

Feminist Terminology

Attitude

A set of beliefs concerning an object and resulting in an evaluation of that object. Attitudes are not necessarily related to behavior.

Culture

The symbolic and learned aspects of human society, including language, custom and convention.

Deconstruction

Most often applied as a method of literary analysis, “deconstructive readings emphasize the indeterminacy of textual meaning and the ceaseless play of signification.”

Écriture Feminine

(A term originated by Helene Cixous) To designate a form of discourse that has been “marginalized, silenced, and repressed” by a male-dominated culture. Proponents say the form creates an opportunity for feminine expression to be developed and ‘articulated.’ Critics counter that certain characteristics of writing, such as “imprecision, prolixity, and digression,” are not necessarily feminine. Furthermore, a fine distinction exists between recognizing and celebrating difference and asserting difference to the extent that it creates another form of marginalization.

Feminism

A handy definition of feminism emerged in the early days of the second wave of the women's movement: Feminism is the "radical" notion that women are human. This notion has not yet been fully embraced in the United States, as is illustrated by the failure to pass the Equality Rights Amendment, as well as by the high rates of violence against women, wage discrimination, etc. In the most basic definition of the term, a goal of equal opportunity without regard to sex. The philosophy recognizes that women have been oppressed and that “gender relations are neither inscribed in natural differences between the sexes, nor immutable.” It also strives for political commitment to transcend the inequities. The movement has spawned many sub-groups—black feminists, Marxist feminists, radical feminists—that do not agree on what the term means or on what the philosophy should entail. However, the movement has galvanized people and produced progress. Moreover, it has produced “a rich seam of social and cultural critical theory, and political practice which has had a major impact on culture”.

Gender relations

Depend on economic conditions and change together with them. The notion of sex is linked with different functions of men and women in the biological reproduction. Gender refers to the social and cultural structure superimposed on a pure conception of sex. The difference between gender and sex testifies to that a subordinate status of women is not an inherent quality of our organism. It is not inherent; it may change, be assessed and criticized like any other social phenomenon, Gender policies is a planning and implementation of decisions based on recognizing that women and men play different roles in society due to different requirements to them.

Gender-identity disorder

The diagnosis applied to a person who behaves too much like members of the gender to which they have not been assigned, or to a person who identifies as a member of the other sex. When the American Psychiatric Association eliminated homosexuality as an illness, gender identity disorder was added as a new diagnosis. Thus, it is no longer an "illness" to be gay or lesbian or bisexual, so long as you act like the gender to which you have been assigned. Members of the transgender movement are working politically to have this diagnosis eliminated in order to de-stigmatise and invite a wide range of gender expressions, however atypical they may be.

Gender socialization

Patterns of behavior taught to children and adults in order to help them learn to behave as acceptable females or males. It begins at birth via naming, clothing, and treatment of the infant and it continues to be taught and reinforced throughout life within most social institutions.

Gender and Sex

According to Robert Stoller, "Gender" indicates socio-cultural designations while "sex" indicates biological differences. Once again, understanding and acceptance of these distinctions remains complex. The differentiation may be a "necessary construction," but opponents question if we can completely separate the terms since we know that culture encroaches on biology

Gyno-criticism

A term given by Elaine Showalter to describe a feminist approach to literary analysis examining women as writers, i.e. the producers of meaning. This method represents a dominant approach to challenge male images of women. Critics decry its "essentialist premise," and claim that it has not established a concrete theory of language to replace the male model.

Hegemonic masculinity

The dominant, white, heterosexual, patriarchal, privileged masculinity that controls many aspects of people's lives. It includes a tough, take-charge, don't-feel image of masculinity that frequently dominates male socialization even when other forms of masculinity are present.

Heterosexuality

Attraction to people of the opposite sex

Homophobia

Fear of, hatred toward, or prejudice/discrimination against people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In some contexts, it is also used to refer to men's fear of judgment or humiliation by other men even when sex per se is not a factor in the interaction.

Homosexuality/lesbianism

Attraction to people of the same sex

Intersecting identities

No one lives with simply one identity. Everyone has an array of identities that intersect within her or him; some identities are privileged, others oppressed. Thus, a person might be white, male, economically comfortable, and disabled. Another might be able-bodied, female, bisexual, and Asian American.

Intersex

A sex that lies somewhere on the continuum between female and male. This occurs approximately once in every 1,500 - 2,000 births. Most inter-sex infants are reassigned female; such reassignment is often accompanied by genital reconstruction surgery.

Internet Relay Chat

A medium for chatting in real time, either publicly or privately, with other people who are connected to an IRC network.

Lurking

Reading messages posted to a bulletin board, such as in Usenet Groups, but not actively participating by initiating communication.

