

A Glossary of Women's Studies Terms

androgynous mind: Virginia Woolf introduced this term in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) to indicate the creative mentality that partakes of both masculine (andro) and feminine (gyno) qualities. Heilbrun and Bazin see it as a balancing of "the evanescent masculine and the eternal feminine" as typical of the enlightened state, yet Showalter and others have seen it as a "sexist myth in disguise," reifying binary stereotypes. See Elizabeth Wright's "Evaluating Woolf's Androgynous Mind":
(<http://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/ElizabethWrightArticleIssue14.htm>)

binary thinking: black and white thinking, the inability to see "gray areas" or a middle between two opposing categories.

canon/canonization: list of generally recognized important works in a field, or the process of making such a list. In feminist terms, as long as learning disciplines were controlled exclusively by white males, very few women or ethnically diverse authors were included in this list.

chicana feminisms: feminist thinking, writing, and action on behalf of Chicanas and Latinas. See Definitions at <http://www.chicanas.com/defs.html> , and further discussion at La Chola: <http://brownfemipower.com/archives/2471#more-2471>

circular and linear thinking: linear thinking tends to be goal-driven, solely pursuing the lines dictated by logic and evidence in pursuit of its goals or conclusions; circular thinking explores "around" a subject, often pausing for multiple viewpoints, networking in ways that may not seem to bear directly on the problem at hand, and as a result this type of thinking tends to develop ideas within a larger context, thus locating multiple perspectives in its conclusions. Circular thinking is not to be confused with circular reasoning, a fallacy which embeds the conclusion as part of the argument, "begging the question."

consciousness-raising: a form of networking to raise political and social gender awareness .Initiated by radical feminists in the late 60s-early 70s, consciousness-raising sessions involve small groups of women meeting weekly to discuss predetermined subjects and become more aware of themselves and of the issues they face as women. For basic principles of consciousness-raising, see <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/cwlu.html>

deconstruction: "strategy of critical analysis . . . directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language" (OED). Deconstructive analysis shows the text's failure to fulfill its "project" by exposing overly simplistic binary assumptions, gaps (aporia) in the message and by showing the absence of those clearly present.

difference feminism: developed by Carol Gilligan, a theory that posits fundamental biological, psychological, and spiritual differences between men and women. The concept has many variations, including reverse gender polarity (the view that women are superior to men), and notions of gender complementarity. For larger definitions, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Difference_feminism

discriminaton: pattern of treating members of a group on the basis of group membership rather than individual qualities and merit; dismissal or marginalization of those against whom one holds a prejudice.

empowerment: sociological empowerment provides marginalized groups with methods to obtain full privilege within a society, eliminating marginalization and discrimination. Individually, empowerment implies self-confidence in one's skills and a sense of belonging necessary to success in achieving one's goals.

epistemology: major branch of philosophy that studies how we know what we know. In feminist epistemology, ways in which women construct distinctive forms of knowledge and self-expression.

essentialism: the assumption that people or things have a fixed "nature," as well as the generalizations that grow from such assumptions (e.g. the old shtick that "women are intuitive and emotional; men are rational and reflective").

exoticization: the process of sexualizing a group and reducing it and its members to "Other." The exoticization of women happens in many ways; see www.ltconline.net/lukas/gender/pages/exoticsgen.htm.

feminine ecriture (écriture féminine): "gendered women's writing." In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous claims that "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." Feminine ecriture explodes or evades "the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system" of representation.

feminine mystique: first named and explored by Betty Friedan in her groundbreaking book of the same name, the feminine mystique socializes women to locate their identity and meaning of their lives through their husbands and children, and involves a loss of one's identity in the needs and wishes of one's spouse and family.

feminization: process of associating people and things with the stereotypically feminine.

fluid: in gender theory, the notion that identity and sexuality are not fixed categories.

