

‘History cannot be understood without women’: Feminist teachers’ representations of women’s history in primary and secondary education in Spain

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Abstract

This study examines the perspectives of in-service teachers in Spain on the integration of women’s history in the formal education curriculum. The data were collected from a general invitation extended to primary and secondary education history teachers. However, the respondents to the questionnaire were 88 teachers who self-identified as feminists. The participants were invited to complete a free word association exercise regarding the possibility of integrating women’s history in their classes. The lexical content of their narratives was analysed using the Reinert method. The results demonstrate that teachers express criticism of the existing history curriculum, citing the absence of content about women in textbooks and advocating for their inclusion in history classes. The respondents recognized the challenges of acknowledging the role of women in different epochs and the need to create female historical references and break with traditional gender stereotypes. It can be concluded that there is a presence of critical awareness and a favourable attitude towards the introduction of content linked to women’s history, and that teachers tend to agree with the arguments presented in the scientific literature of recent decades.

Keywords

Coeducation, conceptions, history teaching, in-service teachers, women’s history

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Introduction

The achievement of equality between men and women is one of the greatest challenges faced by contemporary societies. In fact, despite the progress made towards formal equality at the legal and rights level in many countries, gender inequalities still exist in many fields. For that reason, the importance of working on gender equality in schools is increasingly being underlined by different institutions. Indeed, gender equality is the fifth of the *Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda to transform the world* (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, the framework for action in education outlined by UNESCO (2016) indicates the agency's commitment to gender-sensitive programmes.

Schools – where future generations are educated – should develop citizen awareness and critical thinking to achieve a more equal and fairer society (Tomé et al., 2021). However, although projects have been implemented in recent years and efforts have been redoubled, certain forms of gender discrimination still appear to be prevalent in schools, according to a recent scoping review of research in 14 countries (Aragónés-González et al., 2020). Sexist and stereotypical attitudes persist among young students, showing that differential socialization processes are still in place and unequal attitudes are perpetuated. This has clear consequences for the struggle for gender equality and against gender-based violence (Gallardo-López et al., 2020; Rivas-Rivero et al., 2020).

In relation to tackling these issues, coeducation is a potentially useful tool since it is a teaching approach that incorporates the diversity among different gendered groups that does not homogenize them, but instead respects the differences within a framework of equality (Marolla Gajardo, 2015). Coeducation seeks to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive education, questioning socially dominant forms of knowledge. The ultimate goal is to fully develop the students' personalities without gender barriers, correcting cultural and ideological sexism and gender inequalities. Therefore, coeducation strategies must consider both men and women in the fight against structural sexism and hegemonic sexist social models (García Luque and De La Cruz Redondo, 2019).

The subject taught can significantly contribute to the coeducation of social sciences and history. Indeed, if one of the pillars of teaching in social sciences is citizenship education, the struggle for equality should be inherent. To that end, a critical feminist point of view is necessary as a basis of coeducation (Schmeichel, 2015). Teaching history, then, cannot be limited to transmitting academic knowledge about the past but must involve teaching how to make sense of it and mobilize it to analyse and understand current social issues. For this reason, before introducing any historical content in schools, we should ask ourselves about its educational value or usefulness in helping students understand present social realities, question them, and imagine changes that will enable new scenarios based on coexistence, tolerance, and empathy.

Therefore, introducing women's and gender history issues in the classroom is an issue of great relevance. Since the emergence of women's history in the 1970s as a historiographical current, the discipline has given rise to an extensive scientific production (Bock, 1991; Crocco, 2018), including in Spain (Segura, 2015), where we carried out the present study. The origins and evolution of teaching women's history have been analysed and explained by pioneering authors such as Gerda Lerner (1979). Later, Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault (1987) categorized the approaches to women's history in terms of the following phase model:

1. A *male-defined history*, where women do not appear in historical discourse and the male is interpreted as universal.
2. A *contribution history*, where historical discourse focuses on ‘forgotten’ women that played an important role within a male framework.
3. A *bifocal history*, where narratives about the past emphasize women’s oppression, misogyny, and efforts to overcome it.
4. *Histories of women* or *feminist history*, where narratives about the past try to respond to new questions and categories to illuminate women’s traditions, vision, and values. Here, women’s experience speaks for itself.
5. *Histories of gender* or *relational history*, where historical discourse becomes multifocal, relational, and assumes a gender-balanced perspective, weaving together both women’s and men’s experiences as human experiences about the past.

