

Κοινωνικές Προσεγγίσεις του Φύλου

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- Σε γενικές γραμμές η φεμινιστική θεωρία εξετάζει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους οι διάφορες πολιτισμικές πρακτικές ενισχύουν ή υπονομεύουν την οικονομική, πολιτική, κοινωνική και ψυχολογική καταπίεση των γυναικών.
- Σε πολλές περιπτώσεις, ωστόσο, οι θεωρητικοί του φεμινισμού έχουν συχνά διαφορετικές ή και αντιθετικές απόψεις για διάφορα ζητήματα.
- Για το λόγο αυτό είναι προτιμότερο στο εξής να χρησιμοποιούμε τον πληθυντικό (φεμινισμοί, φεμινιστικές θεωρίες) προκειμένου να αναγνωρίσουμε τον πλουραλισμό των απόψεων που υπάρχουν.

Παρόλα αυτά, πολλές και πολλοί από
μας να έχουμε αποφασίσει εκ των
προτέρων ότι δεν είμαστε
φεμινίστριες/στές επειδή διαφωνούμε
με την όποια φεμινιστική θέση
τυχαίνει να έχουμε ακούσει.

- Μια τέτοια στάση θεωρώ ότι εκφράζει μια υπεραπλουστευμένη, αρνητική αντίληψη για τη φεμινιστική σκέψη, που εξακολουθεί να επιβιώνει ακόμη και σήμερα.**
- Αυτό συμβαίνει διότι η συγκεκριμένη προκατάληψη αναπαράγεται διαρκώς μέσα από το ευρύτερο πολιτισμικό πλαίσιο στο οποίο ζούμε- την οικογένεια, το εργασιακό περιβάλλον, τα ΜΜΕ κ.ο.κ.**

ΣΚΕΦΤΟΜΑΙ...

- Σήμερα εξακολουθούν να υπάρχουν έμφυλες προκαταλήψεις ή έχει επιτευχθεί η ισότητα των φύλων;





Προκειμένου να δούμε πώς λειτουργεί
αυτή η υπεραπλούστευση που μας
κάνει να αγνοούμε τη σοβαρότητα
των ζητημάτων που εγείρει η
φεμινιστική σκέψη, ας εξετάσουμε
μια από τις πιο παρεξηγημένες θέσεις
της: ότι δε θα'πρεπε να
χρησιμοποιούμε το αρσενικό γένος
προκειμένου να αναφερθούμε και σε
άνδρες και σε γυναίκες.

- Για πολύ κόσμο ένα τέτοιο αίτημα αποτελεί απόδειξη ότι οι φεμινίστριες ασχολούνται με ανούσια ζητήματα.**
- Τι διαφορά έχει άλλωστε να χρησιμοποιούμε καθολικά το αρσενικό γένος για να αναφερθούμε και στα δύο φύλα;**
- Ο κόσμος αυτός πιστεύει ότι είναι απλά μια γλωσσική σύμβαση που απλοποιεί τη χρήση της γλώσσας, αφού μας επιτρέπει να συμπεριλάβουμε και τα δύο φύλα.**
- Αυτοί οι άνθρωποι θεωρούν ότι οι φεμινίστριες θα πρέπει καλύτερα να ασχοληθούν με σοβαρότερα ζητήματα, αντί να σκοτίζονται για τα άρθρα και τις αντωνυμίες!**

- Για πολλές φεμινίστριες, ωστόσο, το να χρησιμοποιούμε το αρσενικό γένος για να αναφερθούμε και στα δύο φύλα αντανακλά και διαιωνίζει ένα συγκεκριμένο τρόπο να βλέπουμε τον κόσμο, που ανάγει την **ανδρική εμπειρία σε κανόνα**.
- Με άλλα λόγια, ενώ το αρσενικό γένος υποτίθεται ότι συμπεριλαμβάνει και τα δύο φύλα, στην πραγματικότητα αποτελεί μέρος μιας **βαθιά παγιωμένης πολιτισμικής στάσης** που αγνοεί τη γυναικεία εμπειρία και κυρίως μας κάνει να μη βλέπουμε την οπτική γωνία των γυναικών.
- Οι καταστροφικές συνέπειες μια τέτοιας στάσης παρατηρούνται σε πολλές όψεις της καθημερινότητας.

ΣΚΕΦΤΟΜΑΙ...

- Μπορείτε να σκεφτείτε πώς αυτή η ανδροκεντρική ματιά υπονομεύει τη θέση των γυναικών;



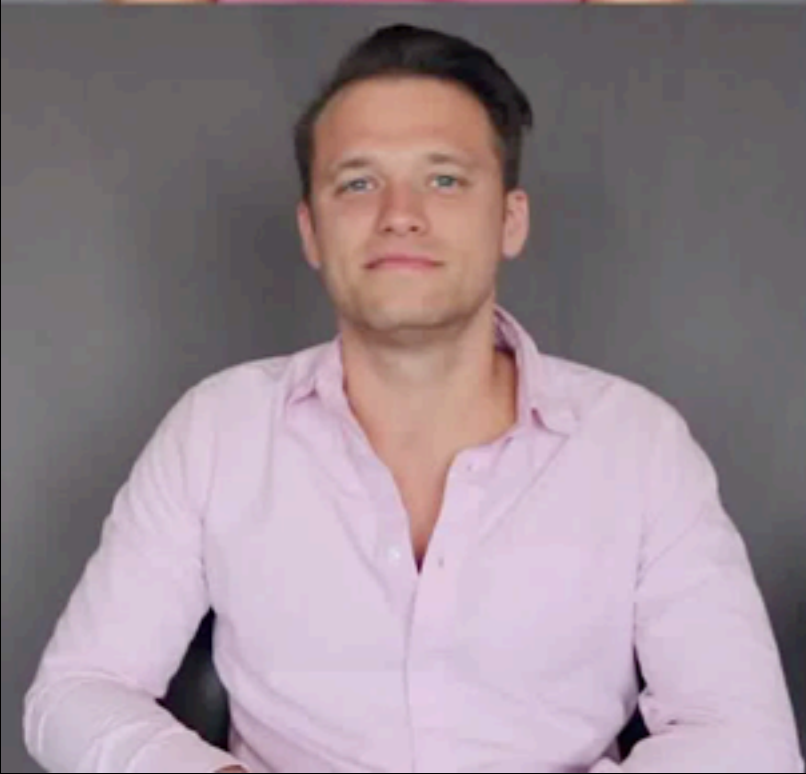


*"I think it's high time we **all** started to think like a middle-aged, Hispanic woman."*