MUDs

(Multi-User Dungeons/Multi-User Domains): Virtual communities that are established through networked software in which individuals at various geographic locations gain access via their individual computers to the community by creating and projecting a persona.

Men's liberation

A philosophy and a social movement designed to liberate men from oppressive aspects of male gender socialization; a complement to women's liberation.

Men's movements

Several men's movements are active in the United States today. Some are focused on feminism; others not. Examples include the pro-feminist National Organization for Men Against Sexism, whose goals include the equality and liberation of all oppressed people; the mytho-poetic men's movement, designed to work toward liberating men from oppressive and restricting aspects of male gender socialization and facilitating male bonding; the Christian men's movement (e.g., Promise-keepers), which encourages men to take responsibility for their families in a traditionally male-dominant way; and the Men's Rights Movement, which is very critical of feminism, being convinced that women's liberation limits men's rights.

Men's studies

The field of study that focuses on men's experiences as men and that challenges existing concepts of gender. It complements women's studies.

Multiracial feminism

An approach to feminism developed by women of color that incorporates the wide range of women's and men's experiences, acknowledges intersecting identities of privilege and oppression, explores the structural sources of diversity and oppression, and leads to multiple understandings of what it means to be a woman or a man in various racial, ethnic, and class contexts. Multiracial feminism assumes that generalizing from one cultural group to another is likely to be inaccurate.

Post-colonial

A theory that examines the relationship of "third world" cultures to imperialist, dominant Western culture. Critics regard this theory in "negative terms as a Western-initiated and oriented attempt" that does not necessarily help establish "Black and Third World women's identities".

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a term that defies definition. In part, a reaction against modernism, but also a movement similar to modernism in its use of experimental form. As significant as language is to post-structuralism, so is the increase in communications, computer technology, and cybernetics significant to postmodernism.

Positive discrimination of women

This notion designates many limitations imposed on women due to their reproductive role (a prohibition to do night, over-time or heavy physical job, to lift heavy things, etc.). From a feminist viewpoint, a woman must herself decide about the sources of her income, profession and labor conditions, depending on her strivings and life circumstances. The wording of the Labor Law «a woman is prohibited» as such violates the principle of gender equity and attaches a subordinate role to women. In conditions of unstable economic development and staff redundancies, the «positive» discrimination of women may act as a veiled mechanism for forcing out women from sources of income.

Pedophiles

Those who prefer children as sexual objects

Patriarchy

A social structure in which women are systematically subjected to sex discrimination and sexual oppression in various ways - including rape, incest, and other violence; limited literacy or education; blocked access to political participation and power; limited economic resources (e.g., basic housing, health care, and food); forced marriage; lack of reproductive rights or freedom; compulsory heterosexuality; and genital mutilation. It is a movement arguing for the elimination of these oppressions is struggling to define women's rights as human rights.

Queer

A term used for a wide range of variation in sexual orientation and gender identity. It encompasses people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender.

Reconstruction of knowledge

A phrase used by philosopher Elizabeth Minnich and others to describe the need to rebuild knowledge systems in order to incorporate a wider range of human experience and to eliminate faulty logic when describing that experience.

Second shift/double day

The many hours of work that women do at home following a day of paid labour. Most women spend considerably more time performing housework and childcare than men do.

Sex Physical attributes

(e.g., chromosomes, hormones, genital appearance) that determine whether infants are assigned male or female at birth.

Sex segregation

The separation of women and men in various contexts - on playgrounds, in schools, in religious institutions, in workplaces, etc. This is frequently caused by sex discrimination in which women are denied access to traditionally male spaces. Their lack of access to high-paying, traditionally male jobs explains women's lower incomes in many situations.

Sexual harassment

Unwanted sexual attention of various kinds: demand for sexual favors in exchange for promotions or admission to educational or occupational settings; hostile or offensive atmosphere characterized by sexualized comments, objects, or images. Sexual harassment is considered a form of sex discrimination, although same-sex sexual harassment has also been found unacceptable by the Supreme Court. Sexual harassment does not include mutually acceptable flirting, unless the latter is offensive to a third party. Unlike most other kinds of discrimination, it is victim-defined - thus, a behavior defined as unwanted by one person might be defined as acceptable by another.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation refers generally to the gender of people to whom one is sexually attracted. Although, typically, this encompasses heterosexuality (attraction to people of the opposite sex), bisexuality (attraction to people of either sex), or homosexuality/lesbianism (attraction to people of the same sex), these terms can become confusing in the context of transgender issues. Thus, is a man who is married to a woman and who dates a male transvestite on the side straight or bisexual? A heterosexual man who becomes a woman and is still attracted to women is labeled a lesbian. Has his/her sexual orientation really changed? In Texas, a transsexual man who became a woman was allowed to marry her lesbian

partner because she is genetically male even though she identifies as female.