Peggy McIntosh (1983, 1997) then developed another model consisting of five interactive phases, but, as Christine Woysner (2002) showed, it can be considered synonymous with the intentions of Tetreault’s model. Even if neither was intended to be a sequential path, both outline the progression from a male-defined history to a history in which a women-oriented consciousness drives historical inquiry and is central to the curriculum. This classification of approaches to women’s history research has been extrapolated to the field of teaching as a tool for analysing both curricula and textbooks according to their level of integration of women’s history (McIntosh, 1997, 2005; Sant and Pagès, 2011; Scheiner-Fisher, 2013; Schmeichel, 2015; Schrader and Min Wotipka, 2011; Woysner, 2002). It has become clear that *taught history* has not yet been able to adopt these historiographical findings that have made women’s contributions, activities, and spaces visible and valued.

Recently, several countries have adopted educational legislation calling for the inclusion of women’s history contents in social science and history classes. These include the Equality and Citizenship Act (Law n° 2017-86 27 January 2017) in France, the Act to Strengthen the Role of the State as Promoter of Equality (2018) in Canada, the Discrimination Act (2008: 567, as amended in 2016) in Sweden, the Australian Curriculum Review (2021), the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (2017), the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free from Violence (2007, as amended in 2021) in Mexico, the Women’s History Month Resolution (H. Res. 198, 2019) in the United States, the Comprehensive Sexual Education Law (2006, as amended in 2022) in Argentina, or the Organic Law 3/2020 amending Organic Law 2/2006 on Education in Spain.

But the meaning of these guidelines becomes distorted if we consider that the changes that would have been relevant to achieve this goal have not been introduced into the official curricula. The curricula are still anchored in prioritizing contents related to political-institutional history, leaving aside a more social approach to the past. Women’s presence is erased, particularly when no historical significance is given to major events because women were involved in them, such as, for instance, peace movements during the World Wars. Is it more important to list the battles or the peaceful resistance to the war itself (Noddings, 1992)? Women have been silenced in the historical narrative traditionally taught in schools unless their actions coincided with the hegemonic male values (Marolla Gajardo, 2015). As a result, women and their historical contributions to different periods are still often invisible (Crocco, 2008).

Indeed, research on the treatment of women in school textbooks in different countries continues to criticize the reduced presence of female characters and to emphasize the persistence of an androcentric discourse, which fails to deal with the specific contents of women's history (Clark et al., 2004, 2005; Vaillo, 2016). For example, in Spain, even if textbooks must comply with the general government's curriculum decrees, there is no institutional control over publishers and each school chooses their own textbooks among the editorial offer. Textbooks often offer a *contributive* narrative, dealing with queens and remarkable women or with the role of some exceptional women in a 'man's world'. Other times, they limit their explanations to describing their role in the suffrage movement. In many cases, the situation of women in certain periods is conspicuously absent. For instance, when discussing classical Greece, it is briefly mentioned that women were not allowed to participate in *polis* government, but there is no explanation of why this was so. Another critique is that textbooks often provide a stereotypical view of women's roles, too often representing them as being associated with the domestic sphere and with functions traditionally considered 'feminine'. But, above all, we can highlight the fact that school textbooks rarely deal with issues directly related to women's history, such as reproduction and upbringing, the spaces of women's sociability – fountains, kitchens, ovens, markets, or convents – or women's relational networks, their trades, and knowledge (Fernández Valencia, 2005).

