



**Your body**

**is a**

**battleground**

**battleground**

**Feminist  
Literary  
Criticism:  
Historiography,  
Text and  
Context**

**by**

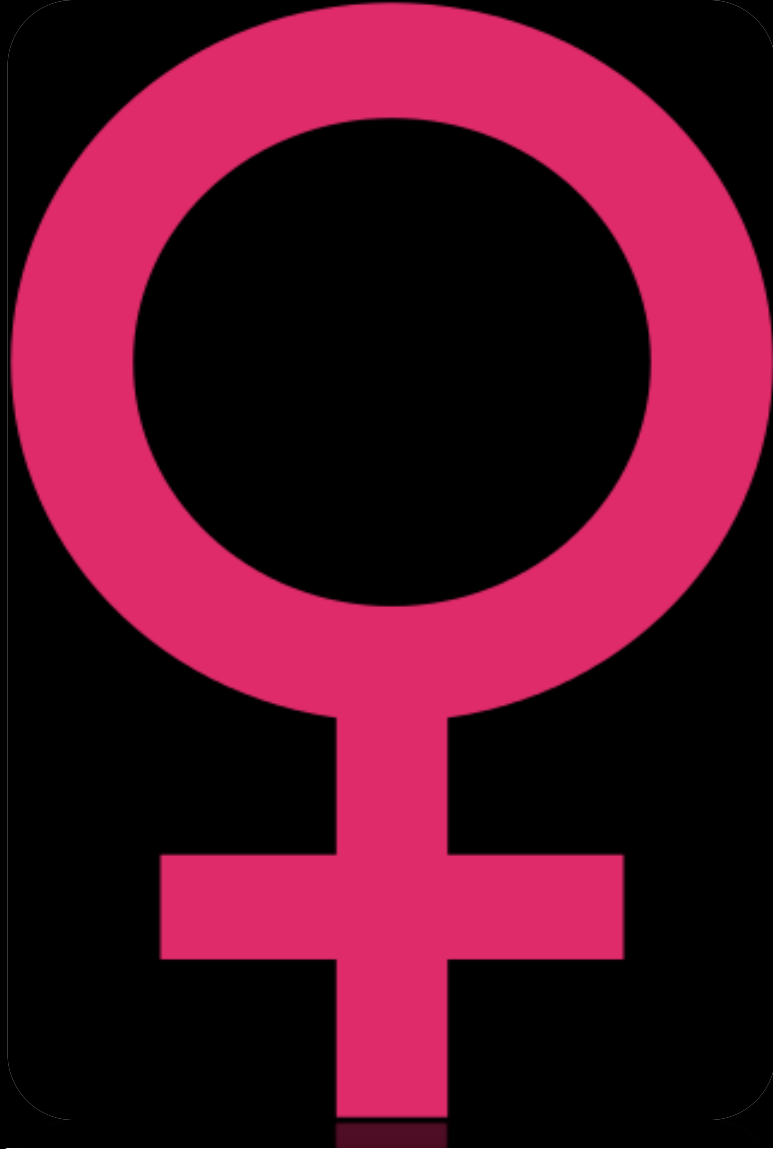
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## Feminism: Definition and Scope



Symbol of feminism,  
women and the struggle  
for their rights

- ❑ Feminism is a range of diverse socio-political movements, and ideologies that aim to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes.
- ❑ Feminism incorporates the position that societies prioritize the male point of view, and that women are treated unfairly within those societies.
- ❑ Efforts to change that include fighting **gender stereotypes** and seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men.



# WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND FEMINISM

Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including **the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages, equal pay and eliminate the gender pay gap, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave.** Feminists have also worked to ensure access to legal abortions and social integration and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. **Changes in dress and acceptable physical activity have often been part of feminist movements.**

# Waves of Feminist Movements

Modern Western feminist history is conventionally split into **three time periods, or “waves”**, each with slightly different aims based on prior progress: (Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker)

- ❑ **First-wave feminism** of the 19th and early 20th centuries focused on overturning legal inequalities, particularly addressing issues of **women's suffrage**.
- ❑ **Second-wave feminism (1960s–1980s)** broadened the debate to include a wider range of issues: **sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities**.
- ❑ **Third-wave feminism (1990s–2000s)** The third wave saw the emergence of new feminist currents and theories, such as **intersectionality, sex positivity, vegetarian ecofeminism, transfeminism, and postmodern feminism**.
- ❑ **The fourth wave (2012-Present)** from around 2012, **used social media to combat sexual harassment, violence against women and rape culture**; it is best known for the Me Too movement.



# Basic Concepts related to Gender Studies

## What is patriarchy?

[feministastic.com](http://feministastic.com) • feminism 101

The patriarchy is the name for the system that privileges men. In this system, men hold most or all of the power, and it is difficult or impossible for women to reach the same status as men.

The patriarchy does not mean a small group of men are sitting in a room actively making decisions to oppress women. Rather, it's a name for a system that historically has given men more rights than women. These rights can be obvious (not letting women own land or vote, dismissing/ignoring rape reports) or more subtle (devaluing female-dominated jobs, presenting women as sex objects in media/advertisements).

# SEX VERSUS GENDER

Sex refers to the biological and physiological differences between men and women.

Sex has two main two categories: male and female.

Sex remains the same regardless of time and culture

Sex is created by the reproduction needs, that is, biological features.

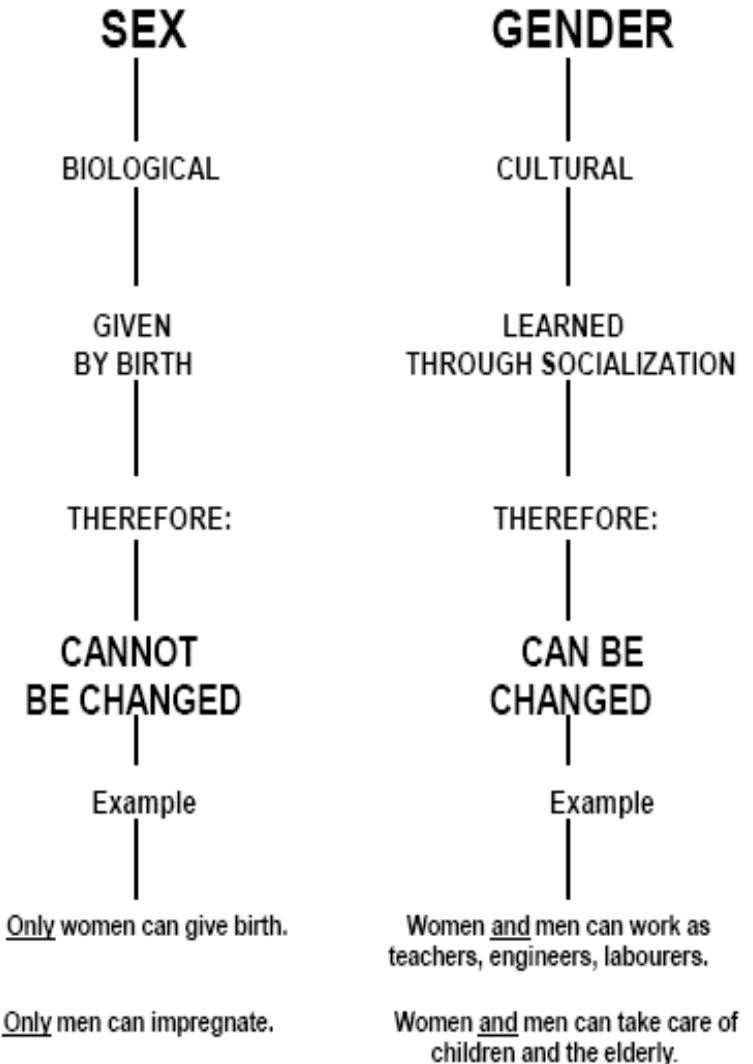
Gender refers to the social and cultural differences between men and women.

Gender has two main categories: masculine and feminine.

Gender roles, expectations may differ across time and culture.

Gender distinctions are created by social norms.

## Sex versus gender



# What is Phallocentrism?

- The belief that identifies the phallus as the source of power in culture and literature.

Phallus: a penis, especially when erect (typically used with reference to male potency or dominance).



## Phallocentrism

- a doctrine or belief centred on the phallus, especially a belief in the superiority of the male sex.
  - In other words we can say that a patriarchal society is phallogentric
  - In literature it is common to search for phallic symbols – symbols of male dominance
  - This overlaps with psychoanalytic Freudian theory



# What is Sexism?

1. attitudes or behavior based on traditional stereotypes of sexual roles.
2. discrimination or devaluation based on a person's sex, as in restricted job opportunities; esp., such discrimination directed against women.



# Misogyny

Misogyny, as defined by the Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology,:

“is a cultural attitude of **hatred** for females simply **because they are female**. It is a central part of sexist prejudice and ideology and, as such, is an important basis for the **oppression** of females in male-dominated societies. Misogyny is manifested in many different ways from jokes to pornography to violence to the **self-contempt women may be taught to feel toward their own bodies.**”

## MISANDRY

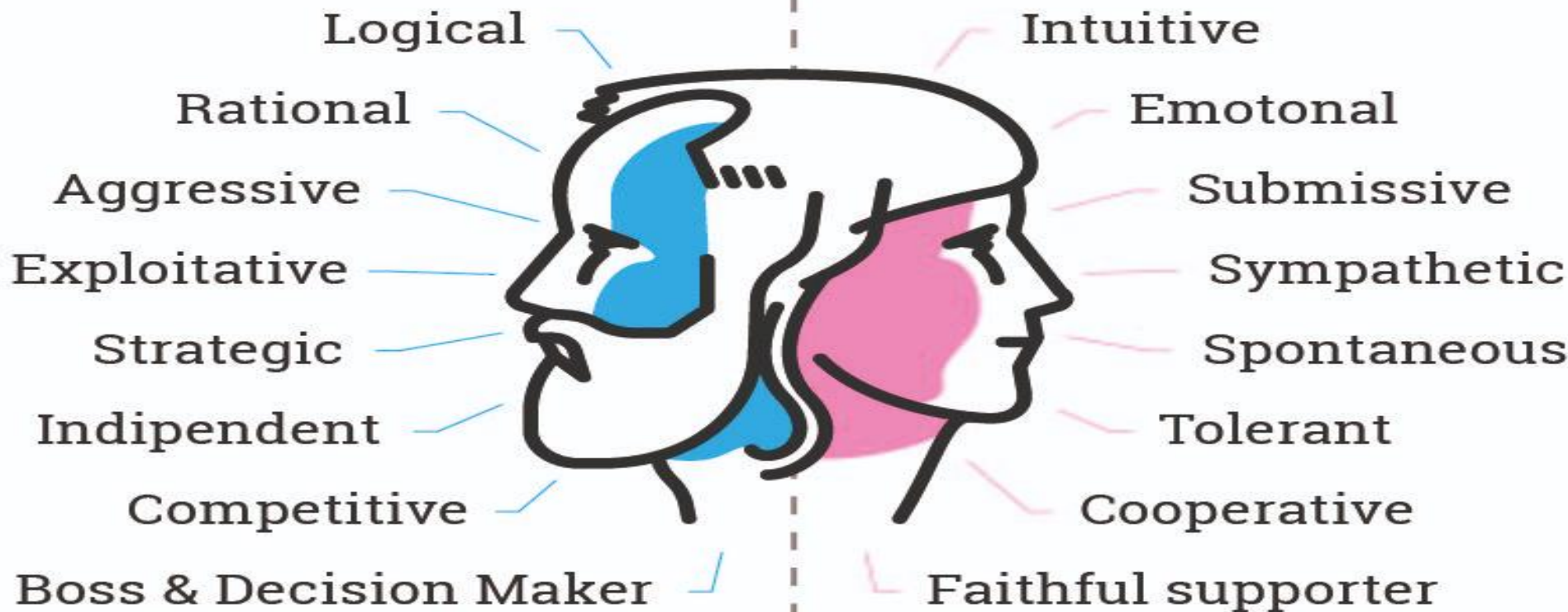
Unlike misogyny, which means the hatred of women. Misandry means the hatred of the male sex.

# Gender Role/Gender Stereotyping

A gender role, also known as a **sex role**, is a **social role** encompassing a range of behaviors and attitudes that are generally considered **acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their biological or perceived sex**. Gender roles are usually centered on conceptions of **masculinity and femininity**.

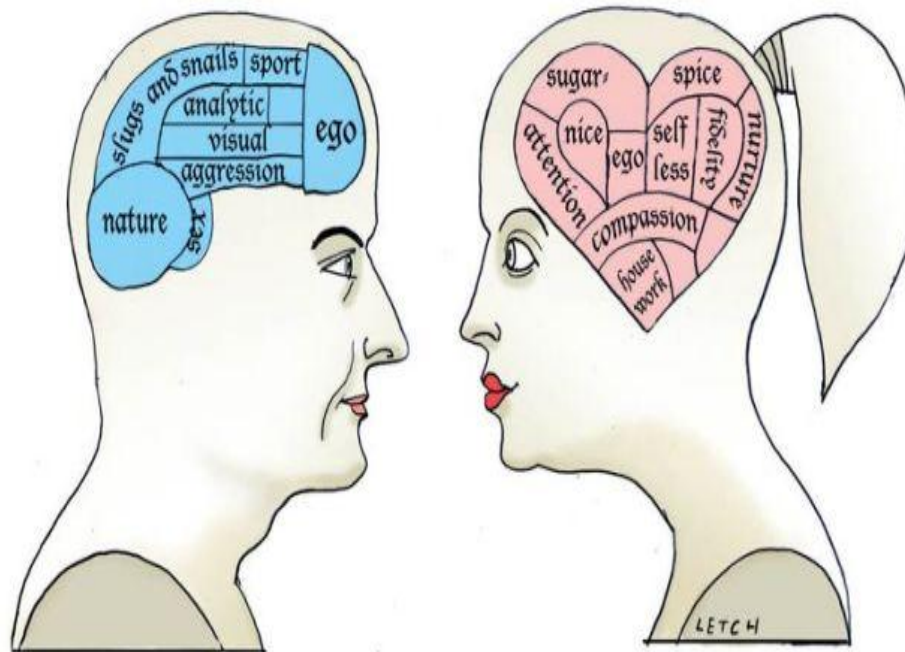
## Masculine stereotype

## Feminine stereotype



# Essentialism

The concept of **Essentialism** states that there are innate, essential differences between men and women. That is, we are born with certain traits. This is often used as an explanation for why there are so few women in science and technology. It is also used as a rationale for pigeonholing, offering limited education, hiring discrimination, etc. It is also sometimes raised (including by women) under the guise of Equal but different.

