality has only worsened while our country continues to deny healthcare and a supportive social safety net to those that are most affected.

Discussion Questions:

- How can awareness of racism in the movement help us reframe feminist history?
- How does modern voter disenfranchisement reflect trends of the past? How does it limit progression within the feminist movement?

More Resources: [Brennan Center for Justice](#), [Fair Fight Action](#), [ACLU](#), [Carol Sanger on the Law & Gender](#), [Planned Parenthood](#), [Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

Intersectional Feminism

Capitalism & The Patriarchy, Black Feminist Legal Theory, Queer & Gender-Inclusive Theory

Capitalism & The Patriarchy: Economic Oppression of Women

A renowned Black feminist lesbian scholar, Angela Davis, spearheaded feminist ideas within far-left movements. Her work explores the foundations of economic issues that affect women—from unpaid work (the foundation of the gender wage gap), and gendered family expectations. Fundamentally, capitalism oppresses women into a maternal role as an unpaid laborer within the nuclear family structure, something that Angela Davis studied and fought against ([*Sisters in Struggle*](#), [*Her Publications*](#) & [*Women, Race, & Class*](#)).

Kimberle Crenshaw and Misogynoir

Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 to describe her unique experiences as a Black woman. Crenshaw observed the DeGraffenreid v. General Motors case where five Black women were unable to make a case on hiring discrimination because the company hired Black men and white women, just not Black women. Crenshaw argued that this ignored the specific challenges Black women faced as a group. Intersectionality originated as a legal term, but is now used generally to acknowledge differences in lived experiences based on identity. Intersectionality calls upon us to understand the relationships between systems of power and oppression to better dismantle them for collective liberation.

Key Terms:

- Intersectionality: the intersection of two or more different marginalized identities
- Misogynoir: the combination of anti-Blackness and misogyny towards Black women
- White feminism: feminism that lacks recognition of the unique experiences of women of color

Relevant Media:

- [Intersectionality, explained: meet Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term | Vox](#)
- [Kimberlé Crenshaw's TED Talk](#)
- [Research Publication on White Feminism on Social Media](#)
- *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* by Kimberlé Crenshaw

Critical Discussion Questions:

- How does intersectionality challenge traditional feminist perspectives? Can intersectionality lead to fragmentation within the feminist movement?
- In what ways do race, class, sexuality, and ability intersection with gender to create unique experiences for marginalized women?
- What role does privilege play in intersectional feminism?
- How can mainstream feminism movements do better at representing women of diverse backgrounds?
- How has the concept of intersectionality influenced policy change or activism in feminist movements? What real-world effects have we seen?

Queer & Gender-Inclusive Feminist Theory

Queer theory challenges how scholars, writers, activists, and the media perceive and present oppression through a gender and sexuality binary. Queer feminism, a subset of queer theory, critiques heteronormative and patriarchal structures within feminist advocacies, advocating for an inclusive approach that addresses the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals under the patriarchy. Queer feminist theory focuses on understanding the experiences of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, as well as the experiences of sapphic and lesbian women—there is nuclear family and capitalist critique baked into queer feminist theory, exploring society’s rejection of those who aren’t traditional wage earners choosing not to bear children. The unique experiences of lesbianism as wholly removed from men is often studied. Notable queer feminist scholars include Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, Sara Ahmed, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and Lauren Berlant.

Building onto queer feminist ideas, trans-inclusive feminism aims to understand the experiences of transgender and gender-non-conforming individuals under the patriarchy. Trans-inclusive feminism fights back against essentialist feminism ideas that correlation women only to their traditional biological characters. Through trans-inclusive feminism, we can understand and respect the experiences of different individuals under the patriarchy, as both those who are not perceived or do not identify as male, as well as understanding the inherent struggles of individuals who are assigned female at birth. TERFs, or Trans-Exclusive Radical Feminists, prefer to uphold damaging binary gender norms. Notable trans feminist scholars and activists are Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Sandy Stone and Kate Bornstein.