This means that the history taught in schools usually ignores women's spaces and roles when dealing with different historical periods, undervaluing them and reinforcing the idea that women have not made contributions worth remembering (Hahn et al., 2007). Thus, women's contributions to history are undervalued and deprived of historical significance, which may lead students to think of a historical imaginary in which women did not carry out important actions and roles in the past (Pagès and Sant, 2012; Schmeichel, 2014). Aside from implying an erroneous interpretation of the past, this involves the transmission of discriminatory patterns to students. Furthermore, it deprives them of access to various female historical references, with which they can empathize (López Navajas, 2014; Ortega-Sánchez, 2017).

Therefore, it is necessary to overcome women's absences and give historical significance to areas of history that were previously made invisible. So, we must rethink the presence of women in the most canonical subjects, which have been considered a more masculine domain. Of course, women played a role in them, but our definition of these spheres must be broadened to include realities that have been made invisible, as is the case, for example, of political history (Woyshtner, 2002).

The evident void in school materials concerning contents related to women's history calls for the involvement of teachers to create more gender-equal discourses and develop coeducational pedagogies to remedy such inequalities. However, several obstacles to achieving this include the lack of training and adequate teaching materials (Crocco, 2010b), although an increasing number of proposals are being developed to include the female experience of different historical periods in the classroom (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2021; Molina-Torres and Marques Alves, 2021).

Cicely Scheiner-Fisher's (2013) study shows that teachers claim to be incorporating gender and women's history in their lessons, although there are still few who do so regularly. Despite these efforts, women's historical experiences are not always introduced in

the classroom in a nuanced way, since sometimes this is done ‘in such a manner that perpetuates oppressive systems and does not highlight the contributions women have made to society’ (p. 141). Women’s history is often taught using a *compensatory* or a *bifocal* approach, where it is increasingly rare to find teachers who inscribe themselves in the *feminist history* or the *history of gender*. Similarly, Marolla Gajardo and Pagès (2015) show how, despite the favourable attitude of most teachers towards introducing the female historical experience in their classes, they tend to relegate women to a secondary position when designing specific teaching proposals, balancing this with the official history of men and the ‘great events’ of history in a *compensatory* way. In this sense, as Stevens and Martell (2018) confirm, the teachers’ feminist beliefs are a decisive element in the design of social sciences classes. Even among teachers who consider themselves feminists and agents of change, only those with a critical feminist vision manage to create truly transformative programmes that focus on structural inequity rather than compensatory history.

Other limitations appear within the teaching profession as several studies show that teachers’ gender-stereotyped beliefs are harmful to students, influencing how they construct their identity, and even affecting their academic performance (Kollmayer et al., 2020). In addition, some authors warn that teachers are unable to detect inequality and discriminatory attitudes (Heras-Sevilla et al., 2021) or even resistance to introducing a feminist perspective in their classes (Schmeichel, 2015; Titus, 2000). Consequently, a change is needed in educational institutions, and this can be offered through teacher training (Crocco, 2010a; Resa Ocio, 2021).

Based on these considerations, the present study aims to identify the beliefs of history teachers currently working in primary and secondary education regarding the introduction of women’s history in their lessons. The subject is still poorly studied, both in the geographic area in which our study is located and in the international context, especially in relation to in-service teachers. For this reason, the study could help to identify teachers’ difficulties and strengthen their professional performance (Bair, 2008). In fact, this study is part of a broader research that seeks to explore the reality of teaching women’s history. The present study complements a previously published one, which analysed the content addressed by in-service teachers to introduce women’s history in the classroom (Apaolaza-Llorente et al., 2023). Specifically, the present research analyses what the participating teachers think about the idea of introducing women’s history in their classes.