- Ίσως το πιο τρομαχτικό παράδειγμα αυτής της ανδροκεντρικής σκοπιιάς προέρχεται από **τον κόσμο της σύγχρονης ιατρικής**, όπου φάρμακα που χρησιμοποιούνται και από τα δύο φύλα συχνά έχουν δοκιμαστεί μόνο σε άνδρες.
- Με άλλα λόγια, στα εργαστηριακά τεστ σύμγωνα με τα οποία ελέγχεται η αποτελεσματικότητα και η ασφάλεια των σκευασμάτων, χρησιμοποιούνται αποκλειστικά στατιστικά δείγματα ανδρών.
- Το αποτέλεσμα είναι να εμφανίζονται περισσότερες παρενέργειες στο γυναικείο πληθυσμό. Πώς γίνεται να μην έχει προβλεφθεί ένα τέτοιο ενδεχόμενο; Σίγουρα η καθολικότητα του ανδρικού υποκειμένου έχει παίζει κάποιο ρόλο.

Παραδοσιακοί έμφυλοι ρόλοι

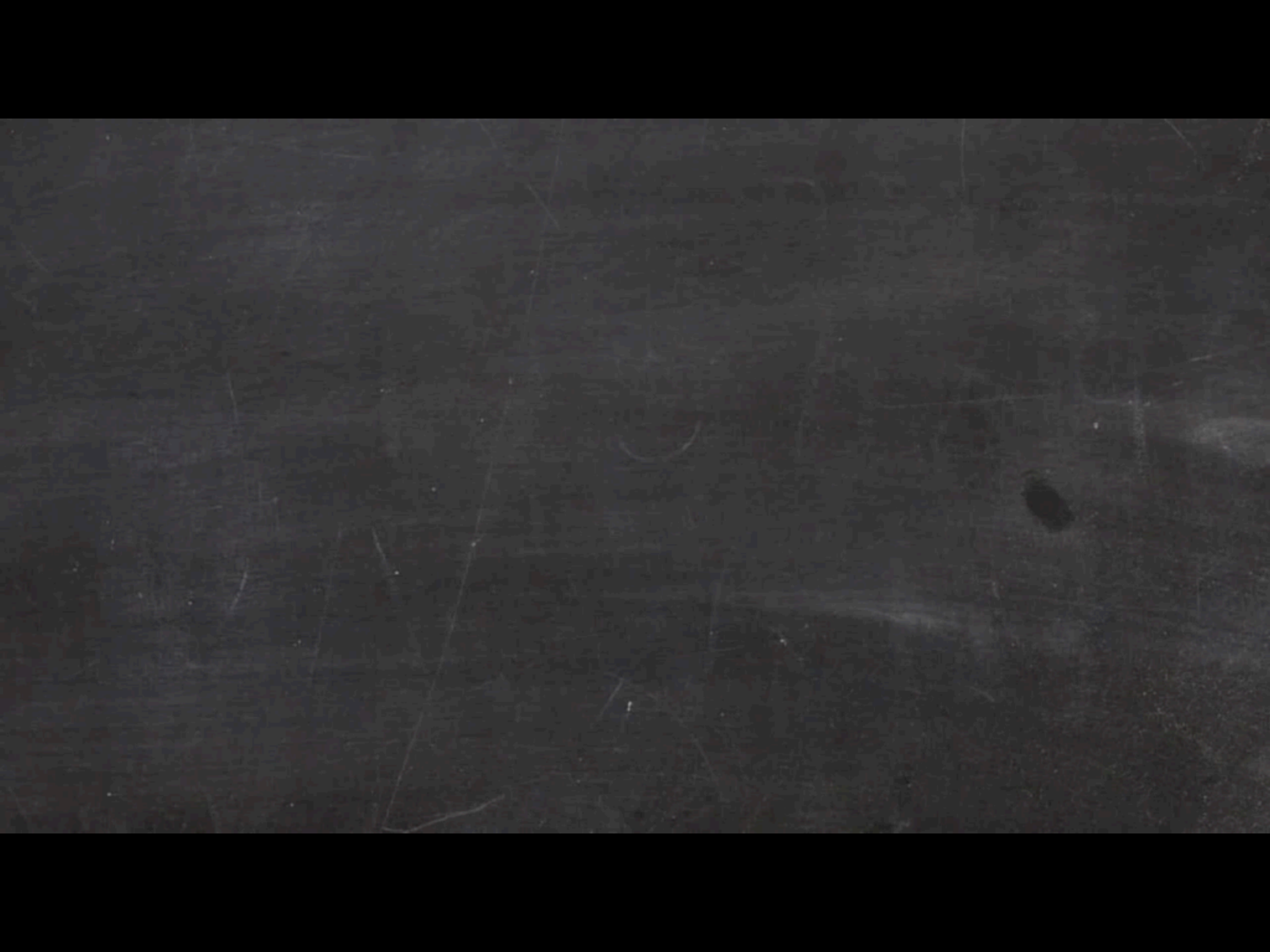
- Οι παραδοσιακοί έμφυλοι ρόλοι παρουσιάζουν τουν άνδρες ως ορθολογικούς, δυνατούς, προστατευτικούς και αποφασιστικούς.
- Παρουσιάζουν τις γυναίκες ως ανορθολογικές (μη-ορθολογικές), αδύναμες, τροφούς και υποτελείς.



Αυτοί οι ρόλοι έχουν χρησιμοποιηθεί επιτυχώς για να νομιμοποιήσουν ανισότητες, που εξακολουθούν να υπάρχουν και σήμερα, π.χ. μέσα από...