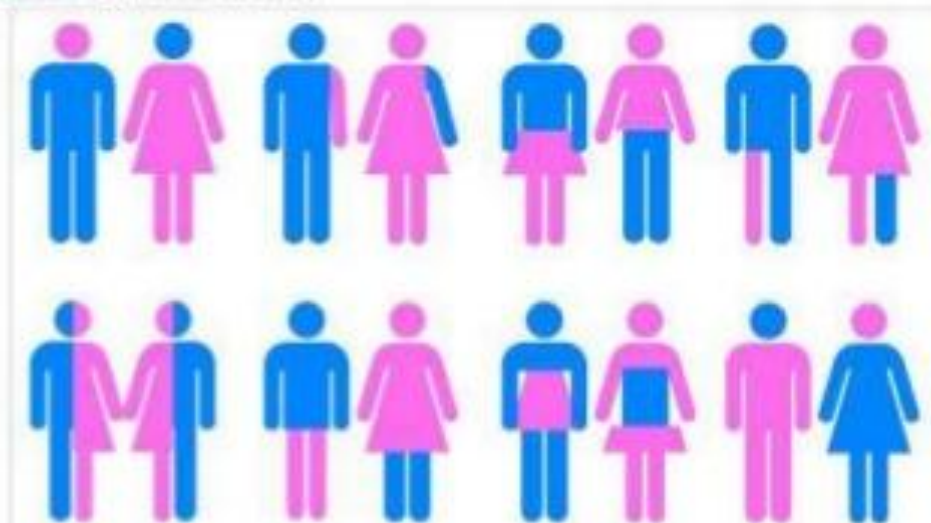




# Androgyny

- Characteristic of possessing the most positive personality characteristics of males and females regardless of actual sex
- A person who does not fit neatly into the typical masculine and feminine gender roles of their society
- Usually tagged as 'social outcastes' ... till now

[flexible] gender identity



"which category do you identify/define yourself?"





## ÉCRITURE FÉMININE

- literally "women's writing" is a strain of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the early 1970s and included foundational theorists such as Hélène Cixous and others ("Écriture Femine").

- **Écriture féminine, or “women's writing”**, is a term coined by French feminist and literary theorist Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay **“The Laugh of the Medusa”**. Cixous aimed to establish a **genre of literary writing that deviates from traditional masculine styles of writing, one which examines the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text.**
- **Écriture féminine** as a theory foregrounds the importance of language for the psychic understanding of self. **Cixous is searching for what Isidore Isou refers to as the “hidden signifier” in language which expresses the ineffable and what cannot be expressed in structuralist language.**

# A Brief History of Gender Oppression



The Venus of Willendorf figure is believed to have been carved during the European Upper Paleolithic, or "Old Stone Age"

Throughout the history of human civilization the voice of women has been suppressed by the patriarchal society. Patriarchy has a long history and it has become a social system in which men dominate, exploit, oppress and subordinate women. If someone reads the ancient history, it becomes clear that Patriarchy is an age-old ideology. For example, ancient Mesopotamian and Greek societies were patriarchal in nature. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* from ancient Mesopotamia shows that Gilgamesh, the Priest-King of the city of Uruk is a rapist. He uses women as objects and slaves to quench his lust. A man could divorce his wife anytime he wanted, but if a woman wanted to divorce her husband against his will she would have been made a slave.

# Religious and Philosophical Roots of Patriarchy

“...this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called a woman.”

-Adam

...so god created man in his own image...

- Gen:1:26-27

Aristotle says:

“the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities”

Nietzsche, the German philosopher says:

“Woman is God’s second mistake.”

Our Manusmriti says:

Meaning: She has to be protected by her father in the childhood, husband in her youth and son in her old age. She does not deserve freedom

Women writers and women readers have always had to work 'against the grain'. Aristotle declared that 'the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities', and St Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is an 'imperfect man'. When John Donne wrote 'Air and Angels' he alluded to (but did not refute) Aquinas's theory that form is masculine and matter feminine: the superior, godlike, male intellect impresses its form upon the malleable, inert, female matter. In pre-Mendelian days men regarded their sperm as the active seeds which give form to the waiting ovum, which lacks identity till it receives the male's impress. In Aeschylus's trilogy, *The Oresteia*, victory is granted by Athena to the male argument, put by Apollo, that the mother is no parent to her child. The victory of the male principle of intellect brings to an end the reign of the sensual female Furies and asserts patriarchy over matriarchy. Throughout its long history, feminism (for while the *word* may only have come into English usage in the 1890s, women's conscious struggle to resist patriarchy goes much further back) has sought to disturb the complacent certainties of such a patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in transforming society. Mary Ellman, for example, in

**Seldan, Brooker, Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Page 114.**



# Proto-feminism



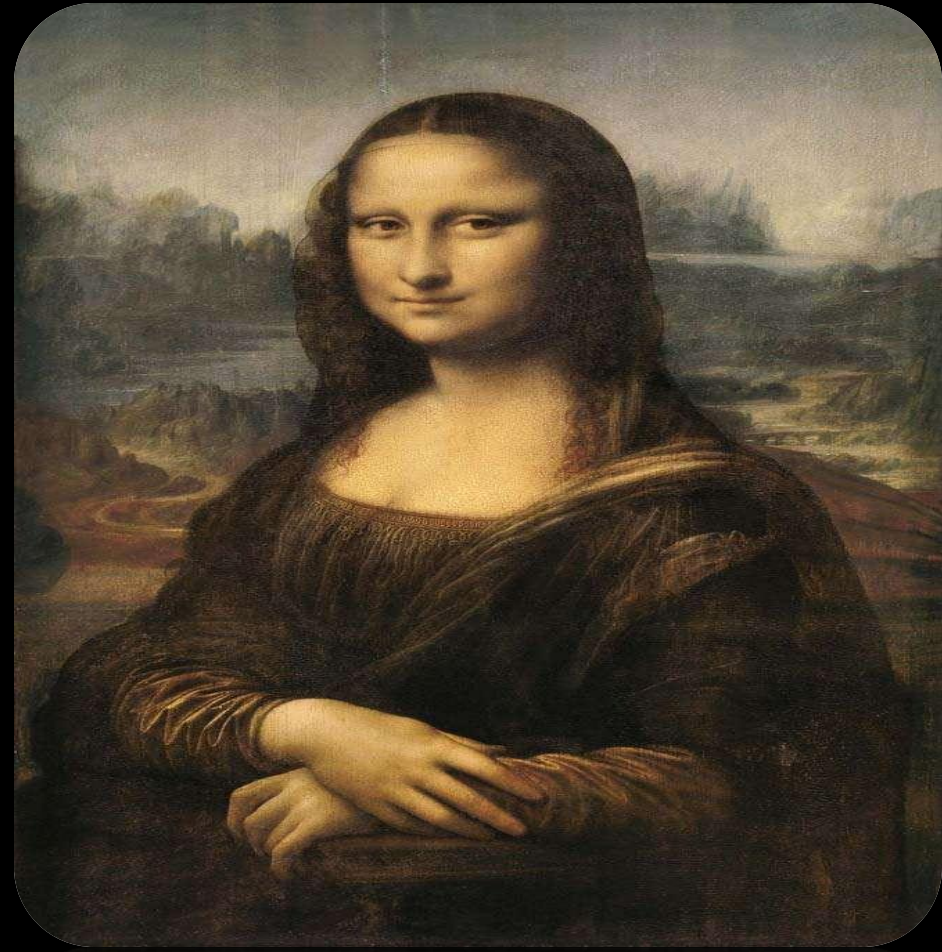
Christine de Pizan presents her book to Queen Isabeau of Bavaria

- ❑ Protofeminism is a philosophical tradition that anticipates modern feminism in an era when the concept of feminism was still unknown.
- ❑ Around 24 centuries ago, Plato, according to Elaine Hoffman Baruch, “[argued] for the total political and sexual equality of women, advocating that they be members of his highest class, ... those who rule and fight”.
- ❑ Italian-French writer **Christine de Pizan** (1364 – c. 1430), the author of *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *Epistle to the God of Love* is cited by Simone de Beauvoir as the first woman to denounce misogyny and write about the relation of the sexes.

# Representation of Women in Art



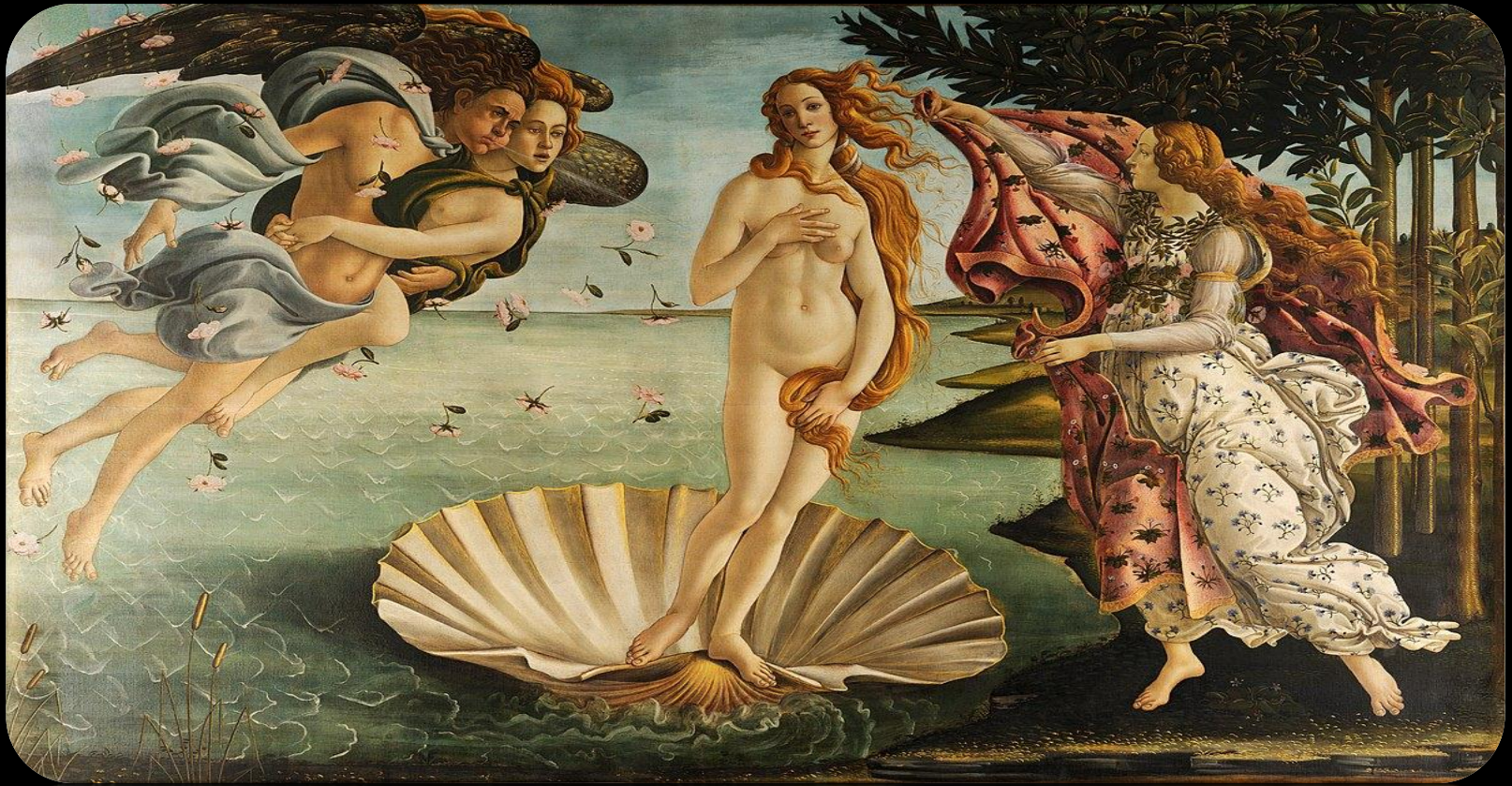
Mathias Grünewald in  
Isenheim Altarpiece



The Mona Lisa is a half-length portrait painting by the Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci. **It is considered an archetypal masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance**



# *The Birth of Venus, Sandro Botticelli, 1483 - 1485*



The Birth of Venus by Botticelli was unusual for the Early Renaissance, mainly because of the way he shunned realism, which was being used by da Vinci and Michelangelo at the time. Venus is pictured here as she emerges from the sea in strong contrapposto, shielding herself with her hand and her long hair. Botticelli made her effortlessly beautiful, and admirers flock to her side, trying to get a look at her. Compared to previous paintings in the Gothic and Medieval Art, her anatomy is more pronounced, and Botticelli obviously had a considerable amount of knowledge about the body.





**Young Woman at Her Toilette, Giovanni Bellini, 1515:** Young Woman at Her Toilette depicts another topless woman gazing into mirror that she is holding. She is seated at her bed in front of a window with a rolling landscape outside. **There is a lot of use of value in this painting, especially within the color green.** The woman is the focus of the painting. **This is another example of how woman are seen as vain and self conceited.**





**Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, (c. 1620) offers another dramatic scene of an ordinary woman overpowering a high-ranking man.** Gentileschi's painting is muscular: The Biblical Judith and her maidservant bear down on their victim, the invading Assyrian general Holofernes, as Judith saws at his neck with a sword. Blood spatters in long, ropy arcs, spraying Judith's chest and neck. Holofernes's tortured expression and copious amounts of blood are also present in 's earlier version of this subject (ca. 1599), from which Gentileschi is said to have drawn inspiration.

**Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, c. 1620**





**Caravaggio, Judith Beheading Holofernes ca. 1598–99**





**Elisabetta Sirani, *Timoclea Killing Her Rapist*, 1659.**

***Timoclea Killing Her Rapist* depicts a popular tale described in Plutarch's biography of Alexander the Great. During Alexander's invasion of Thebes, a captain in his army rapes the titular Timoclea. Following the assault, the captain asks where her money is hidden. Timoclea leads him to her garden well; as he peers into it, she pushes him in, dropping heavy rocks down the well until he dies. The painting turns the story on its head, inverting the hierarchy quite literally: the rapist is shown upside down and helpless, feet flailing in the air, as she stands resolutely above him.**





**Jael and Sisera (1620) by Artemisia Gentileschi**



*Woman Drawing Water at the Cistern*, Jean-Siméon Chardin, 1733 - 1739

*Woman Drawing Water at the Cistern* is a painting that shows a woman pumping water from a cistern **while being watched by a young girl**. She looks to be a maiden because of her bonnet and is dressed in long flowing skirts and petticoats. The woman is highlighted in this painting by being the brightest object in the dark room. **This piece is used to represent how women were only good for doing work around the house and how daughters should learn and follow in their footsteps.**



**The Nightmare, Henry Fuseli, 1781, From the collection of: Detroit Institute of Arts**



This painting depicts a nightmare incarnate, and the way it holds the girl down symbolizes how much a bad dream can weigh down on someone. The girl's hair is luscious and curly, and her body almost stretches the length of the canvas, making her the obvious focal point of the composition.



## *Woman with a Parasol - Madame Monet and Her Son (1875)*



*Woman with a Parasol - Madame Monet and Her Son (1875)* by **Claude Monet** is a painting depicting a woman holding a parasol walking through a field of flowering plants with her son. The sky is bright and the flowers are blooming. The woman is significantly larger than the child, making her and her parasol the focal point of this piece. **This piece represents family time spent together. Women spend lots of time with their children and this portrays that well.**





***Woman Ironing (1887) by Edgar Degas*** are series of paintings that shows a woman ironing a collared shirt on a table. **The colors are very muted, making the piece look like it takes place in the early morning. There is soft light coming in through the windows. This shows that women are good for cleaning and doing the chores.**



## *Stonebreaking Woman*, Karl Janssen, 1902



*Stonebreaking Woman* is a sculpture of a woman sitting amidst a pile of stones, breaking them with a mallet. **The woman is looking away from the stones as to not get them in her eyes.** There is a lot of use of texture in this sculpture, making it look life like. **This shows that as time progressed women were able to do more things that were usually considered masculine, like manual labour.**





4. Florence Nightingale was a national heroine – the ‘Lady with the Lamp’ – often, as here, celebrated for her compassion and womanly tenderness towards the wounded soldiers in the Crimea, rather than for her truly remarkable talent for administration and organization.