This is further enhanced by the methodology used, which has never been applied in this field of research. We designed the study in a way that allowed teachers to speak freely, without including questions that directly reference the topics that the scientific literature has identified as defining factors in the women’s history teaching process. This was made possible due to the innovative approach adopted in this research, called the Grid Elaboration Method (GEM) of free association to explore teachers’ representations regarding the introduction of women’s history in their lessons. We analysed the results using the Reinert method for lexical analysis (explained in detail below in the ‘Methodology’ section). With a long tradition of use in other fields and proven reliability (Idoiaga Mondragon and Belasko, 2019), this methodology has made it possible to establish the teachers’ representations of the possibility

to introduce women's history in their lessons without any type of mediation that could contaminate their responses. This offers a more direct approach towards revealing what is experienced in the classroom. Are the teachers' thoughts in line with the needs and difficulties mentioned in the scientific literature? Has women's history made its way into the classroom through teachers? Are textbooks and curricula impediments to teaching women's history?

Methodology

Sample

A total of 88 participants were included in this study. The sample was recruited mainly in the Basque Country and Navarre region in Northern Spain (86.3%). Of the sample, 58 were women, 29 were men, and 1 identified as non-binary. Furthermore, 67% of the participants were primary school teachers and 33% secondary school teachers, and 63% work in public schools and 37% in private schools. Thirty-two percent of the teachers had been working for less than 5 years, 19% between 5 and 10 years, 18% between 10 and 20 years, and 31% more than 20 years. Also, on average, teachers finished their university career in 2002 with a range of years between 1978 and 2018. Finally, when asking the participants if they consider themselves feminist on a scale from 1 to 5, 45.5% considered themselves extremely feminist (5), 42% very feminist (4), 11.4% feminist (3), and 1.1% not very feminist (2). Therefore, our participants categorized themselves as feminist, although at different levels.

Recruitment

In order to obtain the sample for this research, an email was sent to all schools in the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre from January to June 2022 inviting all teaching staff to take part in the study. In addition, the research was also announced through the social networks of teachers' associations. As it was an online survey, the link to participate was added in the same email.

Instrument

The questionnaires were administered in two parts. First, we gathered certain socio-demographic data such as information about gender, years of working, and whether the participants worked in primary or secondary education. The participants were also asked to self-categorize as feminist or non-feminist on a scale of 1 to 5.

A free association exercise was then presented based on the GEM (Joffe and Elsey, 2014). Specifically, participants were asked to write the first four ideas that came to their minds when they thought about 'the possibility of integrating women's history content into their classes'. Next, they had to write each word or idea in a box and fill in the four empty boxes. Subsequently, participants were asked to complete their responses by clarifying as deeply as possible the meaning of each of their ideas to gather further information and explanations about the elicited items. Again, there was no word limit in this

exercise. This allowed us to obtain a complete explanation about each word or idea, which formed the basis of the subsequent analysis.

Data analysis: The Reinert method

The Reinert method has been widely employed in the analysis of text corpora using Iramuteq software for lexical analysis (Reinert, 1983, 1990). This approach has been particularly prevalent in studies on social representations (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2021, 2022; Idoiaga Mondragon and Belasko, 2019; Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2023; Kalampalikis, 2005; Klein and Licata, 2003; Lahlou, 1996, 2001). Researchers have described this method as demonstrating strong analytical capabilities, revealing a coherence between the lexical world and shared representations. Furthermore, the utilization of Iramuteq software addresses reliability and validity concerns in text analysis (Klein and Licata, 2003; Reinert, 1996), and facilitates the identification of the idiosyncrasies in the uncovered representations. Using this method, which follows a descending hierarchical analysis format, the analyst obtains a set of classes and statistical clues in the form of typical words and specific text segments (see Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2021). Specifically, the software identifies the words and text segments with the highest chi-square values, that is, the words and text segments that best identify each class or idea repeatedly mentioned by participants (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2023). Following previous studies using the Reinert method (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2021, 2023; Vizeu and Bousfield, 2009), the raw data were entered into Iramuteq software and the most important vocabulary in each class was selected based on three criteria:

1. of words with expected value greater than 3,
2. evidence of chi-square association tested for class ($\chi^2 \geq 3.89$; $p = .05$; $df = 1$), and
3. this word occurs primarily in this class, with a frequency of 50%.