- τον αποκλεισμό των γυναικών από την ίση πρόσβαση σε ηγετικές θέσεις και υπεύθυνες θέσεις για τη λήψη αποφάσεων (στην οικογένεια, την πολιτική, την τριτοβάθμια εκπαίδευση και τον κόσμο των επιχειρήσεων).**
- χαμηλότερες αμοιβές των γυναικών για την ίδια εργασία (εάν κατορθώσουν να καταλάβουν καν τη θέση).**
- και την απόπειρα να αποκλειστούν από καριέρες και επαγγέλματα σε πεδία όπως τα μαθηματικά ή η μηχανολογία.**

- Πολλοί άνθρωποι σήμερα πιστεύουν ότι αυτές οι ανισότητες έχουν ξεπεραστεί καθώς πλέον υπάρχουν νόμοι κατά των διακρίσεων, όπως οι νόμοι που εξασφαλίζουν ίσες αμοιβές.
- Αυτοί οι νόμοι, ωστόσο, συχνά παρακάμπτονται.
- Για παράδειγμα η εργοδοσία μπορεί να πληρώσει μια γυναίκα λιγότερο για την ίδια εργασία με εκείνη ενός άνδρα (ή εργαζόμενη περισσότερο από αυτόν) απλώς και μόνο ονοματίζοντας διαφορετικά τη θέση.
- Έτσι, οι γυναίκες πληρώνονται χονδρικά 55-80 cents, ανάλογα με την εθνότητα και την ηλικία, για κάθε ευρώ της αμοιβής ενός άνδρα.



- **Patriarchy** is thus, by definition, sexist, which means it promotes **the belief that women are innately inferior to men.**
- This belief in **the inborn inferiority of women** is a form of what is called **biological essentialism** because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women.

Oscarina...

WANT ME TO PUSH
YOU ALL THE WAY
TO THE SUN, OSCARINA?

IS THIS A LESSON IN
HYPERBOLE, OR IN
GETTING ACQUAINTED
WITH THE ROUTINE
LETDOWNS OF THE
PATRIARCHY?



CAT

- **Feminists don't deny the biological differences between men and women; in fact, many feminists celebrate those differences.**
- **But they don't agree that such differences as physical size, shape, and body chemistry make men naturally superior to women: for example, more intelligent, more logical, more courageous, or better leaders.**



"Some kids at school called you a feminist, Mom, but I punched them out."

- Feminism therefore distinguishes between the word **sex**, which refers to our **biological constitution as female or male**, and the word **gender**, which refers to our **cultural programming as feminine or masculine**.

- In other words, **women are NOT born feminine**, and **men are NOT born masculine**.
- Rather, these **gender categories are constructed by society**, which is why this view of gender is an example of what has come to be called **social constructionism**.

TO THE AUTHORS OF
PORN FOR WOMEN:

YOUR BOOK FEATURES PICTURES
OF HOT, CLOTHED GUYS COOKING,
DOING LAUNDRY, AND VACUUMING.



THE IDEA SEEMS TO BE THAT
MY DEEPEST FANTASIES, LIKE
THE REST OF MY LIFE, LIKELY
REVOLVE AROUND HOUSEWORK.



SO I WANTED
TO WRITE IN
TO CLARIFY:

IN MY PORN,



PEOPLE *FUCK*.



- **The belief that men are superior to women has been used** to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political, and social power, in other words, **to keep women powerless** by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power.
- That is, the **inferior position** long occupied by women in patriarchal society **has been culturally**, not biologically, **produced**.

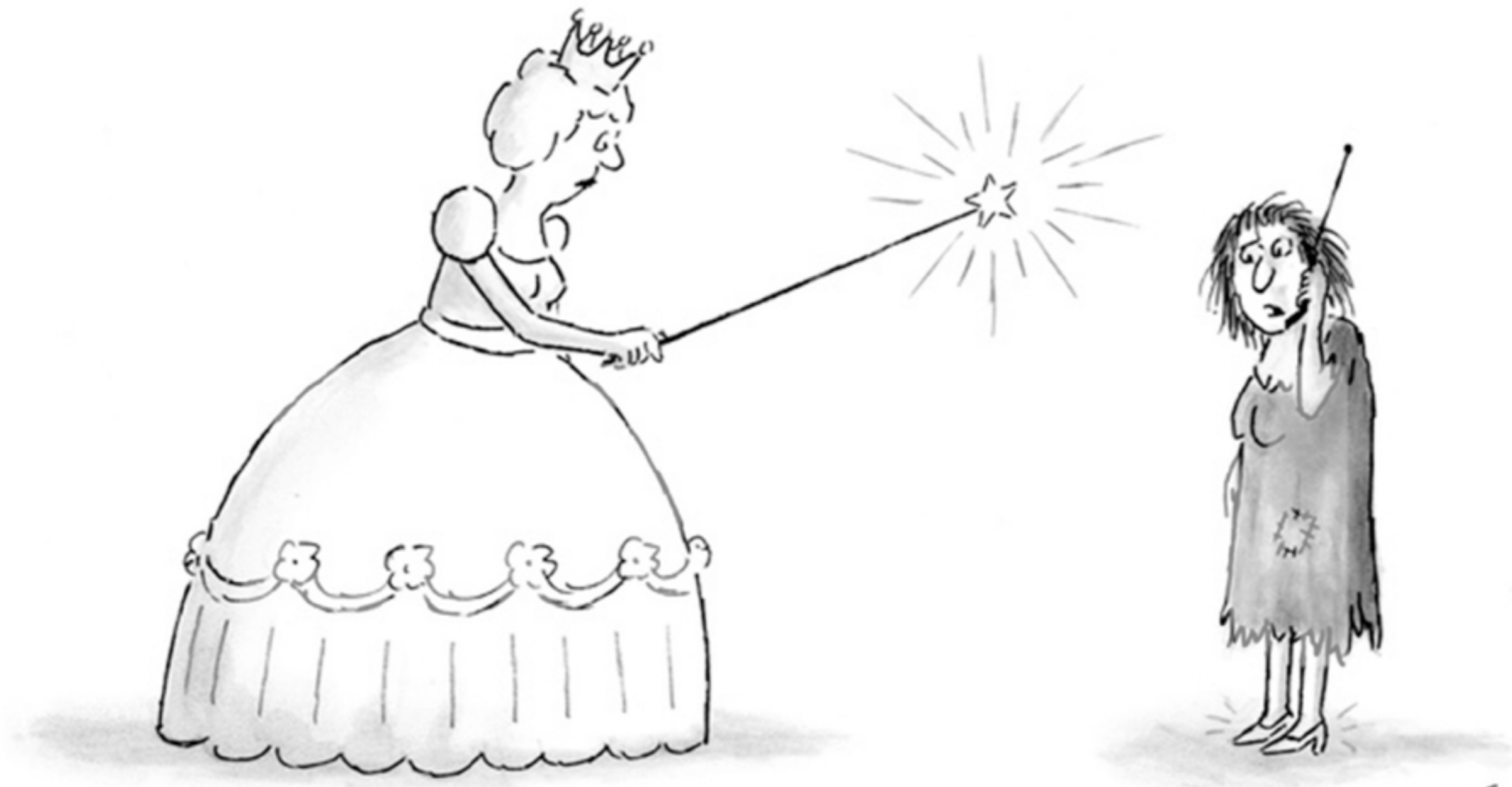
**What does it mean that
gender is performative?**