**Woman (Elevation), Gaston Lachaise (American, born France, 1882-1935),  
Modeled 1912–15, cast 1927, From the collection of: The Art Institute of  
Chicago**



Women (Elevation) is a statue of a curvy, naked woman. It is black and the woman is standing on the tip of her toes and has her arms raised shoulder height. This piece is intended to show that body image now is not the same as it was. It was seen as good and healthy to have curves, usually in history showing fertility.

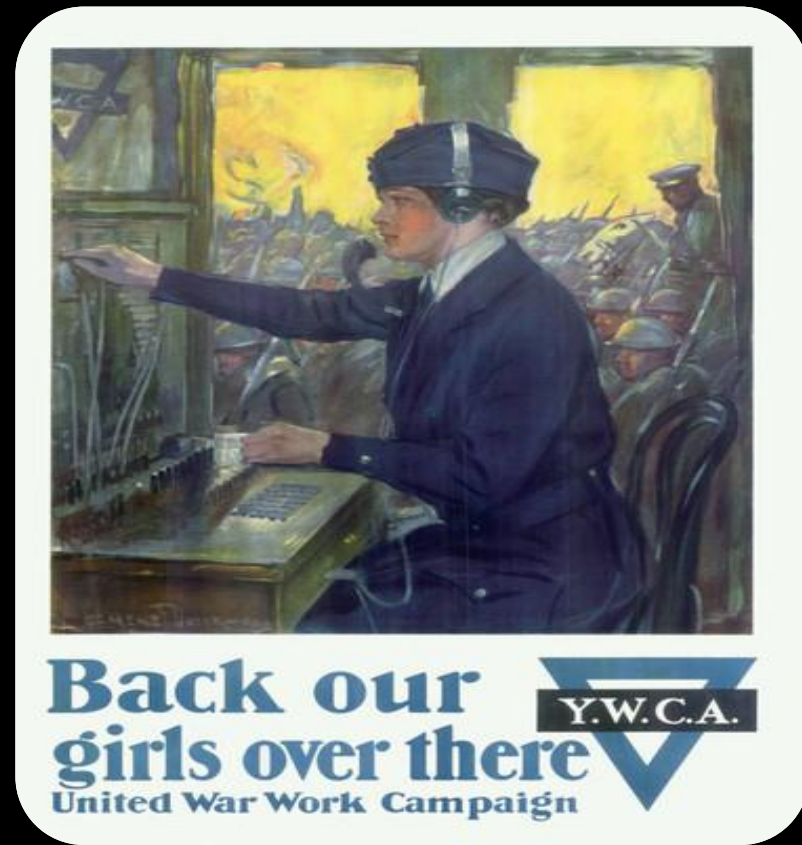


***Nude woman reading, Robert Delaunay, (1915), From the collection of: National Gallery of Victoria***



Nude Woman Reading is a very colorful drawing of a nude woman, with her back turned, reading a book. **The colors in this piece are magnificent and the use of color on her body really show off how her body is shaped. This piece represents that women started to engage themselves in various forms of intellectual activities.**

*For every fighter a woman worker care for her through the YWCA : United War Work Campaign / Adolph T, Treidler, Adolph, 1886-, 1918, Original Source: Library of Virginia*

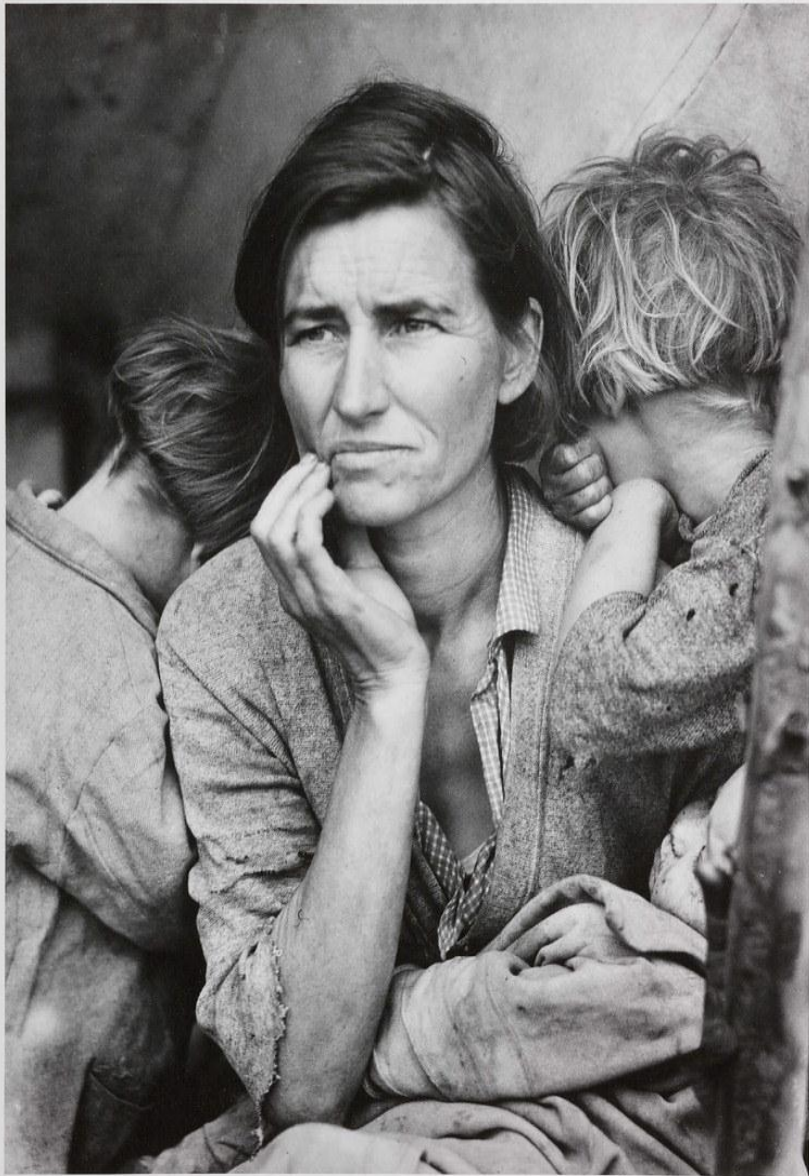


*For Every Fighter a Woman Worker* is a piece depicting a woman dressed in overalls holding an airplane and a missile. It is very simplistic due to it being a poster, and has muted yellows, greens, blues and reds. This was a poster to promote that for every man that was a soldier, a woman took over his job while he was gone, showing that women were being allowed to work and do “men’s” (jobs).





Re-thinking of the female body as a weapon rather than a sexual object comes in the form of Action Pants: Genital Panic. In 1968, the self-named Austrian performance artist Valie Export.



**Migrant Mother, Nipomo,  
California, Dorothea Lange, 1936;  
printed early 1960's, From the  
collection of: The Nelson-Atkins  
Museum of Art**

This photograph is easily the most influential photograph of Lange's career. The mother looks worried for the future, but knows she has to be strong for her children, who depend on her. She supports the pyramidal composition, just as she supports her family.



*The Soldier and the Peasant Woman*, Vilmantas Marcinkevičius, 1994, From the collection of: Modern Art Center / Modernaus Meno Centras



*The Soldier and the Peasant Woman* is a very colorful, seemingly happy painting. It shows a peasant woman trying to sow the field while a soldier is raping her. His machine gun is laid to the side on the ground and his pants are around his ankles. There is a large use of contrasting and primary colors in this piece, making it seem bright and fun while the subject is actually dark. This represents how women in developing countries are treated by militant soldiers. They are sexually assaulted and still expected to work long and hard days.

# FIRST WAVE FEMINISM

- The “First Wave” of feminism began in the late 19th and early 20th Century.
- Focused mainly on opening up various opportunities for women, especially the right to vote (women’s suffrage) and property rights.
- Concerns of First wave Feminism:

Education, Employment, Reformation in Marriage laws and the plight of intelligent middle class single women.

- British women fought against the idea of ‘Angel in the House’



# First Wave Feminism (Cont..)

- In USA: First wave feminism (1848-1960) focused on right to vote and right to practice birth control.
- July 13, 1848: USA, Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the Seneca Convention- to discuss about the social, civil and religious condition and rights of woman.
- Issued 'Declaration of sentiments'
- Key Thinkers of this phase: Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth.
- Major achievements: **Voting rights, property rights and birth control**

# First-Wave Feminism

Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913



Silent Sentinels 1917-1919



After selling her home, Emmeline Pankhurst, pictured in New York City in 1913, traveled constantly, giving speeches throughout Britain and the United States.





Photograph of American women replacing men fighting in Europe, 1945



Louise Weiss along with other Parisian suffragettes in 1935. The newspaper headline reads “The Frenchwoman Must Vote.”

# SECOND WAVE FEMINISM

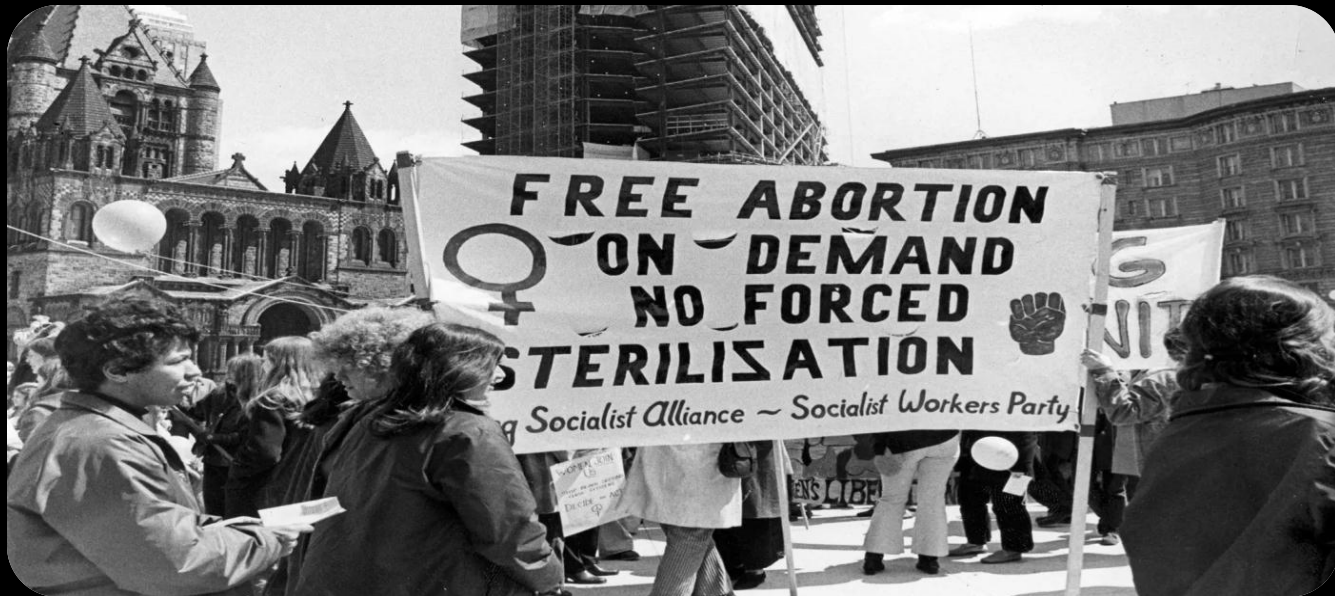
- The “Second Wave” of feminism is typically seen as starting in the 1960s and continuing into the 1990s .
- It was particularly connected to other social movements occurring at the time, such as the anti-Vietnam protests and the civil rights movement.
- The “**new social movement**” dedicated to raising consciousness about sexism and patriarchy, legalizing abortion and birth control, attaining equal rights in political and economic realms, and gaining sexual liberation



# Second Wave Feminism (cont..)

- Important books: *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)
- The Second Wave of feminism, although it did stress such important social and economic issues as equality in employment and sexual harassment, was also driven by other, more theoretical interests, such as the differences between men and women and the political consequences of those differences. As in First Wave feminist thought, however, there was still a prevailing belief that men and women were essentially different, and that due to their nurturing and collaborative natures women would be able to bring about a peaceful world.
- Major achievements: **Sexual freedom, integration in the workplace and into the political arena, equal funding**

# Second Wave Feminism





# Second Wave Feminism



# THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

- shares many of the interests of the first two waves (such as the empowerment of women,)
- also characterized by a desire of young women to find a voice of their own and to include various diverse groups in the fold of feminist thought.
- Rebecca Walker, who coined the term “Third Wave,” is one of the most prominent figures in this wave of feminism.
- includes various groups of women, including women of color; lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women; and low income women.
- often seen as a critique Second Wave feminism for either excluding or overlooking these disempowered groups.
- Major concerns: **sexual freedom, inclusion of women of color and women from other cultures, including the issues of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism.**



# Third Wave Feminism





# Third Wave Feminism





# HOW TO DESCRIBE THE FOURTH WAVE OF FEMINISM

- Fourth wave feminism is not universally acknowledged as a real thing among feminists, but it can be used to refer to any sort of feminism that wasn't a feature of third wave feminism.
- Some consider online activism a form of fourth wave feminism, and some consider the man-bashing, "rape culture" brand of feminism to be fourth wave.
- Like most cultural movements, we probably won't know until we're out of it.

# WELCOME TO THE FOURTH WAVE OF FEMINISM

- This movement follows the first-wave campaign for votes for women, which reached its height 100 years ago, the second wave women's liberation movement that blazed through the 1970s and 80s, and the third wave declared by Rebecca Walker, Alice Walker's daughter, and others, in the early 1990s. That shift from second to third wave took many important forms, but often felt broadly generational, with women defining their work as distinct from their mothers'. What's happening now feels like something new again. It's defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online. Just how popular is sometimes slightly startling. Girlguiding UK introduced a campaigning and activism badge this year and a summer survey of Mumsnet users found 59% consider themselves feminists, double those who don't. Bates says that, for her, modern feminism is defined by pragmatism, inclusion and humor. "I feel like it is really down-to-earth, really open," she says, "and it's very much about people saying: 'Here is something that doesn't make sense to me, I thought women were equal, I'm going to do something about it.'"



# Feminist Literary Criticism

- ❑ Feminist literary criticism is a product of the feminist movement of the 1960s.
- ❑ Feminist criticism of the 1960s and 1970s concerned itself with the representation of women in literature as an expression of the social norms about women and their social roles and as a means of socialization. It focused on the images of women in books by male writers to expose the patriarchal ideology and how women characters are portrayed. They try to show how male writings emphasize masculine dominance and superiority.
- ❑ In the 1980s, it switched its focus from attacking male representation of the of women to discovering forgotten and neglected works by women.