"the gaze": asserting dominance by staring at, objectifying and sexualizing those one considers inferior to or merely of use to oneself, transforming them into "other" and objectifying them. In art, the male gaze can be a projection of the artist's fantasy onto a female figure; the white gaze can also be a form of racial intimidation, and the gaze can also be a lesbian or gay projection onto someone so that she/he becomes an object of interest. In film, the gaze has at least three registers: the eye of the camera registering the POV taken in the filmic event, the POV of the spectator viewing the film, and that of the characters on the screen gazing at each other.

gender identity: subjective sense of oneself as "female" or "male" or homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered.

gender presentation: how a person dresses, looks, and acts; the presentation of one's sense of gender through behavior and dress.

gender roles: gendered behaviors considered appropriate by a given society or group.

guerilla girls: "feminist masked avengers" who promote women and people of color in the arts.

hegemony: one group's multiple levels of dominance over another, including the suppressed group's consent to domination; hegemony is less a domination by force than a means of encouraging participation in one's own oppression. Cultural hegemony, a term used by Antonio Gramsci, is the use of ordinary practices and shared values as a means by which one group can dominate a diverse culture.

herstory: feminist effort to revise "history" so that it includes women and their importance in the shared temporal narrative of events; some feminists find the term frivolous.

hierarchy: value system of ordering people's roles as "above" and "superior" in a descending order to "below" and "inferior." Hierarchies establish relatively fixed positions within a social system.

identity politics: political action challenging established hierarchies and categorization on behalf of a non-dominant or marginalized group; the politics of resisting oppression.

intersectional analysis: exploration of the ways race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. may impact an individual and one's treatment in society. Its function in policy discussions: <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/csw01/csw01priority.html> . Contemporary discussions of intersectionality as central to current feminisms include: Latoya Peterson at Racialicious: <http://www.racialicious.com/2008/04/28/the-or-versus-the-and-women-of-color-and-mainstream-feminism/> and Jill Filpovic at Feministe: <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2008/06/09/has-feminism-lost-its-focus/>

logocentrism: the assumption that there is truth in the sign system (language, etc.) we accept, to the exclusion of historical context, the marginalized and the absent.

"The Man" (or, the boys' club): vernacular term for male dominance.

marginalize: to assign a lesser importance or an "absent presence," to objectify or place "at the margins" those not considered important to a society, culture, or text.

metanarrative / master narrative: the notion of one historical narrative as being central, involving the exclusion or marginalization of oppressed groups.

matrilineal / matrilineal: kinship, ancestry, and descent from the mother.

naturalization: the social construction of gender and other roles as "natural" or innate to a given group. In social practice, the construction of these roles is obscured once the naturalization process becomes a social "given."

nature/culture: binary hierarchy that values the "civilized," cultured and refined over the "natural," barbaric, or uncivilized; cultural prejudice.

nineteenth amendment: amendment to the U. S. Constitution which gave women the right to vote, proposed on June 4, 1919 and passed on August 18, 1920.

objectification: in literature, the reduction of character to behavior and public speech, refusing the character her/his own psychology and inner subjectivity. In society, objectification (and specifically sexual objectification) occurs when a person is defined by her/his sexual attributes and the rest of her/his personality and existence are ignored; objectification involves reduction of a person to an object for one's gaze or pleasure.

oppression: the culture of injustice; unjust exploitation, or domination of others. Insidiously, oppressive cultures convince themselves that their cruelty or injustice are good for those they oppress. However, as Montaigne notes, the oppressor bends the subservient oppressed to "“treachery, lust, covetousness, and every kind of inhumanity and cruelty, on the model and after the example of our own manners.”"

“Other”: term used by Simone de Beauvoir to describe the marginalization of a group or individual as “not-Self”; the objectification of a subject/self, which makes it possible for those in the “center” to define their subject/selves against those which are different (“the margin constitutes the center”).

patriarchy/patriarchal: social organization favoring males on every level; rule by men.

patrilineal/patrilocal: kinship, ancestry, and descent from the father.

penis envy: term developed by Freud as a primary characteristic in the psychology of girls; Freud's perceptions of women distorted gendered perceptions in the field of psychology for generations.

performative: term used by Judith Butler to describe gendered behavior as a performance.

phallogocentrism: privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning; defining the male as the center.

phallogocentrism: “a combination of phallogocentrism and logocentrism, resulting in an ahistorical and non-contextualized view of male dominance, thus limiting and restricting knowledge while also forming the roots of women's oppression” (from the Women's Studies Sparkchart).

postmodernism: art, literature, social critique and view that human “texts” (ranging from ourselves to society itself, as well as all forms of human endeavor) can be approached from multiple perspectives, that there is no one “metatext” and that ideas and texts must be contextualized in order to make some sense of them; a healthy skepticism of fixed forms and ideas.

psychoanalysis: method of understanding individual psychology via free association, testimonies, dreams, fantasies, etc., with the idea of removing a person's defenses to get at hidden problems, thus freeing the “analysand” of impediments to her/his psychological health.

repression: in psychoanalysis, the unconscious burying of painful experiences, memories, and desires.

resistance: a variety of techniques employed by oppressed people as a reaction to oppression, ranging from passive aggression to social critique, direct action and open rebellion.