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□ For men reading this chapter the imperative is to see in feminism the potential for learning a good deal about themselves as well as about women.

□ And for readers of both sexes the imperative is to see that, even when we think we're talking about men, we're also talking about women because, **in patriarchy, everything that concerns men usually implies something (usually negative) about women.**

To briefly illustrate the debilitating effects of patriarchal gender roles on both women and men, consider fairy tales such as “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and, of course, “Cinderella.”



S. Gross

“I’ll call you back. I’m in the middle of a make-over.”

- In all three tales, a beautiful, sweet young girl (for females must be beautiful, sweet, and young if they are to be worthy of romantic admiration) is rescued (for she is incapable of rescuing herself) from a dire situation by a dashing young man who carries her off to marry him and live happily ever after.**
- The plot thus implies that marriage to the right man is a guarantee of happiness and the proper reward for a right-minded young woman.**



"Would you mind stepping out of the pumpkin, please?"

- In all three tales, the main female characters are stereotyped as either “good girls” (gentle, submissive, virginal, angelic) or “bad girls” (violent, aggressive, worldly, monstrous).
- These characterisations imply that if a woman does not accept her patriarchal gender role, then the only role left her is that of a monster.
- In all three tales, the “bad girls”—the wicked queen in “Snow White,” the wicked fairy in “Sleeping Beauty,” and the wicked stepmother and stepsisters in “Cinderella”—are also vain, petty, and jealous, infuriated because they are not as beautiful as the main character or, in the case of the wicked fairy, because she wasn’t invited to a royal celebration.



*"I can't decide what I want to be when I
grow up: a good girl or a slut."*

- In two of the stories, the young maiden is awakened from a deathlike slumber by the potent (after all, it brings her to life) kiss of the would-be lover.**
- This ending implies that the proper patriarchal young woman is sexually dormant until “awakened” by the man who claims her.**
- We could analyse these tales further, and we could analyse additional tales, but the point here is to see how pervasive patriarchal ideology is and how it can program us without our knowledge or consent.**

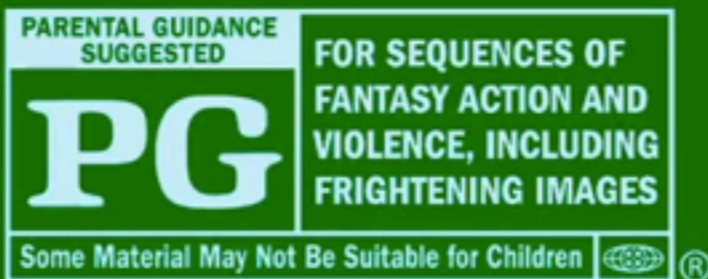
- I refer in the above paragraph to “good girls” and “bad girls,” and this concept deserves more attention because it’s another way in which sexist ideology continues to influence us.
- As we saw above, patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have.
- If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a “good girl”; if she doesn’t, she’s a “bad girl.”

These two roles—also referred to as “madonna” and “whore” or “angel” and “bitch”—view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order.

- Of course, how “good girls” and “bad girls” are specifically defined will alter somewhat according to the time and place in which they live.**
- But it is patriarchy that will do the defining because both roles are projections of patriarchal male desire: for example, the desire to own “valuable” women suited to be wives and mothers, the desire to control women’s sexuality so that men’s sexuality cannot be threatened in any way, and the desire to dominate in all financial matters.**

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- According to a patriarchal ideology in full force through the 1950s, versions of which are still with us today, “bad girls” violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they’re sexually forward in appearance or behaviour, or they have multiple sexual partners.**
- Men sleep with “bad girls,” but they don’t marry them.**
- “Bad girls” are used and then discarded because they don’t deserve better, and they probably don’t even expect better.**
- They’re not good enough to bear a man’s name or his legitimate children.**
- That role is appropriate only for a properly submissive “good girl.”**

- The “good girl” is rewarded for her behaviour by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture.**
- To her are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she’s modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing.**
- She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving her family.**

Revolutionary Road (Sam Mendes, 2008)

- What's wrong with being placed on a pedestal?**
- For one thing, pedestals are small and leave a woman very little room to do anything but fulfil the prescribed role.**
- For example, to remain on her Victorian pedestal, the "good girl" had to remain uninterested in sexual activity, except for the purpose of legitimate pro-creation, because it was believed unnatural for women to have sexual desire.**
- In fact, "good" women were expected to find sex frightening or disgusting.**

- For another thing, pedestals are shaky.**
- One can easily fall off a pedestal, and when a woman does, she is often punished.**
- At best, she suffers self-recrimination for her inadequacy or “unnaturalness.”**
- At worst, she suffers physical punishment from the community or from her husband, which until relatively recently was encouraged by law and custom and which is still too often tacitly condoned by an ineffectual or complicit justice system.**

Revolutionary Road (Sam Mendes, 2008) - "You are sick!"