# Feminist literary criticism

- ❑ Feminist literary criticism is literary criticism informed by feminist theory, or more broadly, by **the politics of feminism**. **It uses the principles and ideology of feminism to critique the language of literature.** This school of thought seeks to analyze and describe the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male domination by exploring the economic, social, political, and psychological forces embedded within literature.
- ❑ Traditionally, feminist literary criticism has sought to examine old texts within literary canon through a new lens. Specific goals of feminist criticism include both the development and discovery female tradition of writing, and rediscovering of old texts, while also interpreting symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view and resisting sexism inherent in the majority of mainstream literature.





□ The history of feminist literary criticism is extensive, from classic works of nineteenth-century women authors such as George Eliot and Margaret Fuller to cutting-edge theoretical work in women's studies and gender studies by "third-wave" authors. Before the 1970s—in the first and second waves of feminism—feminist literary criticism was concerned with **women's authorship and the representation of women's condition within the literature**; in particular the depiction of fictional female characters. In addition, feminist literary criticism is concerned with the exclusion of women from the literary canon, with theorists such as **Lois Tyson suggesting that this is because the views of women authors are often not considered to be universal.**

# Feminism and Queer Studies

Additionally, **feminist criticism** has been closely associated with the birth and growth of queer studies. **Modern feminist literary theory** seeks to understand both the literary portrayals and representation of both women and people in the **queer community**, expanding the role of a variety of identities and analysis within feminist literary criticism.





# A Summary for Feminist Premises

1. Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept so.
2. In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is *other*: she is objectified and marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values, defined by what she (allegedly) lacks and that men (allegedly) have.
3. All of Western (Anglo-European) civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology, as we see, for example, in the numerous patriarchal women and female monsters of Greek and Roman literature and mythology; the patriarchal interpretation of the biblical Eve as the origin of sin and death in the world; the representation of woman as a nonrational creature by traditional Western philosophy; and the reliance on *phallogocentric* thinking (thinking that is male oriented in its vocabulary, rules of logic, and criteria for what is considered objective knowledge) by educational, political, legal, and business institutions. As we saw earlier, even the development of the Western canon of great literature, including traditional fairy tales, was a product of patriarchal ideology.

# A Summary for Feminist Premises

4. While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (masculine or feminine). That is, for most English-speaking feminists, the word *gender* refers not to our anatomy but to our behavior as socially programmed men and women. I behave “like a woman” (for example, submissively) not because it is natural for me to do so but because I was taught to do so. In fact, all the traits we associate with masculine and feminine behavior are learned, not inborn.
5. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting women’s equality. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of *activism*, although the word is usually applied to feminist activity that directly promotes social change through political activity such as public demonstrations, boycotts, voter education and registration, the provision of hotlines for rape victims and shelters for abused women, and the like. Although frequently falsely portrayed in opposition to “family values,” feminists continue to lead the struggle for better family policies such as nutrition and health care for mothers and children; parental leave; and high-quality, affordable day care.
6. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not.



## Key Works of Proto-Feminism

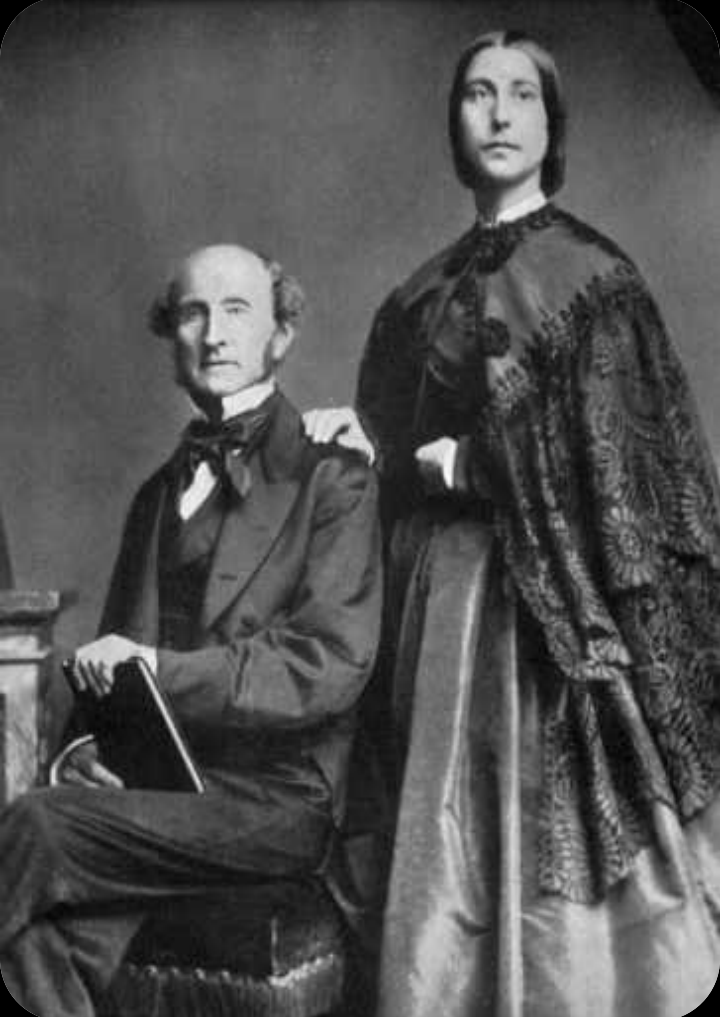


**Mary Wollstonecraft  
(1759-1797)**

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), written by the 18th-century British proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. In it, Wollstonecraft responds to those educational and political theorists of the 18th century who did not believe women should receive a rational education. She argues that women ought to have an education commensurate with their position in society, claiming that women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be "companions" to their husbands, rather than mere wives. Instead of viewing women as ornaments to society or property to be traded in marriage, Wollstonecraft maintains that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men.

While Wollstonecraft does call for equality between the sexes in particular areas of life, such as morality, she does not explicitly state that men and women are equal.

## Key Works of Proto-Feminism



**John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)  
and Helen Taylor, his  
daughter**

*The Subjection of Women* is an essay by English philosopher, political economist and civil servant John Stuart Mill published in 1869, with ideas he developed jointly with his wife Harriet Taylor Mill.

Mill argues that people should be able to vote to defend their own rights and to learn to stand on their two feet, morally and intellectually. In Mill's time a woman was generally subject to the whims of her husband or father due to social norms which said women were both physically and mentally less able than men and therefore needed to be “taken care of”. Mill Said:

**“... [T]he legal subordination of one sex to another – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power and privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.”**



## First Wave Feminism in Literary Criticism



**Virginia Woolf**  
**1882-1941**

- ❑ *A Room of One's Own* is an extended essay by Virginia Woolf, first published in September 1929.
- ❑ An important feminist text, the essay is noted in its argument for both a **literal and figurative space for women's writers within a literary tradition dominated by men.**
- ❑ Woolf notes that women have been kept from writing because of the constraints they face and their relative poverty: **“In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century”.** The essay examines whether women were capable of producing, and in fact free to produce, work of the quality of William Shakespeare, addressing the limitations that past and present women writers face.

## A Room of One's Own

Virginia Woolf's fame conventionally rests on her own creative writing as a woman, and later feminist critics have analysed her novels extensively from very different perspectives (see below, pp. 119, 125, 128, 136). But she also produced two key texts which are major contributions to feminist theory, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). Like other 'first-wave' feminists, Woolf is principally concerned with women's material disadvantages compared to men – her first text focusing on the history and social context of women's literary production, and the second on the relations between male power and the professions (law, education, medicine, etc.). Although she herself abjures the label 'feminist' in *Three Guineas*, Woolf nevertheless promotes a wide-ranging slate of feminist projects in both books, from a demand for mothers' allowances and divorce-law reform to proposals for a women's college and a women's newspaper. In *A Room of One's Own*, she also argues that women's writing should explore female experience in its own right and not form a comparative assessment of women's experience in relation to men's. The essay therefore forms an early statement and exploration of the possibility of a distinctive tradition of women's writing.



# Virginia Woolf on Patriarchal Society

Woolf sums up the stark contrast between how women are idealised in fiction written by men, and how patriarchal society has treated them in real life:

Women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time. Indeed if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some would say greater. But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room. A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words and profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read; scarcely spell; and was the property of her husband.



**Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre in Beijing, 1955**

- ❑ **Simone de Beauvoir (1908 – 1986) was a French writer, intellectual, existentialist philosopher, political activist, feminist and social theorist.** Though she did not consider herself a philosopher, she had a significant influence on both feminist existentialism and feminist theory.
- ❑ **De Beauvoir wrote novels, essays, biographies, autobiography and monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues. She was known for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism;** and for her novels, including *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*. She was also known for her open, lifelong relationship with French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.



# Simone de Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir – French feminist, lifelong partner of Jean-Paul Sartre, pro-abortion and women’s-rights activist, founder of the newspaper *Nouvelles féministes* and of the journal of feminist theory, *Questions féministes* – marks the moment when ‘first-wave’ feminism begins to slip over into the ‘second wave’. While her hugely influential book *The Second Sex* (1949) is clearly preoccupied with the ‘materialism’ of the first wave, it beckons to the second wave in its recognition of the vast difference between the interests of the two sexes and in its assault on men’s biological and psychological, as well as economic, discrimination against women. The book established with great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism. When a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying ‘I am a woman’: no man would do so. This fact reveals the basic asymmetry between

**Seldan, Brooker and Widdowson in *A Reader’s Guide to Literary Theory* 120**

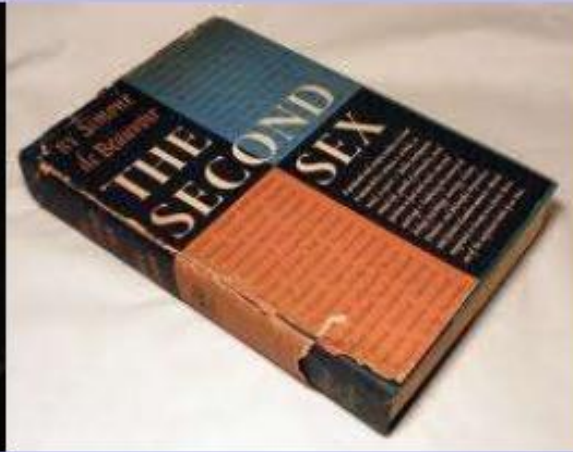
the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine': man defines the human, not woman, in an imbalance which goes back to the Old Testament. Being dispersed among men, women have no separate history, no natural solidarity; nor have they combined as other oppressed groups have. Woman is riveted into a lop-sided relationship with man: he is the 'One', she the 'Other'. Man's dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliance: 'legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth', and, *à la* Virginia Woolf, the assumption of woman as 'Other' is further internalized by women themselves.

**Seldan, Brooker and Widdowson in *A Reader's Guide to Literary Theory* 120**

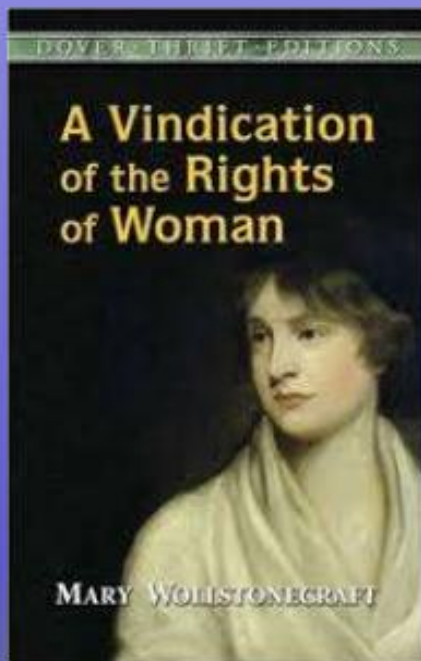


De Beauvoir's work carefully distinguishes between sex and gender, and sees an interaction between social and natural functions: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman . . . it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*.' It is the systems of interpretation in relation to biology, psychology, reproduction, economics, etc. which constitute the (male) presence of that 'someone else'. Making the crucial distinction between 'being female' and being constructed as 'a woman', de Beauvoir can posit the destruction of patriarchy if women will only break out of their objectification. In common with other 'first-wave' feminists, she wants freedom from biological difference, and she shares with them a distrust of 'femininity' – thus marking herself off from some contemporary feminists' celebration of the body and recognition of the importance of the unconscious.

**Seldan, Brooker and Widdowson in *A Reader's Guide to Literary Theory* 120**



Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*(1949)

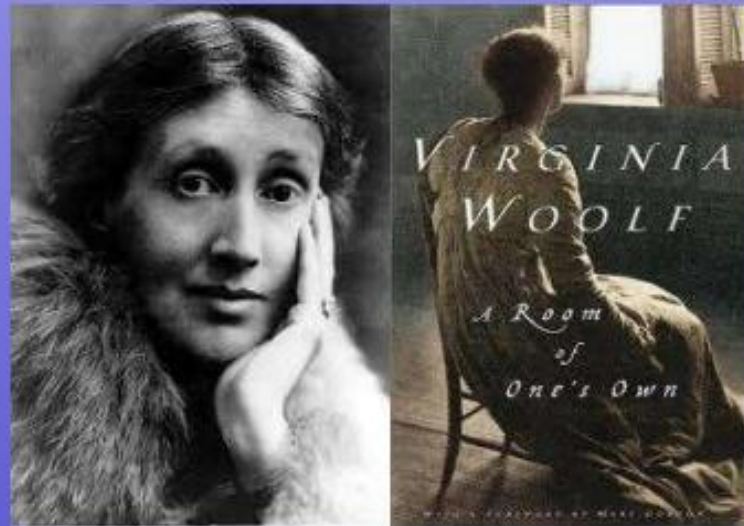


Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792)





Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* (1911)



Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1927)

# Second Wave Feminism in Literary Criticism



**Betty Friedan**

**Betty Friedan (1921 –2006) was an American feminist writer and activist.**

A leading figure in the women's movement in the United States, her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited with sparking the second wave of American feminism in the 20th century. In 1966, Friedan co-founded and was elected the first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which aimed to bring women “into the mainstream of American society now [in] fully equal partnership with men”.



One, perhaps over-simplifying, way of identifying the beginnings of the 'second wave' is to record the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which, in its revelation of the frustrations of white, heterosexual, middle-class American women – careerless and trapped in domesticity – put feminism on the national agenda, substantively and for the first time. (Friedan also founded NOW, the National Organisation of Women, in 1966.) 'Second-wave' feminism and feminist criticism are very much a product of – are shaped by and themselves help to shape – the liberationist movements of the mid-to-late 1960s. Although second-wave feminism continues to share the first wave's fight for women's rights in all areas, its focal emphasis shifts to the politics of reproduction, to women's 'experience', to sexual 'difference' and to 'sexuality', as at once a form of oppression and something to celebrate.