Iramuteq software also determined which text segments were assigned to each word class or word group and classified them according to their chi-square values. In this article, the text segments with the most significant chi-square for each class were collected. Once these 'lexical worlds' were identified, they were associated with 'passive' variables (independent variables). In this case, the passive variables were self-classification as feminist, gender, occupation (elementary school vs middle school), age, and service years (Legorburu et al., 2022). Consequently, the analyst generates a set of classes comprising typical words and text segments (quotes) with the highest chi-square values. The chi-square value for each quotation is the sum of the chi-square values of each word (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2023). This forms the basis for the 'interpretation' of classes as lexical worlds. The Reinert method produces statistical, transparent, and reproducible data all the way to the final interpretation point where the analyst assigns a label. That is, researchers give titles to groups of words and text segments that are grouped together by the software (Schonhardt-Bailey, 2013). In this final step, a systematic process was used in this study to create a label or title for each class (see Legorburu et al., 2022). Two of the researchers independently named each

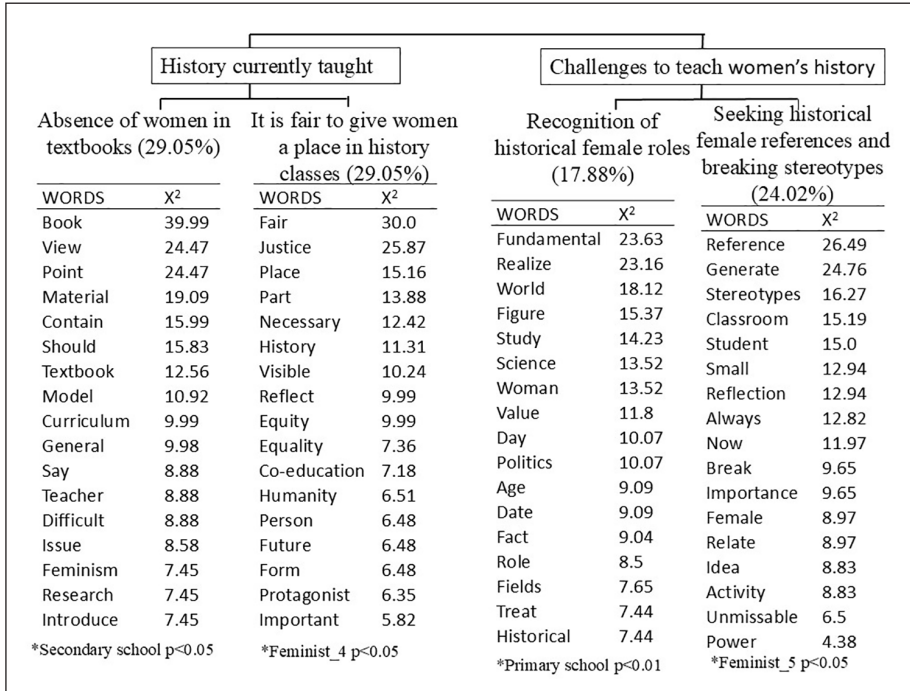


Figure 1. Hierarchical clustering dendrogram showing the results of the free association exercise, with the most frequent words and those with the greatest association $\chi^2(1)$, $p < .001$ extracted by the Reinert method.

class based on the words and associated quotations. Finally, a third researcher created the final label and all three approved it.

Results

First, to analyse the main discourses produced by the participants, the response corpus was analysed using the Iramuteq software. This allowed us to elucidate how ‘the possibility of integrating women’s history content into the classes’ was represented. The full corpus contains 9551 words, of which 1844 are unique.

Reinert method results

The Reinert method’s descending hierarchical analysis divided the corpus into 247 segments and four classes. The results of this analysis can be observed in Figure 1.