- In upwardly mobile, middle-class Western culture today, the woman on the pedestal is the woman who successfully juggles a career and a family, which means she looks great at the office and over the breakfast table, and she's never too tired after work to fix dinner, clean house, attend to all her children's needs, and please her husband in bed.**
- In other words, patriarchal gender roles have not been eliminated by modern women's entrance into the male-dominated work-place, even if some of those women now hold what used to be traditionally male jobs.**
- For many of those same women are still bound by patriarchal gender roles in the home, which they must now fulfil in addition to their career goals.**

- Furthermore, the persistence of repressive attitudes toward women's sexuality is still visible in our language today.
- For example, we use the negative word **slut** to describe a woman who sleeps with a number of men while we use the positive word **stud** to describe a man who sleeps with a number of women.

- And though women's fashions have radically changed since the nineteenth century, the most "feminine" clothing still promotes patriarchal ideology.**
- For example, the extremely tight corsets worn by nineteenth-century women prevented them from getting enough oxygen to be physically active or to experience emotion without getting "the vapors": shortness of breath or slight fits of fainting, which were considered very feminine and proved that women were too fragile and emotional to participate in a man's world.**



- Analogously, one of the most “feminine” styles of clothing for today’s woman is the tight skirt and high heels, which create a kind of “feminine” walk (while precluding running) symbolically akin both to the restrained physical capability imposed by nineteenth-century women’s clothing and to the male sexual access to women’s bodies such attire allows.**

**A summary of 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 marginalised, 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) civilisation 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 non-rational 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.**

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 behaviour 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 behaviour 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.

- The pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology raises some important questions for feminist theory.**
- For example, if patriarchal ideology influences our identity and experience so strongly, how can we ever get beyond it?**
- If our modes of thinking and our language are patriarchal, how can we ever think or speak differently?**
- In other words, if the fabric of our existence is patriarchal, how can we ever become non-patriarchal?**

**Some questions feminist
critics ask about literary texts**

The questions that follow are offered to summarise feminist approaches to literature. Approaches that attempt to develop a specifically female framework for the analysis of women's writing (such as questions 6, 7, and 8) are often referred to as *gynocriticism*.



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1. What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy? How are women portrayed? How do these portrayals relate to the gender issues of the period in which the novel was written or is set? In other words, does the work reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology?

What does the work reveal about the operations of patriarchy?

- In this case, we might say that the text has a patriarchal agenda.**

How are women portrayed?

- In this case, we might say that the text has a feminist agenda.

Does the work reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology?

- Texts that seem to both reinforce and undermine patriarchal ideology might be said to be ideologically conflicted.**

2. What does the work suggest about the ways in which **race, class, and/or other cultural factors intersect with gender in producing women's experience?**

**3. How is the work
“gendered”?**

- That is, how does it seem to define femininity and masculinity?**
- Does the characters' behaviour always conform to their assigned genders?**
- Does the work suggest that there are genders other than feminine and masculine?**
- What seems to be the work's attitude toward the gender(s) it portrays? For example, does the work seem to accept, question, or reject the traditional view of gender?**

4. What does the work imply about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy and/or about the ways in which women's situations in the world—economic, political, social, or psychological—might be improved?

5. What does the history of the work's **reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operations of patriarchy? Has the literary work been ignored or neglected in the past? Why? Or, if recognized in the past, is the work ignored or neglected now? Why?**

6. What does the work suggest about women's creativity? In order to answer this question, biographical data about the author and historical data about the culture in which she lived will be required.

7. What might an examination of the author's style contribute to the ongoing efforts to delineate a specifically feminine form of writing (for example, écriture féminine)?

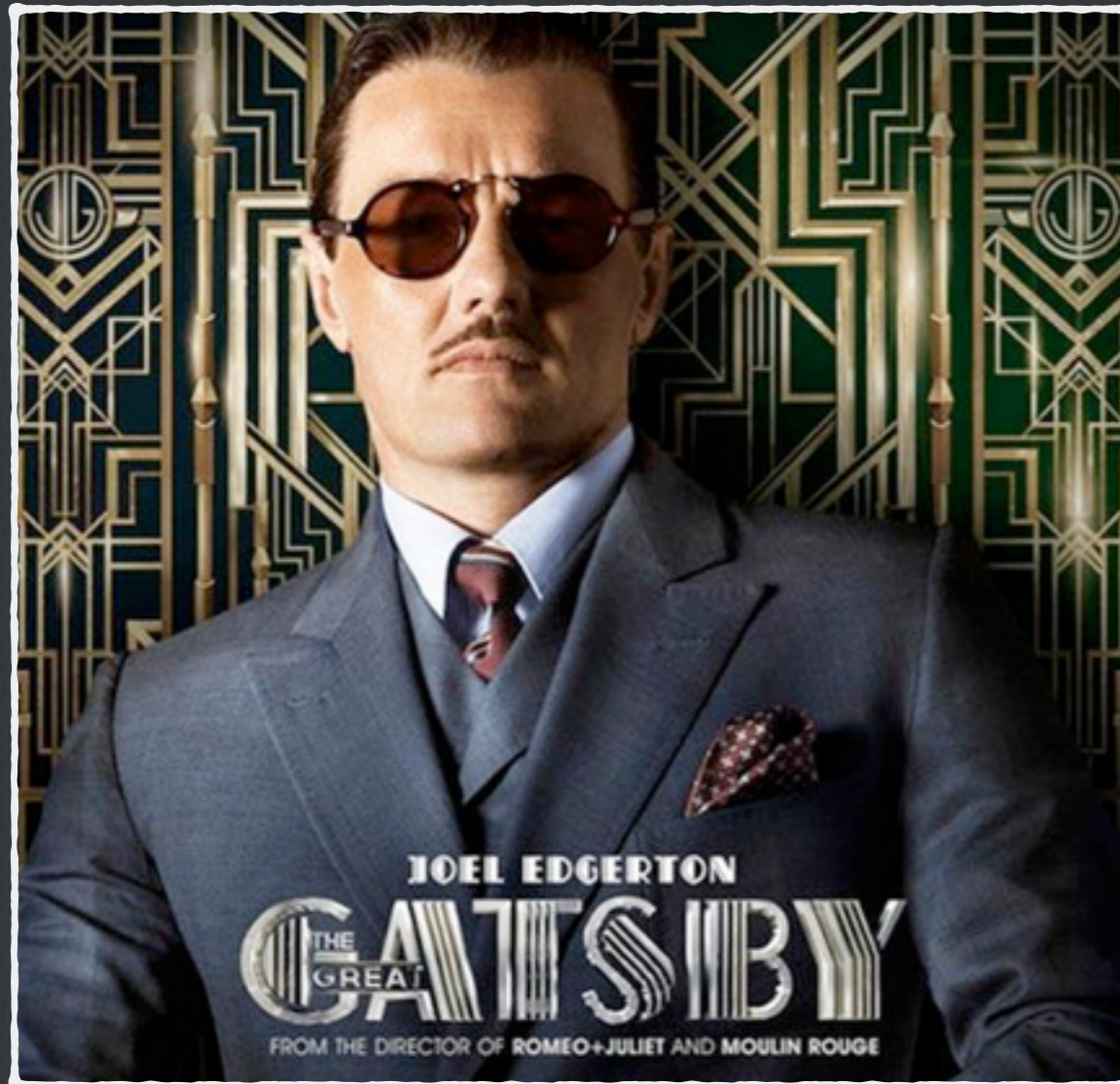
**8. What role does the
work play in terms of
women's literary history
and literary tradition?**