**Seldan, Brooker and Widdowson in *A Reader's Guide to Literary Theory* 120**

Five main foci are involved in most discussions of sexual difference: biology; experience; discourse; the unconscious; and social and economic conditions. Arguments which treat biology as fundamental and which play down socialization have been used mainly by men to keep women 'in their place'. The old Latin saying '*Tota mulier in utero*' ('Women is nothing but a womb') established this attitude early. If a woman's body is her destiny, then all attempts to question attributed sex-roles will fly in the face of the natural order. On the other hand, some radical feminists celebrate women's biological attributes as sources of superiority rather than inferiority, while others appeal to the special *experience* of woman as the source of positive female values in life and in art. Since only women, the argument goes, have undergone those specifically female life-experiences (ovulation, menstruation, parturition), only they can speak of a woman's life. Further, a woman's experience includes a different perceptual and emotional life; women do not see things in the same ways as men, and have different ideas and feelings about what is important or not important. An influential example of this approach is the work of Elaine Showalter (see below, pp. 126–9) which focuses on the literary representation of sexual differences in women's writing.

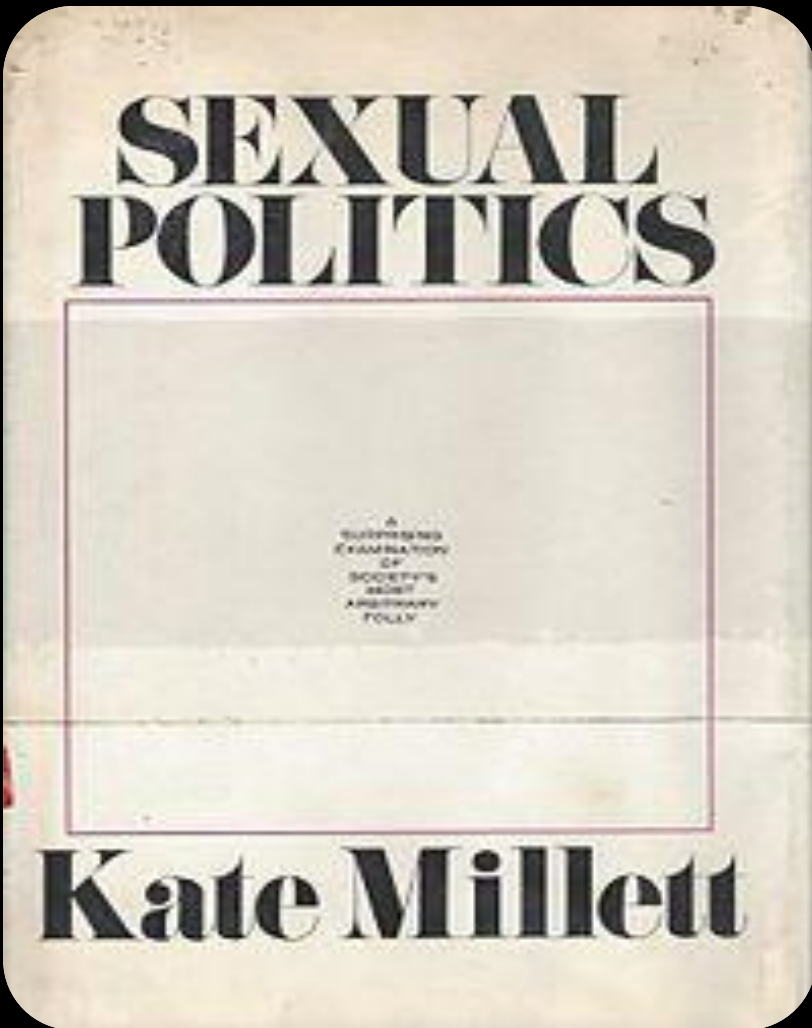


The third focus, discourse, has received a great deal of attention by feminists. Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980), as the title suggests, considers that women have been fundamentally oppressed by a male-dominated language. If we accept Michel Foucault's argument that what is 'true' depends on who controls discourse (see Chapter 7, p. 178ff), then it is apparent that men's domination of discourse has trapped women inside a male 'truth'. From this point of view it makes sense for women writers to contest men's control of language rather than create a separate, specifically 'feminine' discourse. The opposite view is taken by the female

Some feminists have broken completely with biologism by associating the 'female' with those processes which tend to undermine the authority of 'male' discourse. Whatever encourages or initiates a free play of meanings and prevents 'closure' is regarded as 'female'. Female sexuality is revolutionary, subversive, heterogeneous and 'open' in that it refuses to define female sexuality: if there is a female principle, it is simply to remain outside the male definition of the female.

Certain themes, then, dominate second-wave feminism: the omnipresence of patriarchy; the inadequacy for women of existing political organization; and the celebration of women's difference as central to the cultural politics of liberation. And these can be found running through many major second-wave writings, from popular interventions like Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), which explores the destructive neutralization of women within patriarchy, through the critical reassessments of socialism (Sheila Rowbotham) and psychoanalysis (Juliet Mitchell), to the radical (lesbian) feminism of Kate Millett and Adrienne Rich (for Rich, see Chapter 10, pp. 248–9). In feminist literary theory more particularly, it leads to the emergence of so-called 'Anglo-American' criticism, an empirical approach fronted by the 'gynocriticism' of Elaine Showalter, which concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's own culture. In dispute with





Millett argues that “sex has a frequently neglected political aspect” and goes on to discuss the role that patriarchy plays in sexual relations, looking especially at the works of **D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer**. Millett argues that these authors view and discuss sex in a patriarchal and sexist way. In contrast, she applauds the more nuanced gender politics of homosexual writer Jean Genet. Other writers discussed at length include Sigmund Freud, George Meredith, John Ruskin, and John Stuart Mill.



*The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) is a book by the radical feminist Shulamith Firestone. Written over a few months when Firestone was 25, it has been described as a classic of feminist thought.

Firestone argues that the “sexual class system” predates and runs deeper than any other form of oppression, and that the eradication of sexism will require a radical reordering of society: “The first women are fleeing the massacre, and, shaking and tottering, are beginning to find each other. ... This is painful: no matter how many levels of consciousness one reaches, the problem always goes deeper. It is everywhere. ... feminists have to question, **not just all of Western culture, but the organization of culture itself, and further, even the very organization of nature**”.

**The goal of the feminist revolution, she wrote, must be "not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself" so that genital differences no longer have cultural significance.**



# Kate Millett: sexual politics

Second-wave feminism in the United States took its impetus from the civil-rights, peace and other protest movements, and Kate Millett's radical feminism is of this order. First published in 1969, a year after Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* and just before Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, Eva Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes* and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (all in 1970), Millett's *Sexual Politics* at once marks the moment when second-wave feminism becomes a highly visible, self-aware and activist movement, and when it itself became the *cause-célèbre* text of that moment. It has been – certainly in the significant legacy of its title – perhaps the best-known and most influential book of its period, and it remains (despite its inadequacies: see below) a ferociously upbeat, comprehensive, witty and irreverent demolition-job on male culture; and in this, perhaps, it is a monument to its moment.

Millett's argument – ranging over history, literature, psychoanalysis, sociology and other areas – is that ideological indoctrination as much as economic inequality is the cause of women's oppression, an argument which opened up second-wave thinking about reproduction, sexuality and representation (especially verbal and visual 'images of women', and particularly pornography). Millett's title, *Sexual Politics*, announces her view of 'patriarchy', which she sees as pervasive and which demands 'a systematic overview – as a political institution'. Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women. Millett borrows from social science the important distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', where sex is determined biologically but 'gender' is a psychological concept which refers to *culturally* acquired sexual identity, and she and other feminists have attacked social scientists who treat the culturally learned 'female' characteristics (passivity, etc.) as 'natural'. She recognizes that women as much as men perpetuate these attitudes, and the acting-out of these sex-roles in the unequal and repressive relations of domination and subordination is what Millett calls 'sexual politics'.



# What Marxist Feminists believe?

- Women's subordination was a consequence of the introduction of private property, women became the property of men and the first oppressed class
- Women's oppression was caused by their economic dependence in the family but also in the work force, this keeps an exploitable reserve labour force
- Women have always had unpaid work (housewife) and most low paying and boring jobs
- Women must have equal participation in the economic production process
- Propose wages for housework, developing a system for paying women directly for their household work





# Marxist feminism

Socialist/Marxist feminism was a powerful strand of the second wave during the late 1960s and 1970s, in Britain in particular. It sought to extend Marxism's analysis of class into a women's history of their material and economic oppression, and especially of how the family and women's domestic labour are constructed by and reproduce the sexual division of labour. Like other 'male' forms of history, Marxism had ignored much of women's experience and activity (one of Sheila Rowbotham's most influential books is entitled *Hidden from History*), and Marxist feminism's primary task was to open up the complex relations between gender and the economy. Juliet Mitchell's early essay, 'Women: The Longest Revolution' (1966), was a pioneering attempt, *contra* the ahistorical work of radical feminists like Millett and Firestone, to historicize the structural control patriarchy exerts in relation to women's reproductive functions; and Sheila Rowbotham, in *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), recognized both that working-class women experience the double oppression of the sexual division of labour at work and in the home, and that Marxist historiography had largely ignored the domain of personal experience, and particularly that of female culture.

□ In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, published in 1884, inspired by and based on notes by Karl Marx to Lewis H. Morgan's 1877 book *Ancient Society*, Friedrich Engels writes about the earliest origin of the family structure, social hierarchy, and the concept of male wealth, drawing from both ancient and contemporary study. **He concludes that women originally had a higher social status, equal consideration in labor, and particularly, only females were sure to share a family name.** A woman pursuing monogamy, or even paired marriage, however, was socially unacceptable, so monogamy and paired marriage were a cultural desire of women. **As the earliest males did not even share the family name, Engels says, they did not know for sure who their children were or benefit from inheritance.**

□ **When agriculture first became abundant and the abundance was considered male wealth, as it was sourced from the male work environment away from the home, a deeper wish for male lineage and inheritance was founded.** To achieve that wish, women were not only granted their long-sought monogamy but forced into it as part of domestic servitude, while males pursued a hushed culture of "hetaerism". Engels describes this situation as coincidental **to the beginnings of forced servitude as a dominant feature of society, leading eventually to a European culture of class oppression, where the children of the poor were expected to be servants of the rich.**

## Michèle Barrett: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter

In her seminal text *Women's Oppression Today* (1980), Michèle Barrett outlines some of the central problems facing any attempt to forge a coalition of Marxist and feminist perspectives. How can a Marxist analysis, conceived on the basis of “a primary contradiction between labour and capital,” be reconciled with a feminist approach, which must begin with the relations of gender?<sup>12</sup> In general terms, suggests Barrett, the object of Marxist feminism must be to “identify the operation of gender relations” as they relate to the “processes of production and reproduction understood by historical materialism.” Marxist feminism must “explore the relations between the organization of sexuality, domestic production . . . and historical changes in the mode of production and systems of appropriation and exploitation.” Such an approach will stress the “relations between capitalism and the oppression of women” (WT, 9).



# Feminist Criticism

## ■ Elaine Showalter

- Coined term **gynocritics** or **gynocriticism**: process of “constructing a female framework for analysis of women’s literature to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt to male models and theories.”
- **Gynocriticism**
  - Label given to the study of women as writers
  - Subjects it deals with: the history, style, themes, genres, and structures of writings by women

# Gynocriticism

- Gynocriticism involves three major aspects. The first is the examination of female writers and their place in literary history. The second is the consideration of the treatment of female characters in books by both male and female writers. The third and most important aspect of gynocriticism is the discovery and exploration of a canon of literature written by women; gynocriticism seeks to appropriate a female literary tradition. In Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, she proposes the following three phases of women's writing:

# ELAINE SHOWALTER

*A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists  
from Brontë to Lessing.* Princeton: Princeton  
UP, 1977.

▣ Three phases:

Feminine: 1840-80 women writing like men

Feminist: 1880-1920 women advocating for their rights

Female: 1920-present women examining biological,  
linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural differences

▣ Gynocriticism: women need to study writing  
by women, their “mothers”



Literature'. She divides this tradition into three phases. The first, 'feminine', phase (1840–80) includes Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, and is one where women writers imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic standards which required that female authors remain gentlewomen. The 'feminist' phase (1880–1920) includes such radical feminist writers as Elizabeth Robins and Olive Schreiner, who *protest* against male values and advocate separatist utopias and suffragette sisterhoods. The third, 'female', phase (1920 onwards) inherited characteristics of the former periods and developed the idea of specifically female writing and female experience in a phase of *self-discovery*. For Showalter, Rebecca West, Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson were its most important early 'female' novelists. In the same period that Joyce and Proust were writing long novels of subjective consciousness, Richardson's equally long novel *Pilgrimage* took as its subject *female* consciousness. Her views on writing (see 'Women in the Arts', 1925) anti-

# French Poststructuralist Feminism

- French post-structuralist feminism takes post-structuralism and combines it with feminist views and looks to see if a literary work has successfully used the process of mimesis on the image of the female. If successful, then a new image of a woman has been created by a woman for a woman, therefore it is not a biased opinion created by men. Along with **Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous is considered one of the mothers of post-structuralist feminist theory.** Since the 1990s, these three together with **Bracha Ettinger** have considerably influenced French feminism and feminist psychoanalysis.
- **Écriture féminine literally means women's writing.** It is a philosophy that promotes women's experiences and feelings to the point that it strengthens the work. It is a strain of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the 1970s. Hélène Cixous first uses this term in her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* in which she asserts:
  - Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. Écriture féminine places experience before language, and privileges the anti-linear, cyclical writing so often frowned upon by patriarchal society.**

# French feminism: Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray

Bearing in mind that the fallout from 'French' feminist critical theory is constrained by no national boundary, it is nevertheless the case that this other key strand of the 'second wave' originated in France. Deriving from Simone de Beauvoir's perception of woman as 'the Other' to man, sexuality (together with class and race) is identified as a binary opposition (man/woman, black/white) which registers 'difference' between groups of people – differences which are manipulated socially and culturally in ways which cause one group to dominate or oppress another. French feminist theoreticians in particular, in seeking to break down conventional, male-constructed stereotypes of sexual difference, have focused on language as at once the domain in which such stereotypes are structured, and evidence of the liberating sexual difference which may be described in a specifically 'women's language'. Literature is one highly significant discourse in which this can be perceived and mobilized. (Black and lesbian feminists in America and elsewhere have developed and/or critiqued these ideas in relation to the ever more complex positionings of those whose 'difference' is over-determined by race and/or sexual preference.)



# French Feminism

- French feminism refer to a branch of feminist thought from a group of feminists in France from the 1970s to the 1990s.
- French feminism, compared to Anglophone feminism, is distinguished by an approach which is more philosophical and literary.
- Its being less concerned with political doctrine and generally focused on theories of “the body”.

# New French Feminism 2

- Hysteria was hailed as a specifically female transgressive language: chaotic , associative - antidote to literary styles and modes of philosophical reasoning which defined women as inferior to men... by celebrating the opposite of patriarchal rationality as woman's imaginative and intellectual sphere, they alienated many women who felt that this position was a stab in the back to the longstanding struggle to have women's rationality recognised.
- Strategic essentialism: a woman's body determines not only her identity but also a mode of writing and thinking fundamentally different from and in revolt against masculine modes



**Julia Kristeva**

- **Julia Kristeva (1941-Present)** is a **Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst, feminist, and, most recently, novelist, who has lived in France since the mid-1960s.** She is now a professor emeritus at the University Paris Diderot. The author of more than 30 books, including *Powers of Horror*, *Tales of Love*, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, *Proust and the Sense of Time*, and the trilogy *Female Genius*.
- Her sizeable body of work includes books and essays which address **intertextuality, the semiotic, and abjection, in the fields of linguistics, literary theory and criticism, psychoanalysis, biography and autobiography, political and cultural analysis, art and art history.** She is prominent in structuralist and poststructuralist thought.



