

Feminist Terms:

Sex: A biological quality; male or female.

Gender A social or cultural quality along a spectrum; masculine, feminine, non-binary.

Femininity: A set of externally-defined characteristics through which cultural and social norms of gender are ascribed to people. For example:

Feminine	Masculine
body, material	mind, abstract
domesticity (keeping house)	adventure (hunting and gathering)
passive	active
nurturing	demanding
silence	voice
subservience	dominance
humility, modesty	pride, boasting
sweet, courteous	curt, rambunctious
emotional	intellectual, rational
chaos, fragmentation	order, unity
intuition	logic
spinning tales, gossip	writing literature, reporting
damsel in distress	knight in shining armor

Feminism: A political stance that seeks to uncover and debunk the patriarchal prejudices and sexism endemic to social, institutional, and personal power relations between the sexes. Feminist criticism seeks to expose the ways in which males appropriate certain high-status roles for

themselves, while relegating females to lower-status roles determined by male-dominated society. Feminist criticism strives to reveal the bias in supposedly neutral or objective observations.

Patriarchy: A society in which political power is maintained in the hands of men and is used to repress women, according them a secondary status. A major device of patriarchies is to equate female and feminine in order to make the connection seem natural (that is, based on laws of nature), and thus indisputable.

Sexism: The automatic ascription of essential qualities to people solely on the basis of sex.

Essentialism: Ascribing invariable, or essential (in the meaning of “pertaining to the natural essence”), traits to people without respect to geographic, cultural, or social factors.