Key Terms:

- AFAB: Assigned Female At Birth, “biologically female” characteristics such as XX chromosomes, reproductive capabilities, etc

- Feminist Essentialism: an ideology proclaiming women have inherent, unchanging biological differences from men and defining women based purely on biology; used to justify trans-exclusionary feminism and dehumanize trans women
- Transgender: People whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth
- Gender Non-Conforming & Non-Binary: Can be standalone gender identities, or can be umbrella terms for identities outside of the gender binary

Relevant Media:

- [From Darkness to Illumination: A Queer Feminist's Journey of Empowerment | Dian Dian | TEDxEmory](#)
- [Judith Butler on Gender Theory](#)
- [Anne Ciasullo: "Cultural Representations of Lesbianism"](#)
- *Sister Outsiders: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde
- [Jasbir Puar's Pinkwatching And Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and its Discontents](#)
- [Queer Women & Culture](#) Research Proposal
- [Transcripts / The Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling — ContraPoints](#)
- [Transcripts / Gender Critical — ContraPoints](#)
- [Introduction to trans-inclusive feminism](#)

Critical Discussion Questions:

- How does queer feminism expand our understanding of identity beyond a binary framework?
- How do heteronormativity and cisnormativity show up in feminist movements and how can we destabilize them?
- How does queer feminism approach the relationship between bodies, desire, and power, particularly in contexts of social norms surrounding femininity and masculinity?
- How can queer feminism create solidarity and coalition-building across different identities?
- How does queer feminism analyze the existence of lesbianism as completely independent from men? Do queer women have political existences? How has that changed over time?

Intersectionality is a constantly developing field and perspective, and it's important to note that the oppression of many gender minorities with intersecting identities is characterized by violence and struggle. Trans, Black, brown, and Indigenous people across the identity spectrums face discrimination and sexual violence both as manifestations of generational trauma, but also because heteropatriarchal white supremacy has historically been enforced through the oppression of women and disconnecting them from their land, homes, and communities through an imperialist, Eurocentric lens of women as producers.

Perceptions of Women & Modern Feminism

Sex, scandal, and the demonization of fighting for justice

Women in Scandal: The Rise & Fall of #MeToo

After decades of overt harassment and sexualization within the workplace, women started to fight back. One notable woman was Anita Hill, now a professor of social policy, law, and women's studies. In 1991, she testified against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, accusing him of sexual harassment within their workplace where he was her superior. Despite the eventual confirmation of his appointment, her story resonated with many across the country—leading to a jump in the number of women elected to office the next year—and shined a light on the everyday barriers women face. Anita Hill and other women in the spotlight, such as Monica Lewinsky, faced unparalleled media scrutiny and demonization compared to their male superiors, highlighting the manifestations of societal misogyny and double standards toward gender minorities.

In the mid-2000s, assault survivor and activist Tarana Burke started the MeToo movement, using the phrase to publicize the widespread impacts of sexual misconduct, harassment, and assault. 10 years later, many high-profile women in Hollywood started using the hashtag, which the movement is now more strongly associated with. The late 2010s saw a rise in sympathy and support towards victims and fighting workplace harassment, rather than the rejective mainstream reaction we saw in the 90s. But, in recent years, we've seen a trend in the opposite direction. Assault apologists and those who try to cover up these scandals are rampant among those in positions of power, and society still holds bias towards many female victims, especially the “imperfect” ones (spoiler alert: there's no such thing as a victim who will fit perfectly into any stereotype).

Relevant Media:

- [NPR Interview](#) with Anita Hill
- [The Dehumanization of Amber Heard by Sincerely Shaianne](#) on Substack
- Rayne-Fisher Quann's [Who's Afraid of Amber Heard?](#)
- Adrienne L. Massanari & Shira Chess [essay on SJWs as the “monstrous feminine”](#)

Discussion Questions:

- How can we look at rise in popularity of #MeToo in 2017, rather than in 2007, through an intersectional lens? How could the systems of race, power and class define this narrative?
- What does the demonization of primarily marginalized people fighting for justice say about societal misogyny and other systems of power in the mainstream?

Devaluation of Women: Objectification & Sexuality

Everyday Sexism, Beauty Standards, and the Pressure to Perform

Beauty Standards for Women

Beauty standards for women are pervasive through modern society and help enforce sexist ideals. From larger societal messaging like magazines, music, and popular culture, to school dress codes and comments from family members, there is a constant pressure on women to look and act a certain way. Though beauty standards exist for all genders, non-men in particular often have their value tied to their appearance, making beauty standards hold a ridiculous amount of weight. Standards are increasingly narrowed ideals—thinness, whiteness, youth—that align with heteronormative and capitalist values. Intersectional feminism highlights that beauty standards disproportionately affect women of color, as they tend to be masculinized or fetishized, and face additional pressures to conform to Eurocentric ideals.

Objectification commodifies women's bodies and perpetuates their subordination. The concept of the "male gaze," as defined by Laura Mulvey, explains how women in media often solely exist as objects of visual pleasure, reflecting these norms. The rise of social media and the Internet have further pushed beauty standards on younger women in particular, with photo editing deluding young people and pressuring them to feel inadequate. Beauty standards increase rates of mental illness, particularly disordered eating, as well as pushing women to commit to irreversible and often dangerous procedures like plastic surgery. It is critical that we undo the correlation between women's value and their appearances and dismantle patriarchal structures.