## Symbolic and Semiotic

One of Kristeva's most important contributions is that **signification is composed of two elements, the symbolic and the semiotic**. As explained by Augustine Perumalil, Kristeva's **semiotic is closely related to the infantile pre-Oedipal**. **The semiotic is a realm associated with the musical, the poetic, the rhythmic, and that which lacks structure and meaning**. It is closely tied to the "feminine", and represents the **undifferentiated state of the pre-Mirror Stage infant**.

Upon entering the Mirror Stage, the child learns to distinguish between self and other, and enters the realm of shared cultural meaning, known as the symbolic. **In *Desire in Language* (1980), Kristeva describes the symbolic as the space in which the development of language allows the child to become a "speaking subject", and to develop a sense of identity separate from the mother**. **This process of separation is known as abjection, whereby the child must reject and move away from the mother in order to enter into the world of language, culture, meaning, and the social**. This realm of language is called the symbolic and is contrasted with the semiotic in that it is associated with the masculine, the law, and structure. **Kristeva departs from Lacan in the idea that even after entering the symbolic, the subject continues to oscillate between the semiotic and the symbolic**.

## The Concept Abjection

This thinking is linked to the concept of 'abjection' in Kristeva's work, a concept which names the horror of being unable to distinguish between the 'me' and 'not-me' – of which the first and primary instance is the embryo's existence within the mother (Kristeva, 1982). The 'abject' is what the subject seeks to expel in order to achieve an independent identity, but cannot, since the body is unable to cease both taking in and expelling 'waste' (body fluids, excrement, bile, vomit, mucus). The abject is therefore the troubled and recurrent marker bordering the clean and unclean, the self and other – including, primarily, the self and its mother. As Kelly Oliver

# Julia Kristeva

- The Symbolic
  - Words clearly represent objects
  - Logical and ordered
  - Scientific Discourse
  - Authority and Power
- The Semiotic (not to be confused with semiotics)
  - Pre-Oedipal Babble
  - Rhythm and sound
  - Contradictions, disruptions, absences, silences in language
  - Poetic Language
- Language is constantly moving back and forth between the symbolic and the semiotic
- Meaning is not always expressed in words: music
- We must analyze both the conscious and unconscious, the mind and the body, the cultural and the natural to make meaning.
- Subjectivity happens through language : speaking subject
- Because language is dynamic, the subject is always in process.
- Identity is not fixed

For Kristeva, such language came from a **pre-Oedipal state, from the realm of the “semiotic,” prior to the process of cultural gender formation.** She was aware, however, that reliance solely on this “maternal” language would entail the risk of political marginalization.



Kristeva's work (see also Chapter 7, pp. 161–2) has frequently taken as its central concept a polarity between 'closed', rational systems and 'open', disruptive, 'irrational' systems. She has considered poetry to be the 'privileged site' of analysis, because it is poised between the two types of system, and because at certain times poetry has opened itself to the basic impulses of desire and fear which operate outside the 'rational' systems. Her important distinction between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' is the progenitor of many other polarities. In *avant-garde* literature, the primary processes (as described in Lacan's version of Freud's theory of dreams) invade the rational ordering of language and threaten to disrupt the unified subjectivity of the 'speaker' and the reader. The 'subject' is seen no longer as the source of meaning but as the site of meaning, and may therefore undergo a radical 'dispersal' of identity and loss of coherence. The 'drives' experienced by the child in the pre-Oedipal phase are like a language but not yet ordered into one. For this 'semiotic' material to become 'symbolic' it must be stabilized, and this involves repression of the flowing and rhythmic drives. The utterance which most approximates to a semiotic discourse is the pre-Oedipal 'babble' of the child. However, language itself retains some of this semiotic flux, and the poet is especially attuned to tapping its resonances. Because

# WHAT IS INTERTEXTUALITY

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**The shaping of texts' meanings by other texts.**

- ✘ Introduced by Julia Kristeva
- ✘ Kristeva argued against the concept of a text as a isolated entity which operates in a self-contained manner and states that:

**“any text is the absorption and transformation of another”**

# Hélène Cixous (b.1937)

- Theorist, poet, novelist, playwright, philosopher, and literary critic
- Born in Oran, Algeria, in 1937 of Spanish/French and Jewish/German descent.
- Entered the English-speaking literary scene with the publication of “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976[1975])
- *Écriture féminine*: both theory and practice. A mode of writing that represents what is repressed in the Symbolic order (Derrida and Lacan). Revolutionary articulation of non-hierarchical difference as opposed to a phallogocentric language based on binary oppositions like man/woman, mind/body, self/other, where the first term is invariably dominant.



# Hélène Cixous

- Écriture féminine
  - Feminine writing
  - Writing the body
  - The unconscious, fluid, multiple, Imaginary, feminine sexuality
  - Cixous' example: the language of Freud's hysterics
- The "other bisexuality"
  - A refusal of the self/other binary
  - Sexuality is from anybody, any body part, at any time



Medusa, by Caravaggio (1592:1600) – from Wikipedia.com

“Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies [...]. A woman's body with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor – once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction – will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.” – From “The Laugh of the Medusa”

literary writing. Hélène Cixous is a creative writer and philosopher who argues for a positive representation of femininity in a discourse she calls '*écriture féminine*', and her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) is a celebrated manifesto of 'women's writing' which calls for women to put their 'bodies' into their writing. While Virginia Woolf abandoned the struggle to speak of the female body, Cixous writes ecstatically of the teeming female unconscious: 'Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.' The female imagination is infinite and beautiful; the truly liberated woman writer, when she exists, will say:

I . . . overflow; my desires have invented new desire, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again . . . I have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune.

Since writing is the place where subversive thought can germinate, it is especially shameful that the phallogocentric tradition has, for the most part, succeeded in suppressing woman's voice. Woman must uncensor herself, recover 'her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal'; she must throw off her guilt (for being too hot or too frigid, too motherly or too unmaternal). But the heart of Cixous' theory is her rejection of theory: women's writing 'will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system'. Always the 'Other'



# Luce Irigaray

- Subjectivity looks at how a woman herself (the "subject") saw her role, and how she saw that role as contributing (or not) to her identity and meaning
- Becoming the subject of her own sexuality- pleasure is diversified
  - Multiple nature of female desire
  - Not sacrificing any pleasure
  - Not identifying with anyone in particular
  - Auto-eroticism, homosexuality, love of other women as possibilities

Luce Irigaray

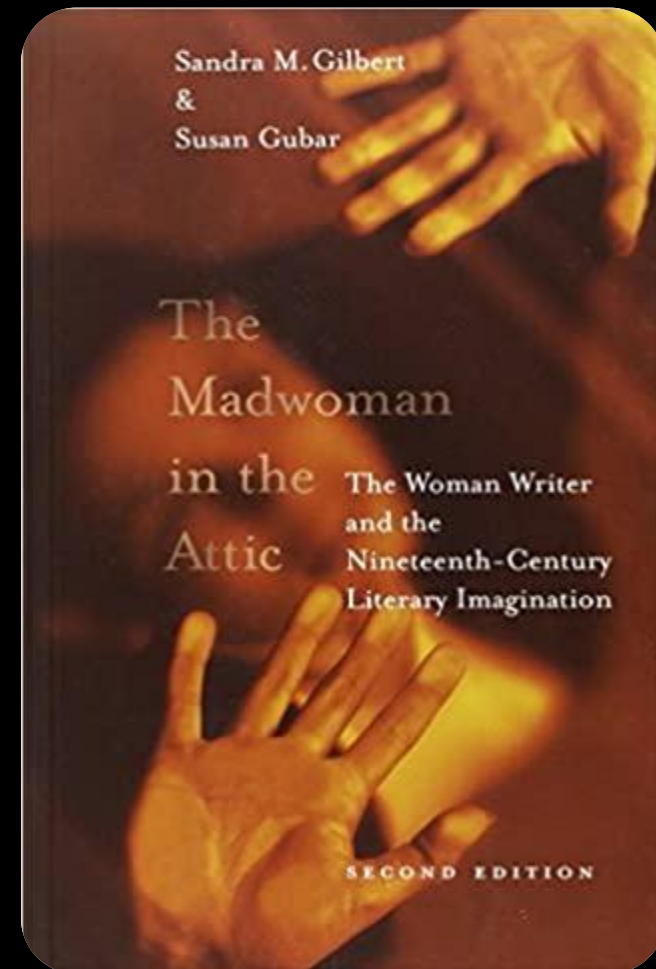




***The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*** is a 1979 book by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in which they examine Victorian literature from a feminist perspective.

## The Mad Woman in the Attic

- While it may be easy to construe that feminist writers embody the "madwoman" or "monster," Gilbert and Gubar stressed the importance of killing off both figures because neither the angel nor the monster are accurate representations of women or women writers. Instead, Gilbert and Gubar claimed that female writers should strive for definition beyond this dichotomy, whose options are limited by a patriarchal point of view.



# Third-wave Feminist Literary Criticism



**Judith Butler  
(1956-Present)**

- ❑ **Judith Pamela Butler (1956-Present)** is an **American philosopher and gender theorist** whose work has influenced political philosophy, ethics, and the fields of **third-wave feminist, queer, and literary theory.**
- ❑ Butler is best known for her books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), in which she challenges conventional notions of gender and develops her **theory of gender performativity.**

# 1988: “PERFORMATIVE ACTS AND GENDER CONSTITUTION”

- Gender is performative
    - Through performative acts, we *become*
  - Gender is separate from biological sex
  - Gender is not natural; it is socially constructed
    - But we think it's natural because of gender norms
  - Gender varies by time period and culture
  - Gender categories and oppression
  - Binaries: heterosexual v. homosexual
  - Gender performativeness is not gender expression
- Gender is something you do, not something you are.*<sup>3</sup>

In the essay “**Performative Acts and Gender Constitution**” (1988), **Judith Butler** proposes that **gender is performative**. Butler argues that gender is best **perceived as performative, which suggests that it has a social audience**. It also suggests that performances of woman are compelled and enforced by historical social practice. **During historical conventions and people's repetitive practice of citation, materialization, iteration, and sedimentation to become norms, and who do not follow the norms would be punished.**





To say that gender is performative is a little different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman.

— *Judith Butler* —

AZ QUOTES

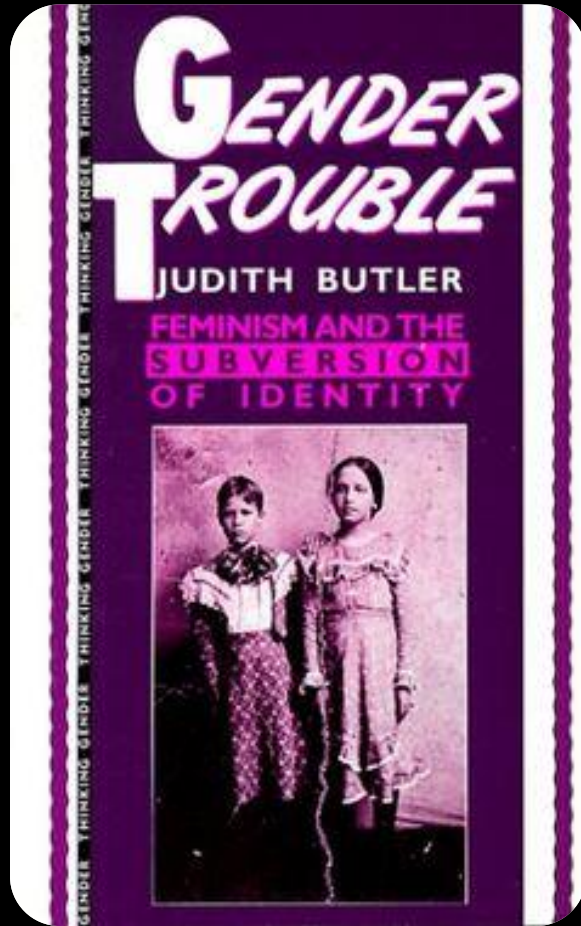
GENDER= constitution of identity culturally and socially instituted through REPETITION OF STYLIZED ACTS through TIME.



WHAT IS AN ACT?

ACT= Bodily gestures, styles, movements (language as well) = *stylized* acts that must constantly be REPEATED.

The repetition itself produces a set of behaviors and reified forms which APPEARS as THE NATURAL CONFIGURATION OF BODIES (ontological “core”/original matrix of gender).



□ ***Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*** (1990) is a book by the philosopher Judith Butler, in which the author argues that gender is a kind of improvised performance. **The work is influential in feminism, women's studies, and lesbian and gay studies, and has also enjoyed widespread popularity outside of traditional academic circles.**

□ Butler criticizes one of the central assumptions of feminist theory: that there exists an identity and a subject that requires representation in politics and language. For Butler, "women" and "woman" are categories complicated by factors such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Moreover, the universality presumed by these terms parallels the assumed universality of the patriarchy, and erases the particularity of oppression in distinct times and places. Butler thus eschews identity politics in favor of a new, coalitional feminism that critiques the basis of identity and gender.

# Body as a Space for Performance

- ❑ Butler questions the notion that "the body" itself is a natural entity that "admits no genealogy", a usual given without explanation: **"How are the contours of the body clearly marked as the taken-for-granted ground or surface upon which gender signification are inscribed, a mere facticity devoid of value, prior to significance?"** (129). Building on the thinking of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, outlined in her *Purity and Danger* (1966), Butler claims that the boundaries of the body have been drawn to instate certain taboos about limits and possibilities of exchange.
- ❑ Thus the hegemonic and homophobic press has read the pollution of the body that **AIDS** brings about as corresponding to the pollution of the homosexual's sexual activity, in particular his crossing the forbidden bodily boundary of the perineum. In other words, Butler's claim is that "the body is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discrete by virtue of its stable boundaries" (133). Butler proposes the practice of **drag as a way to destabilize the exteriority/interiority binary, finally to poke fun at the notion that there is an "original" gender, and to demonstrate playfully to the audience, through an exaggeration, that all gender is in fact scripted, rehearsed, and performed.**



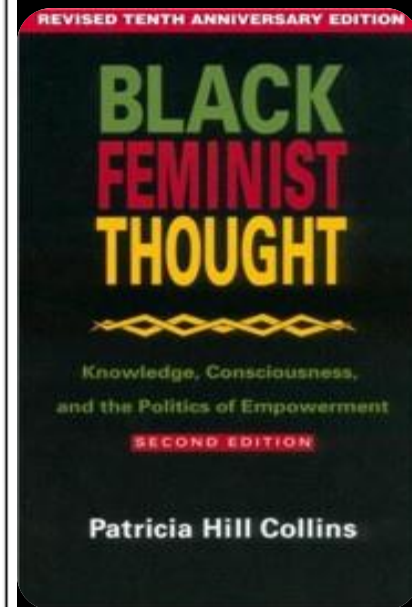
# Drag Show



Cross-dressing elements of performance traditions are widespread cultural phenomena. In England, actors in Shakespearean plays, and all Elizabethan theatre, were all male; female parts were played by young men in drag. Shakespeare used the conventions to enrich the gender confusions of *As You Like It*, and Ben Jonson manipulated the same conventions in *Epicæne, or The Silent Woman* (1609). The plot device of the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) turns upon this Elizabethan convention. During the reign of Charles II the rules were relaxed to allow women to play female roles on the London stage, reflecting the French fashion, and the convention of men routinely playing female roles consequently disappeared. However, in current-day British pantomime, the Pantomime dame is a traditional role played by a man., while the Principal boy, such as Prince Charming or Dick Whittington, is played by a girl.