Our goal is...

- to use feminist theory to help enrich our reading of literary works;**
- to help us see some important ideas they illustrate that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without feminist theory;**
- and to help us see the ways in which patriarchal ideology blinds us to our own participation in, or at least complicity with, sexist agendas.**

**“ . . . next they’ll throw everything
overboard . . . ”: a feminist reading
of *The Great Gatsby***

In a sudden panic over his discovery that his wife has taken a lover, Tom Buchanan exclaims:



- “Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white” (137; ch. 7).

In addition to Tom's double standard for his own and his wife's behaviour (as well as his racism), this statement reveals Tom's assumptions that the moral structure of society rests on the stability of the patriarchal family and that the stability of the patriarchal family rests on the conformity of women to patriarchal gender roles.

In addition to Tom's DOUBLE STANDARD for his own and his wife's behaviour (as well as his racism), this statement reveals
Tom's assumptions that:

- the **moral structure of society** rests on the stability of the patriarchal family.
- the **stability of the patriarchal family** rests on the conformity of women to patriarchal gender roles.

Of course, through the vehicle of Nick Carraway's narration, the novel clearly ridicules Tom's position:

- “Flushed with his impassioned gibberish,” Nick observes, “[Tom] saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilisation” (137; ch. 7).**

Nevertheless, I think it can be shown that *The Great Gatsby* also shares Tom's view of patriarchal gender roles.

- The novel was written and is set in the decade following World War I, which ended in November 1918.**
- The Roaring Twenties, or the Jazz Age, a term coined by Fitzgerald, was a period of enormous social change in America, especially in the area of women's rights.**
- Before World War I, American women did not enjoy universal suffrage.**
- In 1920, two years after the end of the war (and after seventy-two years of organised political agitation), they were finally given the vote.**

- Before the war, standard dress for women included long skirts, tightly laced corsets, high-buttoned shoes, and long hair demurely swept up onto the head.**
- A few years after the war, skirts became shorter (in some cases, much shorter), laced corsets began to disappear (indeed, the most bold and unconventional young women wore few, if any, restraining undergarments), modern footwear frequently replaced high-buttoned shoes, and “bobbed” hair (cut short and worn loosely) became the fashion for young women.**

- Perhaps most alarming for proponents of the old ways, women's behaviour began to change.
- Women could now be seen smoking and drinking (despite Prohibition), often in the company of men and without chaperones.
- They could also be seen enjoying the sometimes raucous nightlife offered at nightclubs and private parties.
- Even the new dances of the era, which seemed wild and overtly sexual to many, bespoke an attitude of free self-expression and unrestrained enjoyment.

- In other words, as we often see during times of social change, a “New Woman” emerged in the 1920s.**
- And, again as usual, her appearance on the scene evoked a good deal of negative reaction from conservative members of society, both male and female, who felt, as they generally do at these times, that women’s rejection of any aspect of their traditional role inevitably results in the destruction of the family and the moral decline of society as a whole.**

This view of women as the standard-bearers of traditional values, whose presence as non-wage-earning supervisors of hearth and home was deemed necessary to maintain the moral structure of society, became the dominant patriarchal ideology of the industrialised nineteenth century as the home ceased to be the place where the family worked together to earn their living and men went off to earn the family bread at various occupations in the towns.

That is, as woman's economic role in the home disappeared, a spiritualised domestic role was created for her in order to keep her, among other things, from competing with men on the job market.

Thus, although most Americans believed the survival of America's moral structure depended on traditional gender roles, it was really the nation's economic structure, which gave economic dominance to men, that depended upon the axiom "a woman's place is in the home."

- Of course, another advantage of keeping women at home, modestly dressed and quietly behaved, was that it reaffirmed men's ownership of women's sexual and reproductive capacities.**
- The threat posed by the New Woman of the 1920s, then, had repercussions on many levels of public consciousness.**

Literary works often reflect the ideological conflicts of their culture, whether or not it is their intention to do so, because, like the rest of us, authors are influenced by the ideological tenor of the times.