Key Terms:

- Eurocentric: Prioritizing European traits, perspectives, and values
- Male gaze: The masculine objectification of women, particularly in media
- Heteronormative: associated with the idea that heterosexuality is the ideal

Relevant Media:

- [EmRata Controversy](#)
- *The Robber Bride* by Margaret Atwood
- *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf
- *Hunger* by Roxane Gay
- [How the 'ideal' woman's body shape has changed throughout history | CNN](#)

Discussion Questions:

- How has choice feminism reinforced beauty standards?
- Is the beauty industry immoral?
- How do beauty standards intersect with racial and class-based oppression?
- What role does social media play in shaping beauty standards?
- What role does feminism play in resisting or reshaping beauty norms? Can beauty norms be reshaped?
- How do beauty standards perpetuate power dynamics?

Women & Fame: Women in Pop Culture

Women in fame and pop culture are often subject to a more intense version of the patriarchal pressures placed on women everywhere. Being in the public eye means they are expected to hold up to impossible expectations: they must balance beauty, perfection, and likeability, all while facing harsh criticism at perceived failures to conform to societal standards of proper feminine behavior. Women in pop culture are also increasingly sexualized at earlier ages, with star Emma Watson being objectified by the press as a tween playing in Harry Potter, or Disney child stars later revealing the behind-the-scenes abuse and harassment they were experiencing.

Britney Spears was a key example of how the pressure put on women led to the abuse of control by her father as well as how it eventually led her to leave pop music. However, newer female stars are trying to revert the norms that have been put on female stars in the past. Stars like Chappell Roan are standing up against the intrusive parasocial relationships female stars are faced with, as well as subverting the expectations for what a woman in pop culture should look like. Through supporting women who fall outside the norm and holding ourselves accountable for what we expect from female pop stars, we can upend patriarchal expectations and recognize the dangers of unhealthy standards for celebrities.

Discussion Questions:

- How do the experiences of women in pop culture reflect the broader patriarchal pressures placed on women in society?
- How do parasocial relationships with female stars contribute to patriarchal control?
- How can we hold the media and entertainment industry accountable for their treatment of women?
- How does the sexualization of young female stars impact their development and public perception?

- How does society's treatment of female celebrities reflect or challenge feminist theories about objectification, autonomy, and power?

Sexism in Academia

Non-men often face difficulties being taken seriously in academic settings. Being pretty has a perceived tradeoff with being intelligent: the more time one puts into their appearance and particularly into being feminine, the less respect they get from peers. Sexism in academia is institutional and cultural: there is still systematic underrepresentation of women in academic fields. Beyond a larger, more statistics-based view, sexism in these settings tends to strongly affect young people and their perceptions of themselves, particularly for high school feminists. From microaggressions to mansplaining, this shows up in educational environments, contributing to systemic barriers for gender minorities in academia later in their careers. As a coalition, we're fighting this at the basic level through our classroom sexism lessons, [available in our member portal here](#).

FEMINIST MEDIA RESOURCES

YouTube

- Broey Deschanel
- amandamaryanna
- ContraPoints
- Jordan Theresa
- Madisyn Brown
- Graysons projects
- verilybitchie
- matt bernstein

Readings (often rambly... bring back the construct that was physical page limits!!!)

- Internet Princess on Substack
- Jessica DeFino on Substack
- Haley Nahman on Substack
- Evil Female on Substack
- Navel Gazing on Substack
- Maalvika: learning-loving & meaning-making on Substack
- Wild, Sublime Body - Yale Review

Nonfiction:

- *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir
- *Carefree Black Girls* by Zeba Blay
- *communion* by bell hooks
- *all about love* by bell hooks
- *the will to change* by bell hooks
- *Women, Culture and Politics* by Angela Davis
- *Bad Feminist: Essays* by Roxanne Gay
- *It's Not About the Burqa* by Mariam Khan
- *Constellations* by Sinéad Gleeson

Fiction:

- *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin
- *Sula* by Toni Morrison
- *Breasts and Eggs* by Mieko Kawakami
- *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado
- *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf

Podcasts

- The Feminist Present (by the Stanford Clayman Institute): [Apple Music](#), [Spotify](#)
- Rehash: [Spotify](#)
- Backtalk: [Spotify](#)
- Intersectional Feminism—Desi Style: [Spotify](#)
- Emotionally Online: [Spotify](#)

More can be found on our open-sourced [feminist cultural criticism masterdoc](#)!