# Black Feminism

- Black Feminism developed out of dissatisfaction of other feminists perspectives.
- They argue that black women suffer the most because it is a double blow – being a woman and being black.
- For them, while white women began to have access to some rights, such as working in businesses and government, black women were still greatly discriminated against.



# The Dimensions of Oppression

**Economic Dimension:** The exploitation of Black women's labor essential to U.S. capitalism – the “iron pots and kettles” symbolizing Black women's long-standing ghettoization in service occupations.

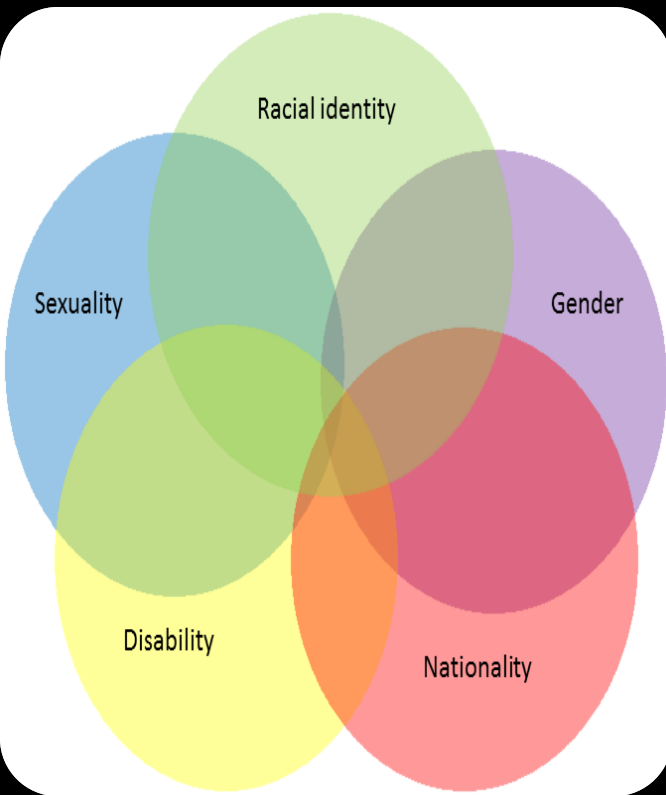
**Political Dimension:** Forbidding Black women to vote, excluding from public office, and withholding equitable treatment in the criminal justice system all substantiate the political subordination of Black women.

**Ideological Dimension:** Negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression.





# Third-wave Feminist Movements



## Intersectional Feminism

- ❑ Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of one's social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination. It aims to broaden the agenda of the first waves of feminism, which largely focused on the experiences of white, middle-class women. The broad agenda means that intersectionality is used to find combinations of injustices that are felt by members of society.
- ❑ For example, a black woman might face discrimination from a company that is not distinctly due to her race (**because the company does not discriminate against black men**) nor her gender (**because the company does not discriminate against white women**), but by a **unique combination of the two**. Intersectional feminism aims to separate itself from white feminism by acknowledging the fact that all women have different experiences and identities.

# Sex-positive feminism



Susie Bright, a writer and activist, one of the first persons to be referred to as a sex-positive feminist.

- ❑ Sex-positive feminism is a movement that began in the early 1980s centering on the idea that sexual freedom is an essential component of women's freedom. **Some feminists became involved in the sex-positive feminist movement in response to efforts by anti-pornography feminists to put pornography at the center of a feminist explanation of women's oppression.**
- ❑ They oppose legal or social efforts to control sexual activities between consenting adults, whether they are initiated by the government, other feminists, opponents of feminism, or any other institution. **They embrace sexual minority groups, endorsing the value of coalition-building with marginalized groups.**

# Eco-Feminism

## ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES: Ecofeminism

### Ecofeminism

- ❖ **Ecofeminism** describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology
- ❖ Ecofeminism connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment, and argues that there is a connection between women and nature.

## What is Eco-Feminism?



1. Emphasizes the relationship between women and nature
2. Draws intersections between man's dominion of nature and the oppression of women
3. Nature and women are both controlled, dominated and exploited by the same cause - patriarchal hierarchy
4. The mistreatment of women is mirrored in the mistreatment of nature
5. Women are uniquely at risk from environmental destruction



# Poststructuralist Feminism (1980s-)

- A radical critique of all meta-narratives of human progress and emancipation (seen as based on Western experience).
- Poststructuralist feminists concentrate on the incremental changes and socially contextualised activities and strategies which women use to improve their social position.
- Poststructuralists focus on everyday practices and how they either allow or close off access to resources in any given societal situation.
- *Pace* Standpoint Feminists, there is no authentic women's experience or standpoint from which to construct an understanding of the social and political world, because women's lives are inextricably embedded in specific social and cultural relations.
- 'Masculinity' or 'femininity' is constructed through language, symbols, stories and practices that are woven into the fabric of everyday life. Gender is discursively constructed and as a category in constant flux.
- Discrimination and reinforcement of gender patterns is constructed through the language (specification of women roles).
- Judith Butler on transgender births
- We cannot, then, speak of women (or men) as having a fixed essence.

# Poststructuralist Feminism, Gender Studies, and Queer Theory

“Just as deconstructionists see everything as multiple and feminists see many ways to be a woman and many ways to enact gender, so queer studies suggests that there are many ways to enact gender and sexual desire” (Parker 179).

Queer studies comes out of Gay and Lesbian Studies, but moves beyond a binary view of sexuality.

Parker, Robert Dale. *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

# Transfeminism

- ❑ **Transfeminism, also written trans feminism, has been defined by scholar and activist Emi Koyama as "a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond."** Koyama notes that it "is also open to other queers, intersex people, trans men, non-trans women, non-trans men and others who are sympathetic toward needs of trans women and consider their alliance with trans women to be essential for their own liberation.
- ❑ According to Emi Koyama, there are two "primary principles of transfeminism": **First, Koyama states that all people should not only be allowed to live their own lives in whichever way they choose and define themselves however they feel is right, but should also be respected by society for their individuality and uniqueness.** Included is the right to individualized gender expression without the fear of retaliation. **Koyama's second principle states that each individual has every right, and is the only one to have the right, to possess complete control over their own bodies.** There shall be no form of authority - political, medical, religious, or otherwise - **that can override a person's decisions regarding their bodies and their wellbeing, and their autonomy is fully in the hands of that sole individual.**



# Feminist Literary Criticism of Three Novels Prescribed in your Syllabus

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

## Moll Flanders

DANIEL DEFOE



## JANE EYRE

CHARLOTTE BRONTË



## PRIDE AND PREJUDICE



## THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN NINETEENTH CENTURY:

- Slaves
- Caged birds
- Social penalties were too high – could not have children or cohabit with man
- Uneducated
- Banned from Universities
- Low paid jobs
- Reproductive machine
- In mid century 30% women over 20 were unmarried
- Spinsters were forced to emigrate
- Marriage is a vow to obey husband
- Properties were inherited by their husband



# Moll Flanders



*The full title of Moll Flanders gives an apt summary of the plot: "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, Etc. Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums."*



# *Pride and Prejudice*

*Pride and Prejudice* is a romantic novel of manners written by Jane Austen in 1813. **The novel follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet**, the dynamic protagonist of the book who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgments and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness. Its humour lies in its honest depiction of manners, education, marriage, and money during the Regency era in Great Britain.

**Mr Bennet of Longbourn estate has five daughters, but his property is entailed and can only be passed to a male heir. His wife also lacks an inheritance, so his family will be destitute upon his death.** Thus it is imperative that at least one of the girls marry well to support the others, which is a motivation that drives the plot. **The novel revolves around the importance of marrying for love, not for money or social prestige**, despite the communal pressure to make a wealthy match.

# Scenes from PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

A Novel by **JANE AUSTEN**

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."*

Fitzwilliam Darcy  
Sir William Lucas—Elizabeth Bennet



*"Mr Darcy, you must allow me to present this young lady to you as a very desirable partner. You cannot refuse to dance...when so much beauty is before you."*

*Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard. Her sisters were uneasy for her, but her mother was delighted.*



Jane Bennet



*Mr Denny addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce his friend, Mr Wickham.*

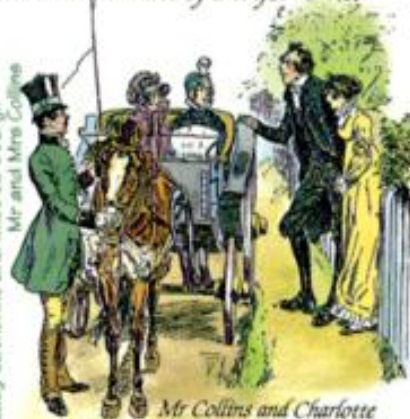
Lydia and Kitty Bennet  
Mr Collins—Mr George Wickham—Mr Denny



Mr and Mrs Bennet

*"You must come and make Lizzy marry Mr Collins, for she vows she will not have him; and if you do not make haste he will change his mind and not have her."*

Lady Catherine and Miss de Bourgh  
Mr and Mrs Collins



*Mr Collins and Charlotte were both standing at the gate in conversation with the ladies.*

Elizabeth—Mr Darcy



*"I have been walking in the grove some time, in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading that letter?"*

*"I never saw any one so shocked. He could not speak a word for full ten minutes."*



Jane—Mr and Mrs Bennet

Mr Dingley—Jane—Elizabeth



*On opening the door she perceived her sister and Bingley standing together over the hearth.*