Rosie the riveter: symbolic name given to women who filled U. S. factories during the second world war, proving that women can do difficult labor as well as or better than their male counterparts.

sex vs. gender: sex is the biological aspect of one's identity; gender is the social construction of sexuality, the ways in which society perceives us or in which we perceive ourselves.

sexual harassment / gender harassment: as defined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. There are two types: *quid pro quo*, a request for sexual favors that implies a trade (e.g. advancement on the job) and "hostile environment, a situation involving a sexually-charged workplace in which the employee is subjected to sexualized behavior and made to feel uncomfortable or threatened. Sexual harassment is a violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (amended), and corporations and institutions of higher learning should all have and enforce policies prohibiting it. See the GRCC Women's Studies website (policies section) for examples.

sexual identity: one's gender orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transsexual). According to most gender theory, sexuality is fluid, not a fixed concept, so these categories may be unnecessarily rigid.

sexual orientation: one's predisposition and sexual attraction toward others, including the four categories of sexual identity. The American Academy of Pediatrics claims that "sexual orientation probably is not determined by any one factor but by a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences."

sex role stereotype: shared and generally reductive gender beliefs about the nature of the sexes. Sex role stereotypes are the grist for many commercials.

sex typing: treating a person differently because of her/his biological sex.

sexuality: biological, physiological, psychological and sociological aspects of human existence involving sexual experience and expression.

Shakespeare's sister: a figure from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Shakespeare's sister presents an example of the gifted young woman denied the opportunity to develop her talents; she illustrates the effects of untrammelled patriarchy and the denial of women's rights.

social constructionism: "sociological and psychological theories of knowledge that consider how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. Within constructionist thought, a social construction is a concept or practice which may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it, but in reality is an invention or artifact of a particular culture or society. Social

constructs are generally understood to be the by-products (often unintended or unconscious) of countless human choices rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature.” (Wikipedia)

standpoint theory: theory that oppressed people possess knowledge or understanding about their society which is unavailable to the dominant group.

stereotyping: reduction of a group or its members to supposed traits of that group.

subject / object: a binary combination important to feminist discourse. The subject possesses interiority, is empowered, and in hierarchical societies, dominates others; the object is reduced to the useful tasks she/he can perform, and is marginalized in a number of ways.

suffrage: the right to vote.

superwoman syndrome: the perception that one must be perfect in all things: perfect on the job, at home, in one’s body image, in one’s relationships, etc. The syndrome may stem from the same kinds of nervous anxiety that produce eating disorders, and it is likely exacerbated by commercials and other social pressures. It has been associated with professional women who work all day at high-power careers and transform themselves into perfect housewives and mothers in the evening, but in recent years it has shown up in the attitudes of younger and younger women.

suppression: being denied opportunity or put down by those in authority.

Title IX: although generally taken as a law enforcing equality of opportunity in sports, Title IX is the foundational law providing for equal opportunity for women in every aspect of federally funded public education. The law reads: “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” There are some exceptions; for details, see <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/titleIX.htm>

wave (first, second, third): the three major feminist movements in American culture. The first wave traditionally begins with the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s “Declaration of Sentiments” and culminates with the adoption of the nineteenth amendment; the second wave involves women of the nineteen-fifties, sixties, and seventies fighting for empowerment in a variety of fields; the third wave of contemporary feminists are shaping the movement in entirely new ways. See the American Women’s History section of the GRCC Women’s Studies website for more comprehensive discussion; start here: <http://www.grcc.edu/womensstudies> .

womanism: term coined by Alice Walker, referring to African American women’s need to create a movement centered on their needs, given Walker’s and others’ belief that white feminism was/is not addressing the concerns of African American women and others.

womyn: term adopted by some feminists as a way of eliminating “man” from “woman”; the argument is that “woman” is a term that implies “not-man,” and thus should be discarded because women need to define themselves without reference to males.