Social construction of gender

A process by which gender differences are taught and reinforced in social interaction within social institutions (e.g., the family, schools, religious settings, workplaces, etc.). Thus, gender goes well beyond the simple learning of sex roles, embedded as it is in every aspect of social life. Male superiority characterizes most aspects of the institutions involved in the social construction of gender.

Sociological imagination

The possession of a sociological imagination allows a person to make sense of her or his life in the context of larger social and historical dynamics. This includes the ability to distinguish between difficulties that lie in the realm of the individual and his or her family (personal troubles) and difficulties that emerge from the larger social context (public issues). Solutions to problems can emerge once individuals and groups are able to understand the sources of their difficulties.

Sex

Refers to sexual behavior; also is used to refer to the biological differences between men and women.

Sexism

Discrimination on the basis of sex, based on the assumption that one sex (generally females) is innately inferior

Sexuality

Gender identity, including masculinity and femininity, as well as sexual orientation, i.e., heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and Trans--genderism

Social Problems

The term applies to the range of conditions and behaviors held to be manifestations of social disorganization that warrant change.

Social Psychology

The sub discipline of sociology that focuses on the study of face-to-face social interaction, making use of experimental studies of small groups, and, under the influence of symbolic interactionism, using such methods as participant observation

Socialization

The process by which people learn to become members of society, both by internalizing society's norms and values and by learning to perform social roles.

Transgender

Transgender is an umbrella term that encompasses any transgression of the expectations for a particular gender. It includes masculine women, feminine men, women or men who identify as a gender different from the one in which they were raised, transsexuals, transvestites, inter-sexual, etc.

Transvestite/Cross Dresser

Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it (i.e. they are not transsexuals). Cross-dresser is the preferred term for men who enjoy or prefer women's clothing and social roles. Contrary to popular belief, the overwhelming majority of male cross-dressers identifies as straight and often is married. Very few women call themselves cross-dressers.

Triangle

A symbol of remembrance is triangle. Gay men in the Nazi concentration camps were forced to wear the pink triangle as a designation of being homosexual. Women who did not conform to

Trans -liberation

A term coined by Leslie Feinberg to describe the movement to transcend gender barriers in the interest of expressing the rich array of human identity and experience that can exist when people are free from gender rules.

Transsexual

A person who becomes the other sex is transsexual. Frequently this involves hormone treatment, surgery, and/or hair removal, along with dressing as the other gender and taking on a new name and identity. It refers to a person who experiences a mismatch of the biological sex they were born as and the biological sex they identify as. A transsexual sometimes undergoes medical treatment to change his/her physical sex to match his/her sex identity through hormone treatments and/or surgically. [Transsexuals are included in the umbrella term transgender, but not all Transgendered people are transsexual].

Women's rights movement

The movement for women's equality has been characterized by three waves of activity. The first wave began in 1848 and ultimately focused on the struggle for the vote, which was attained in 1920 after 72 years of work. The second wave, known more commonly as the women's liberation movement, began in the 1960s and early 1970s and continued into the 1990s. It was characterized by individual and collective empowerment strategies, many of which continue today. These strategies include the development of anti-discrimination legislation and policy focusing especially on abortion rights, prevention of violence against women, gender equality in employment and education, policies against sexual harassment, etc. (action; sexual harassment); conscious-raising groups designed to help women empower themselves in their personal lives and understand how forces in the wider social order affect individual lives; the growth of large women's organizations such as the National Organization for Women, the National Women's Studies Association, the National Women's Health Network, the Black

Women's Health Network, the National Welfare Rights Organization, and the Feminist Majority Foundation, among others; the development of a network of services for women including rape crisis centers, health centers (e.g., birth control, family planning, and abortion services), shelters for battered women, childcare centers, women's newspapers, women's bookstores, feminist counseling centers, and multipurpose women's centers; the growth of women's studies departments in colleges and universities; increased awareness of the situations of women worldwide; and the increasing involvement of women in politics and political office. The third wave began in the 1990s, led by young feminists involved in publishing feminist books and magazines addressing the needs of girls and young women, and in mobilizing young activists to fight inequality based on age, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, or level of education.

Women's studies

A Women's study is an interdisciplinary field of study focusing on women's experiences. Since its beginning, it has focused on analyzing patriarchy and women's limited power worldwide; bringing women's voices into areas of knowledge where they were previously absent; building theoretical explanations for women's lower status in most of the world; and working actively for the empowerment of all women and for their ultimate equality as human beings. Increasing attention to all kinds of women across differences of age, social class, race, culture, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and ability has helped scholars and students to better understand the experiences of women around the globe.