Mrs Bennet

*"Why, Jane you never dropped a word of this - you sly thing!"*

Elizabeth—Mr Darcy

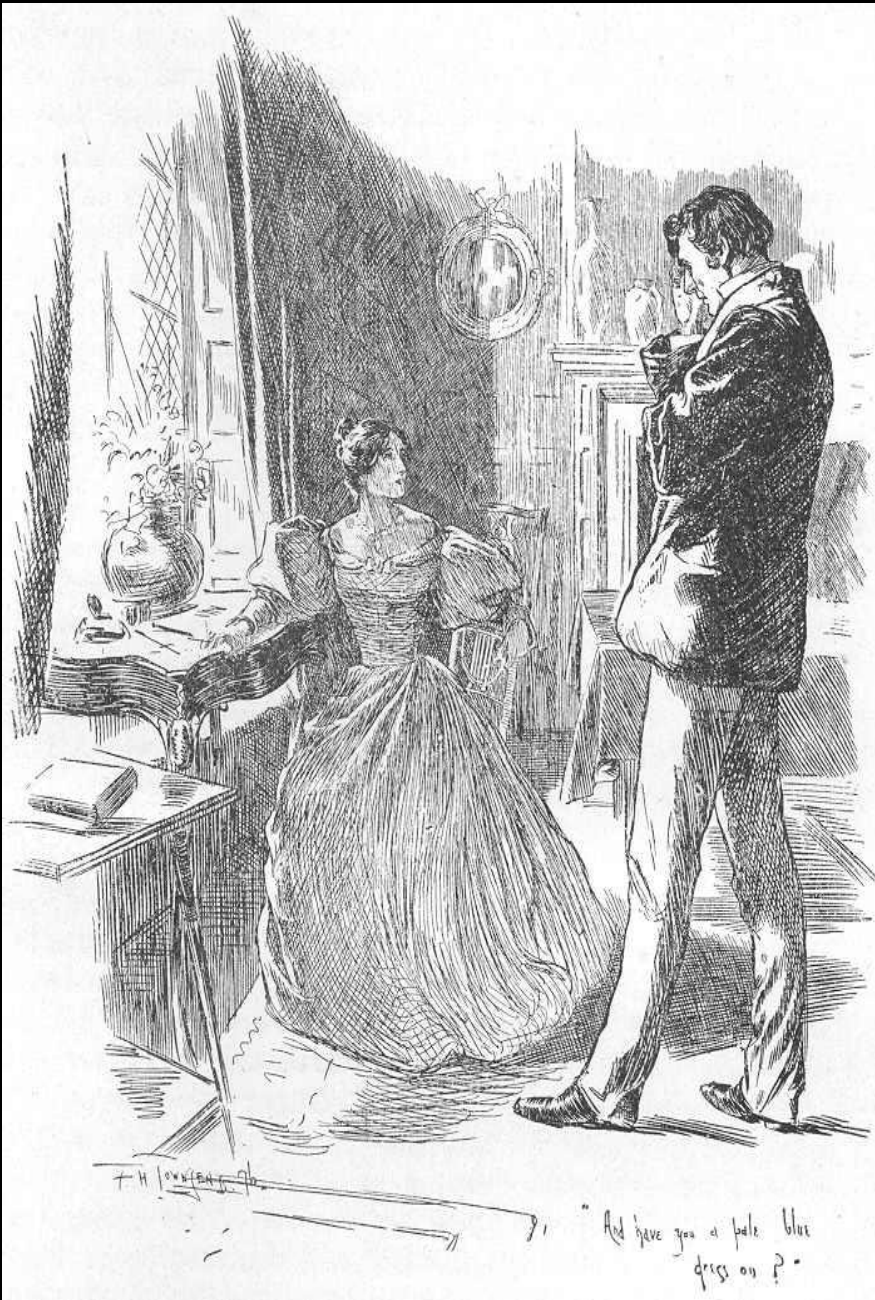


*"Now, be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"*

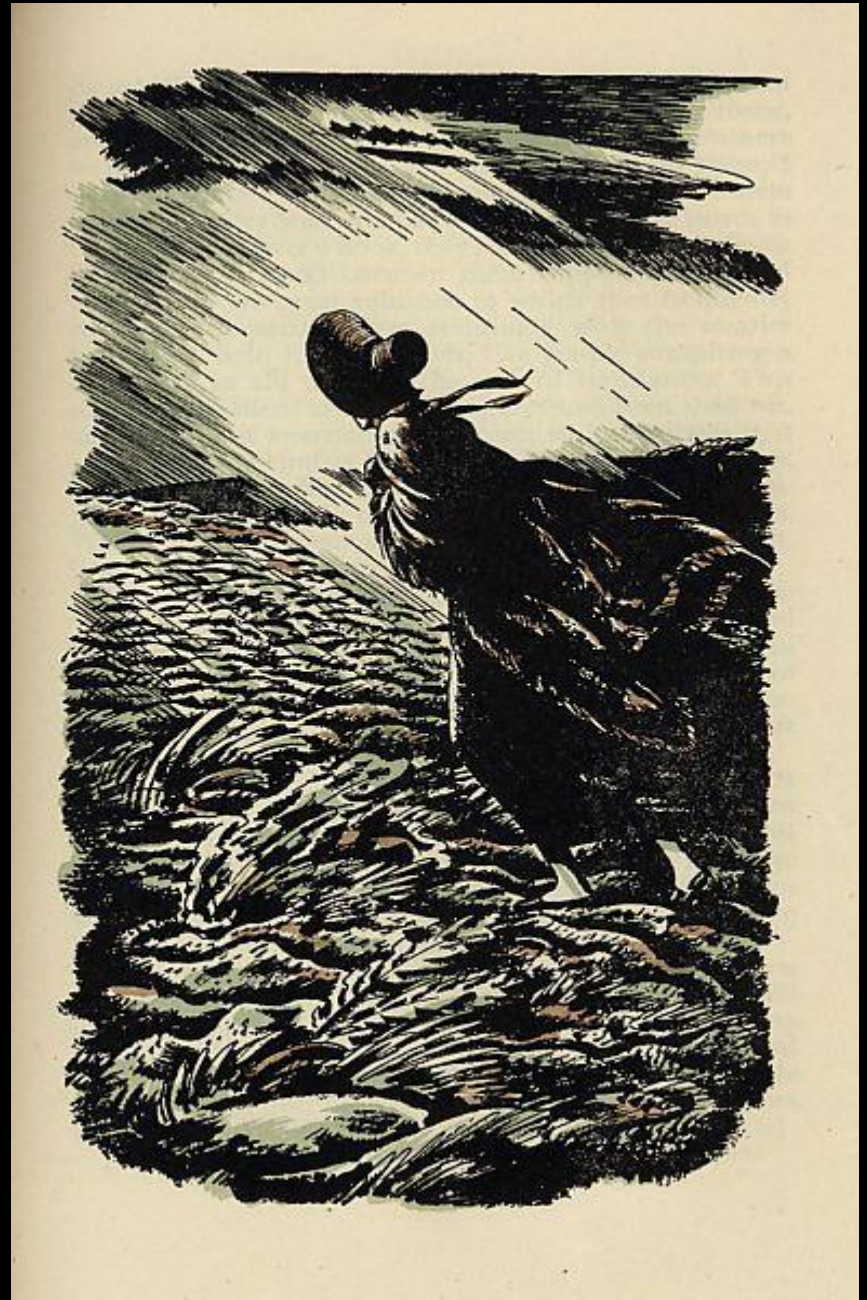
# *Jane Eyre*

**The novel is a first-person narrative from the perspective of the title character (1847).** The novel's setting is somewhere in the north of England, late in the reign of George III (1760–1820). It goes through five distinct stages: Jane's childhood at Gateshead Hall, where she is emotionally and physically abused by her aunt and cousins; her education at Lowood School, where she gains friends and role models but suffers privations and oppression; **her time as governess at Thornfield Hall**, where she falls in love with her mysterious employer, Edward Fairfax Rochester; her time in the Moor House, during which her earnest but cold clergyman cousin, St. John Rivers, proposes to her; and ultimately her reunion with, and marriage to, her beloved Rochester. **Throughout these sections, the novel provides perspectives on a number of important social issues and ideas, many of which are critical of the status quo.**





"And have you a pale blue  
dress on?"



# A List of the Major Works on Feminist Philosophy

## Major works

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*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

*The Subjection of Women* (1869)

*The Origin of the Family, Private Property  
and the State* (1884)

*The Second Sex* (1949)

*The Feminine Mystique* (1963)

*Sexual Politics* (1969)

*The Dialectic of Sex* (1970)

*Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974)

*This Sex Which is Not One* (1977)

*Gyn/Ecology* (1978)

*Throwing Like a Girl* (1980)

*In a Different Voice* (1982)

*The Politics of Reality* (1983)

*Women, Race, and Class* (1983)

*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984)

*The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986)

*Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (1989)

*Gender Trouble* (1990)

*Black Feminist Thought* (1990)

*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993)

*The Promise of Happiness* (2010)

# Evolution of Feminist Thought: Thinking through Quotations & Pictures

## First Wave Feminism

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*Parliaments have stopped laughing at woman suffrage, and politicians have begun to dodge! It is the inevitable premonition of coming victory.*

— Carrie Chapman Catt (1859–1947)

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*I always feel the movement is a sort of mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end.*

— Alice Paul (1885–1977)

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*Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gibbs me any best place! And ain't I a woman! Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seem 'em mos' all sold into slavery, and when I cried out my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?*

— Sojourner Truth (1797–1883)

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*The woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband.*

— Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

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*As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is my world.*

— Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)

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# Second Wave Feminism

There are very few jobs that actually require a penis or vagina. All other jobs should be open to everybody.

— Florynce Kennedy (1916–2000)

A woman reading Playboy feels a little like a Jew reading a Nazi manual.

— Gloria Steinem (1934–)







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*Women are not inherently passive or peaceful. We're not inherently anything but human.*

— Robin Morgan (1941–)

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*Men will often admit other women are oppressed but not you.*

— Sheila Rowbotham (1943–)

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*We've begun to raise our daughters more like our sons . . . but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.*

— Gloria Steinem (1934–)

---



# Third Wave Feminism

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*For girls to pick up guitars and scream their heads off in a totally oppressive, fucked up, male dominated culture is to seize power . . . we recognize this as a political act.*

— Tobi Vail, Bikini Kill

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*I live by my own standards. I am my own judge and jury. I refuse to look/do/say whatever it is I'm supposed to. I may burn bridges, but I don't want to go back there anyway.*

— Bilyana Vujick, DIY Feminism

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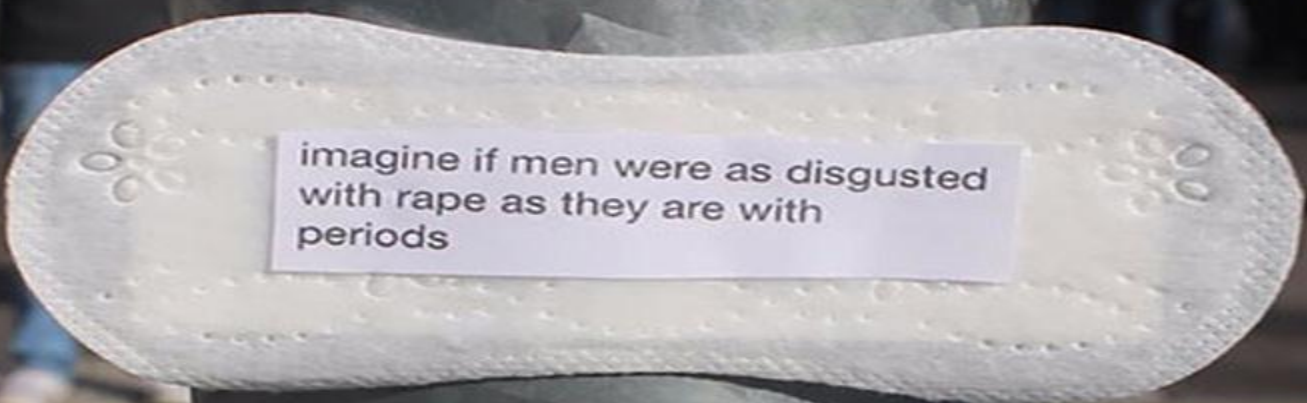


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*It's possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time.*

— Pinkfloor

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A photograph of a white sanitary pad with a small white rectangular label in the center. The pad is placed on a dark, textured surface, possibly a metal pole. The background is blurred, showing people walking on a sidewalk. The text on the label reads: "imagine if men were as disgusted with rape as they are with periods".

imagine if men were as disgusted  
with rape as they are with  
periods

# Change of Feminist Thought over the Years

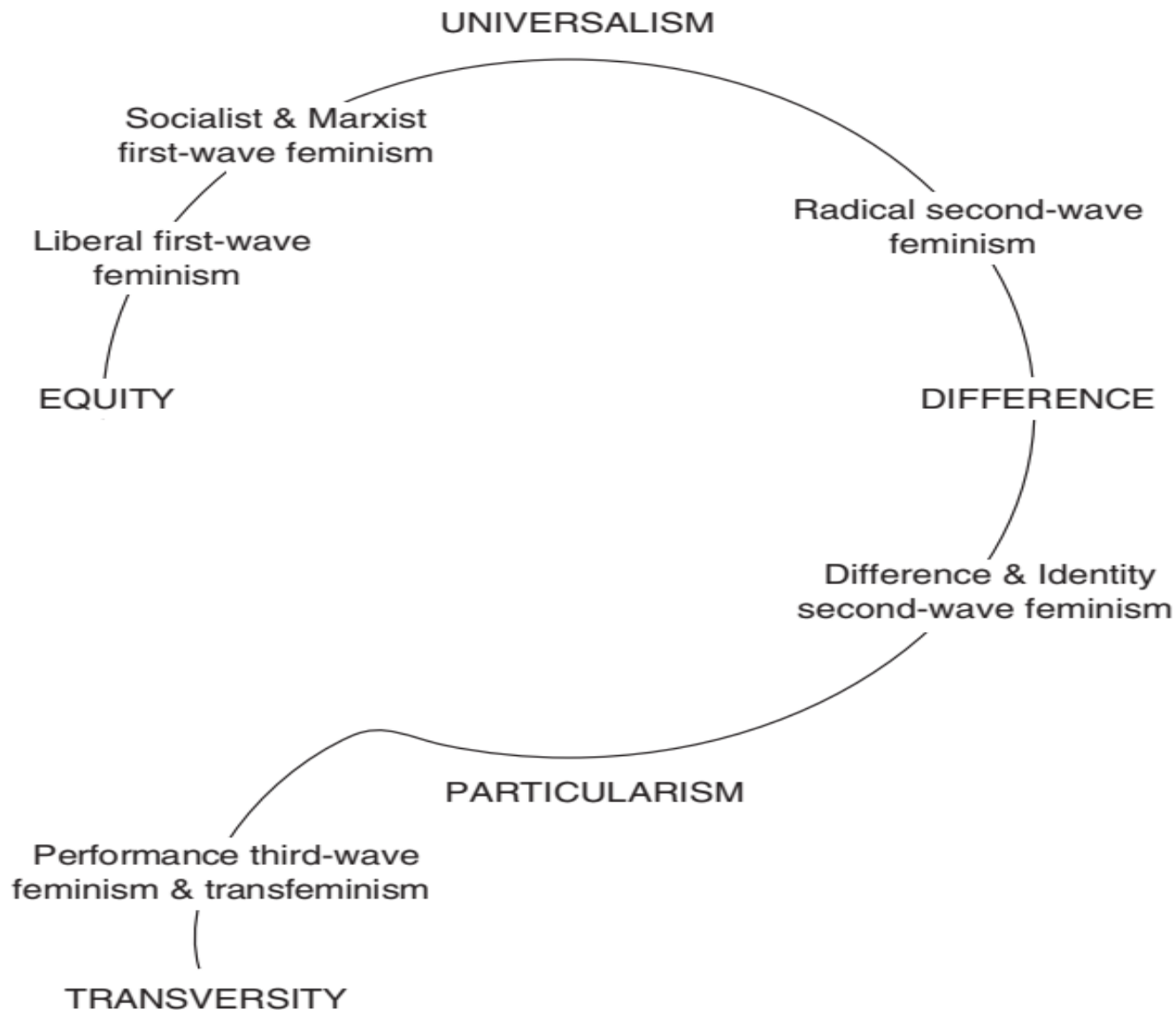
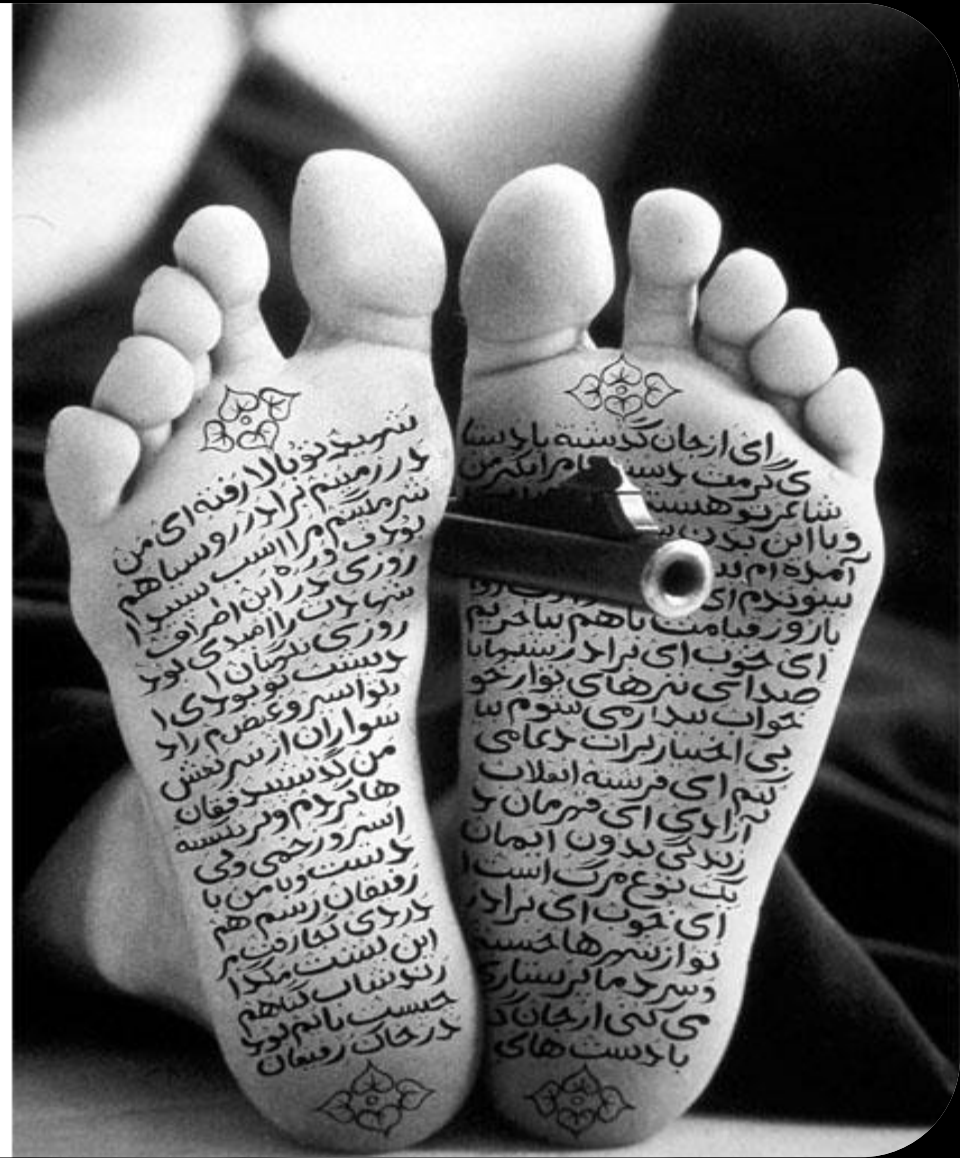


Figure 1.1 Feminist Positions: From Equity to Transversity



**Thank You!**