The analysis identified the main ideas held by the participants regarding the possibility of integrating women’s history contents into the classes. Each issue or idea is represented by a set of typical words and text segments, referred to as a class. The results

reveal four different classes. The first two classes, 'Absence of women in textbooks' and 'It is fair to give women a place in history classes', discuss women in the history that is currently taught in schools, including the shortcomings and needs that currently exist. The third and fourth classes, 'Recognition of historical female roles' and 'Seeking historical female references and breaking stereotypes', deal with the challenges that affect the teaching of women's history, highlighting women's fields of action as well as creating historical female referents and breaking down gender stereotypes.

The first class that emerged was 'Absence of women in textbooks', with a weight of 29.05%. Within this class, it can be observed that teachers express their concern that the presence of women in textbooks is non-existent. Textbooks are portrayed as obsolete materials and criticized for the androcentric nature of the historical narrative they convey, as they almost exclusively mention male historical characters. This makes it difficult for teachers to work on topics or research related to women's history. This class was significantly associated with teachers from secondary education ($p < .05$).

The characteristic text segments should be observed to provide a context for these words. The most significant quotations of this class are as follows:

It is necessary to do this work since history in textbooks is portrayed from a male point of view, historically only male stories have been portrayed. ($\chi^2 = 116.18$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_4)

There is little information in textbooks; traditionally the contents that have been given during these past years are very focused on men. ($\chi^2 = 111.34$; woman, Primary school. Feminist_4)

Re-education of teachers. There are still teachers who understand the subject of social studies or history as curriculum content, following the book. Women are the great forgotten ones in all of them, if teachers do not investigate these contents in depth, it will be difficult for students to understand the role of women in each historical moment. ($\chi^2 = 105.92$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_4)

In education we focus too much on the contents offered in textbooks and the curriculum is very extensive. There is a lack of resources and awareness. We must recover the history of the people and transmit it to later generations: women, workers, the oppressed in general, but the material is obsolete, and the textbooks are still based on the old methodology. ($\chi^2 = 103.36$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_4)

The second class of the cluster was 'It is fair to give women a place in history classes', which has a weight of 29.05%. This class was significantly more mentioned by teachers that categorized themselves as very feminist (i.e. on a scale of 1–5, they self-categorized as 4; $p < .05$). The responses in this class show how teachers view the need to give women a place in history classes because it seems unfair that they do not have such a place. This issue is presented in terms of the injustice associated with only mentioning what half of humanity has done. That is why it is necessary to make women visible if we are to take the step of training future generations in equity, equality, and coeducation.

The following are some of the most significant quotations of this class:

The need to make women visible in history is a matter of justice, history belongs to all men, and there are women who are missing, it is not fair. ($\chi^2 = 113.80$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_4)

If we want to move towards equity, it is necessary to highlight the role of women in history. The interest, the desire to know, should never be limited to what only a part of humanity has done. ($\chi^2 = 1101.40$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_5)

In technology, medicine, STEM, art, photography, etc. Many of them actually gave their name to men who lived with them, and others were the architects of great inventions or theories that were never recognized. Therefore, it is fair and realistic to talk about them and do them justice. ($\chi^2 = 95.52$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_4)

We have been eliminated, and it is essential to give them their place and underline their importance. History cannot be understood without women. It is the history of the powerful and does not reflect reality. Enriching and necessary. If we want to do women justice, to value women's work, we must first know about it, and once we know, we must analyse and clarify the reasons for this silence, and then draw conclusions. ($\chi^2 = 93.57$; woman, secondary school. Feminist_4).

Third, the class labelled as 'Recognition of historical female roles' emerged with a weight of 17.88%. This class was significantly associated with teachers from primary schools ($p < .01$). In this class, teachers describe why they consider the figure of women to be fundamental, along with their achievements in various fields such as science, politics, human rights, and evolution of the family. It is noteworthy that in some cases, teachers make references to women's history in the singular rather than the plural – a term that would in itself reflect the greater diversity of the women's collective.