- Even a writer like F. Scott Fitzgerald, who cut a dashing figure among the avant-garde social set of the 1920s and who was himself married to a New Woman, was subject to the ideological conflicts that characterised his age.
- One might speculate that it was precisely his experience of “life in the fast lane” that created some (conscious or unconscious) misgivings about the changes occurring in America during the 1920s.
- Or one might speculate that he was able to accept the New Woman only as long as he could view her as psychologically troubled and in need of his help, a situation illustrated in his semi-autobiographical novel *Tender Is the Night* (1934), as well as in his turbulent life with his wife, Zelda.



However, it's not my intention to examine Fitzgerald's life but **to examine the ways in which *The Great Gatsby*, his most enduring work, embodies its culture's discomfort with the post-World War I New Woman.**

We see this discomfort in the novel's representation of its minor female characters, and we see it in more complex ways in the novel's characterisations of main characters Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson, who, despite their numerous differences, are all versions of the New Woman.

- We can assume that Nick's descriptions of these characters represent the novel's ideological biases, and not merely his own, because the text portrays Nick sympathetically, unlike Tom Buchanan.**
- In addition to the sympathy Nick evokes by the author's use of first-person narration—because we see the narrative events through Nick's eyes, we are able to more or less “walk in his shoes” —Nick also gains our sympathy because he tells his story in a sensitive and engaging manner, sharing with the reader his personal feelings: his desires, dislikes, fears, doubts, and affections.**

- Finally, as the only character who is consistently aware of ethical considerations, Nick functions as the moral centre of the novel.**
- It is therefore reasonable to conclude that, whether or not Fitzgerald intended Carraway as a reliable narrator, many readers will be strongly influenced by Nick's perspective.**

The novel abounds in minor female characters whose dress and activities identify them as incarnations of the New Woman, and they are portrayed as clones of a single, negative character type: shallow, exhibitionist, revolting, and deceitful.

For example, at Gatsby's parties we see...

- insincere, “enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other’s names” (44; ch. 3), as well as numerous narcissistic attention-seekers in various stages of drunken hysteria.**

Stop & Think



- Find some of the numerous narcissistic attention-seekers in various stages of drunken hysteria.

- **We meet, for example, a young woman who “dumps” down a cocktail “for courage” and “dances out alone on the canvass to perform” (45; ch. 3);**
- **“a rowdy little girl who gave way upon the slightest provocation to uncontrollable laughter” (51; ch. 3);**
- **a drunken woman who “was not only singing, she was weeping too,” her face lined with “black rivulets” created when her “tears . . . came into contact with her heavily beaded eyelashes” (55–56; ch. 3);**
- **a drunken young girl who has her “head stuck in a pool” (113; ch. 6) to stop her from screaming; and two drunken young wives who refuse to leave the party until their husbands, tired of the women’s verbal abuse, “lifted [them] kicking into the night” (57; ch. 3).**

Then there are Benny McClenahan's "four girls":

- They were never quite the same ones in physical person, but they were so identical one with another that it inevitably seemed they had been there before. I have forgotten their names—Jaqueline, I think, or else Consuela, or Gloria or Judy or June, and their last names were either the melodious names of flowers and months or the sterner ones of the great American capitalists whose cousins, if pressed, they would confess themselves to be. (67; ch.4)**

- **In other words, all of these lookalike women who accompanied McClenahan to Gatsby's parties invented names and biographies for themselves to impress their new acquaintances.**
- **We should not be too surprised, then, to hear Nick say, "Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply" (63; ch. 3), implying that women don't seem able to help it: perhaps it's just a natural failing, like so many other feminine weaknesses.**

- The only minor female characters we get to know a little better, both of whom fit the category of the New Woman, are **Mrs. McKee**—who is described as “shrill, languid, handsome, and horrible” (34; ch. 2)—and Myrtle’s sister, **Catherine**, who perfectly fits the negative stereotype outlined above.
- The novel gives Catherine a good deal of attention for such a minor character, perhaps because she has been chosen to represent the physical unattractiveness of her type, which is only hinted at in the descriptions of the other minor female characters.

Stop & Think



- Where does this become evident in the text? Try to find depictions of Catherine that conform to this negative stereotype.

The sister . . . was a slender, worldly girl of about thirty with a solid sticky bob of red hair and a complexion powdered milky white. Her eyebrows had been plucked and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle but the efforts of nature toward the restoration of the old alignment gave a blurred air to her face. When she moved about there was an incessant clicking as innumerable pottery bracelets jingled up and down upon her arms. She came in with such proprietary haste and looked around so possessively at the furniture that I wondered if she lived here. But when I asked her she laughed immoderately, repeated my question aloud, and told me she lived with a girl friend at a hotel. (34; ch.2)

- This is the description of a rather revolting, loud, vulgar young woman whose opening words to Nick are an obvious lie.
- And Catherine fulfils the expectations such a description raises by the vulgar nature of her conversation with Nick concerning Myrtle and her “sweetie” (39; ch. 2) and by her claim that she doesn’t drink, which we learn is a lie when she turns up drunk at George Wilson’s garage the night of Myrtle’s death.
- Her vulgarity, as well as her foolishness, is further revealed in her description of her and her girlfriend’s experience in Monte Carlo: “We had over twelve hundred dollars when we started but we got gypped out of it all in two days in the private rooms.
- We had an awful time getting back, I can tell you. God, how I hated that town!” (38; ch. 2).

- One could argue that the novel's bias here is not sexist, but classist, for all the women described above belong to the lower socioeconomic strata of society.**
- However, there are several male characters from these same strata who are described sympathetically.**

Stop & Think



- Can you find any examples in the text proving this point?

- For example, **George Wilson** is portrayed as a simple, hardworking man who, despite his other limitations, is devoted to his wife.
- **Mr. Michaelis**, who owns a coffee shop in the “valley of ashes” (27; ch.2), is kind to George and tries to take care of him after Myrtle’s death.
- And even the **two party-going husbands** mentioned earlier, themselves sober, tolerate their wives’ drunken abuse with admirable patience.

Thus it is these women's violation of patriarchal gender roles, NOT their socioeconomic class, that elicits the novel's condemnation.