Some of the most significant quotations of this class are as follows:

The role of women has been fundamental for the development of many families. Feats performed by women are not historically recognized even though there have been many milestones and historical events in which the role of women has been essential. ($\chi^2 = 85.70$; woman, primary school, Feminist_4)

Participation, equality, coeducation, added value. The work that women have done in different fields of science and technology in favour of human rights must be made known. Also, the strength they have had throughout history and what they have achieved must be vindicated. ($\chi^2 = 83.66$; woman, primary school, Feminist_3)

Women and their fundamental role in the family. Matriarchy and the role played by women within the family is a very important aspect to be dealt with in the classroom. The role of women has been fundamental for the development of many families. ($\chi^2 = 74.44$; woman, primary school, Feminist_4)

Value the role of women. The importance of women in previous decades and centuries has been denied in many documents and historical accounts. Although their participation and interaction in society has been limited, their role has been fundamental in many historical events. ($\chi^2 = 64.73$; woman, primary school, Feminist_4)

The last class was labelled 'Seeking female historical references and breaking stereotypes' with a weight of 30.19%. This class was significantly associated with participants that categorized themselves as extremely feminist (i.e. on a scale of 1–5, they self-categorized as 5; $p < .05$). This class reflects on the importance of generating diverse female historical models or referents to help current women empower themselves and break with gender stereotypes by working on students' critical thinking, as this can help them construct their own biography in a freer way. In addition, the participants emphasize the need for students to reflect and learn about new realities.

The most significant text quotations of this class are:

It is essential to break gender stereotypes from an early age in order for them to develop a healthy life. Having female role models can be of help to students. ($\chi^2 = 124.55$; woman, primary school, Feminist_5)

It is very important to work on the critical capacity of students. Because it serves to break away from what they have seen so far and social stereotypes, and also to choose the society in which they want to live. It is necessary and essential to form an awareness of class and gender. ($\chi^2 = 93.65$; woman, secondary school, Feminist_5)

The images about women are only about secondary issues and always related to the domestic sphere. What is said about the stereotypes about gender division (without historical rigor) has been repeated for decades. ($\chi^2 = 71.65$; woman, secondary school, Feminist_5)

Girls' knowledge of women's history and female role models serves to empower them and to build a more egalitarian society. ($\chi^2 = 61.20$; woman, secondary school, Feminist_5)

Conclusion

The present study sought to explore and understand teachers' beliefs and perspectives regarding the incorporation of women's history into classroom instruction. The objective was to delve into how educators perceive the importance of, challenges to, and potential benefits of integrating this often underrepresented area of history into their teaching practices. In this study, teachers articulated four primary representations that provide significant insights into their views on the matter. These representations offer valuable clues about the ways in which teachers approach the subject of women's history, the perceived gaps in current curricula, and the possible strategies for effectively including women's contributions in historical narratives taught in schools. The findings from these representations help to shed light on the broader implications for educational practices and curriculum development concerning the teaching of women's history. On the one

hand, participants outline critiques of the shortcomings that affect the integration of women's history in the current history teaching model. The comments in Class 1 are deeply critical of the lack of references to women from various epochs of the past and their experiences or problems in the most widely used school materials still in use today: obsolete textbooks that border on androcentrism. They are aware of the deficiencies these materials present, a reality that has been highlighted in various studies (Clark et al., 2004, 2005; Vaíllo, 2016).

Furthermore, concerning the absence of women in history textbooks, the teachers point out in Class 2 the sense of justice that would come from giving women a place in the daily dynamics of the classroom. According to the participants in this study, making women visible would mean taking a step towards the truth in the sense of looking at historical reality more objectively and inclusively. This visibility would enrich the narrative that is brought to classes with contents that transcend the political-institutional history (Crocco, 2008) and that do not imply the appearance of women only in contexts determined by hegemonic male values (Marolla Gajardo, 2015).

Further, the teachers mentioned some of the challenges concerning the integration of women's history contents, such as recognizing the role and functions of women throughout various historical periods. The desirability of introducing the female experience into the historical narratives brought into classes has already been pointed out by some authors (Fernández Valencia, 2005; Hahn et al., 2007). Certainly, it has been said that the invisibility of women and their historical role can have negative consequences for the imaginary that students form about the past, and can lead them to conclude that they have not made relevant contributions to historical development (Pagès and Sant, 2012; Schmeichel, 2014).

However, it should be assessed to what extent teachers are trained and know how to introduce appropriate content into their classes. Some studies have highlighted shortcomings in their approach when designing teaching proposals (Marolla Gajardo and Pagès, 2015; Scheiner-Fisher, 2013). These problems are largely due to a lack of appropriate materials and training in specific knowledge (Crocco, 2010a). Indeed, the participants in this study refer (in Class 3) to the role of 'great' women, scientists, or politicians, for example, by recalling historical milestones. This could, in some way, be associated with *contributive history* (Tetreault, 1987).

Moreover, among the women's history contents to which the participating teachers appeal, there are sometimes concepts that historiography has already overcome, such as the allusion to women in the singular (history of woman), which reduces the diversity of the collective (Bock, 1991); or statements such as 'women have participated in a limited way in society', which ignores the androcentric focus that has been placed on the definitions of what is important when it comes to the past – something that must be redefined through the lens of women's history and feminism (Woyshner, 2002). This problem particularly affects primary school teachers, who are less trained in specific historical contexts, and much less so in women's history contents. This is because, in truth, in recent decades historiography has made visible the multiple areas of action of women in different historical periods, highlighting these characters as undeniable active agents in all past societies (Segura, 2015).

In addition to recognizing the roles of women in history, the participants refer to another challenge for women's history teaching, linked to one of the fundamental pillars of coeducation: creating female historical referents and breaking with traditional gender stereotypes. The need to provide models of diverse historical figures – both female and male – can be very useful for breaking the chain of transmission of traditional gender stereotypes and offer students a variety of figures from the past with whom they can empathize and from whom they can take inspiration (López Navajas, 2014; McIntosh, 2005; Ortega-Sánchez, 2017). In this sense, the participants criticize the association (present in many historical discourses) between women and the roles linked to the domestic sphere, which often lacks scientific rigour, and they emphasize the need to create a critical awareness to break with gender stereotypes and promote transformation towards a more egalitarian society (UNESCO, 2016). The latter could be linked to a more feminist vision or phase of women's history teaching, just like the feminist self-consideration of the participants who postulate this in Class 4, which would be closer to *feminist history* or *histories of gender* (Tetreault, 1987). The feminist beliefs of teachers are a decisive element in the inclusion of gender perspectives in history classes (Stevens and Martell, 2018). Thus, the inclusion of critical feminism in social science teaching appears to be fundamental in the struggle for equality (Schmeichel, 2015).

In conclusion, the findings of the teachers' discourse on the possibility of introducing women's history into the classroom suggest the presence of critical awareness and a favourable attitude towards the issue. Teachers who participated in this study believe that women's history is a fundamental pillar of coeducation, and they understand its introduction to informal education as a matter of justice. Furthermore, they stress the obsolete and androcentric nature of history textbooks and the need to bring female historical roles and references into the classroom to change education and fight for gender equality. However, it appears that, to a certain extent, more work remains to be done on teacher training, particularly on the issue of how to teach specific women's history contents at the various educational stages and the dissemination of proposals and materials that have emerged for this purpose.

The study has some limitations. Most importantly, although the research was open to all teachers, the majority of our participants were women who identified as feminist and volunteered to take part in the research. Therefore, we can assume they had more awareness and engagement with women's history teaching. However, the results are optimistic, and those interested on working on women's history in the classroom would be represented by these teachers. Finally, the feminist nature of the sample could be seen as insufficient to generalize the findings to all active teachers. Nevertheless, this study is a good snapshot and critique of how history is and should be taught today. That is why, in future studies, it would also be interesting to analyse the representations of those teachers who do not consider themselves feminists.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Ethics Statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University of the Basque Country.

Informed Consent

Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided.

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