The novel's discomfort with the New Woman becomes evident, in a more complex fashion, in the characterisations of main characters Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson.

- Their hair and clothing are very modern.**
- They don't feel, as their mothers and grandmothers surely did, that they must behave modestly in public by avoiding hard liquor, cigarettes, and immodest dancing.**
- In addition, all three women display a good deal of modern independence.**
- Only two are married, and they don't keep their marital unhappiness a secret, although secrecy about such matters is one of the cardinal rules of patriarchal marriage.**

- Jordan has a career of her own and, on top of that, it's in the male-dominated field of professional golf.**
- They all prefer the excitement of nightlife to the more traditional employments of hearth and home.**
- There is only one child among them, Daisy's daughter, Pammy, and while Pammy is well looked after by her nurse and affectionately treated by her mother, Daisy's life does not revolve exclusively around her maternal role.**
- Finally, all three women violate patriarchal sexual taboos: Jordan engages in premarital sex, and Daisy and Myrtle are engaged in extramarital affairs.**

That the novel finds this freedom unacceptable in women is evident in its unsympathetic portrayals of those who exercise it.

Daisy Buchanan

- Daisy Buchanan is characterised as a spoiled brat and a remorseless killer.
- She is so used to being the centre of attention that she can think of no one's needs but her own.
- Although Myrtle's death is accidental, Daisy doesn't stop the car and try to help the injured woman.
- On the contrary, she speeds off and lets Gatsby take the blame. (One can't help but wonder if some readers, at least in decades past, have said to themselves, "See what happens when you let a woman get behind the wheel of a car?")

- Once she learns that Gatsby doesn't come from the same social stratum as herself, she retreats behind the protection of Tom's wealth and power, abandoning her lover to whatever fate awaits him.**
- Indeed, much of our condemnation of Daisy issues from her failure to deserve Gatsby's devotion.**
- Although she lets Gatsby believe she will leave her husband for him, Nick observes during the confrontation scene in the New York hotel room that "[h]er eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she . . . had never, all along, intended doing anything at all" (139; ch. 7).**
- Even her way of speaking is frequently so affected—"I'm p-paralyzed with happiness" (13; ch. 1); "You remind me of a—of a rose, an absolute rose" (19; ch. 1); and "Bles-sed pre-cious. . . . Come to your own mother that loves you" (123; ch. 7)—as to make it difficult to take anything she says seriously.**
- Thus, on top of all her other sins, she's a phoney.**

Jordan Baker

- Jordan Baker is characterised as a liar and a cheat.
- Nick catches her lying about having left a borrowed car out in the rain with its top down, and apparently she was caught cheating during a golf tournament, though she managed to get away with it under circumstances that imply the use of bribery or coercion: “The thing approached the proportions of a scandal—then died away. A caddy retracted his statement and the only other witness admitted that he might have been mistaken” (62–63; ch. 3).

- Like Daisy, Jordan exhibits a lack of concern for others that manifests itself in a refusal to take responsibility for herself, as we see when Nick reports that she drove her car “so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man’s coat” (63; ch. 3).
- Her response to Nick’s admonition that she should drive more carefully or not drive at all is a careless remark that “They’ll [other people will] keep out of my way. . . . It takes two to make an accident” (63; ch. 3).
- When Nick says, “Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself” (63; ch. 3), Jordan’s manipulateness is revealed in her response: “I hope I never will. . . . I hate careless people.
- That’s why I like you” (63; ch. 3). And her manipulation works: “for a moment I thought I loved her,” Nick admits (63; ch. 3).

- Of course, the fact that Jordan must cheat to succeed at golf also implies that women can't succeed in a man's field purely on their own ability.**

- And her physical description completes the stereotype that women who invade the male domain are rather masculine: "She was a slender, small-breasted girl with an erect carriage which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet" (15; ch. 1). The word most frequently used to describe her appearance is jaunty.**

- In other words, Jordan looks like a boy.**

Myrtle Wilson

- ❑ Surely, the most unsympathetic characterisation of the three is that of Myrtle Wilson.
- ❑ She's loud, obnoxious, and phoney, as we see in her “violently affected” (35; ch. 2) behaviour at the party in the small flat Tom keeps for their rendezvous.
- ❑ She cheats on George, who is devoted to her—so she doesn't even have the excuse Daisy has of an unfaithful husband—and she bullies and humiliates him as well.
- ❑ She has neither the youth nor the beauty of Daisy and Jordan: “She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout. . . . Her face . . . contained no facet or gleam of beauty” (29–30; ch. 2).

- **And unlike the other two women, she is overtly sexual: “[S]he carried her surplus flesh sensuously” (29; ch. 2), and “there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering” (30; ch. 2).**
- **In addition, she’s much more sexually aggressive than Daisy or Jordan.**

When Tom and Nick show up unexpectedly at Wilson's Garage...

- [s] he smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye. Then she wet her lips and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice:
- “Get some chairs, why don't you, so somebody can sit down.”
- “Oh sure,” agreed Wilson. . . . A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity—except his wife, who moved close to Tom. (0; ch.)

- In fact, Myrtle is the only woman in the novel we “see” having sex: when Nick returns to their flat after his errand to buy cigarettes, she and Tom have disappeared into the bedroom and emerge only as the rest of their company begins to arrive.**
- Furthermore, Myrtle’s interest in Tom is clearly mercenary.**
- She was first attracted to him by the expensive quality of his clothing, she begins spending his money the instant they meet in town, and she wants him to divorce Daisy and marry her so that she can move out of the garage apartment she’s shared with George for the past eleven years.**

It is important to note that, in addition to being **negatively portrayed (few if any readers find Daisy, Jordan, or Myrtle likeable), in all three cases, these transgressive women are **punished** by the progression of narrative events.**

- That **Daisy** gets stuck with Tom in a loveless marriage seems, at that point in the narrative, only right and proper.
- She doesn't deserve any better, and we can be relatively certain, given Tom's desire for extramarital affairs, that her punishment will fit her crime.
- Tom will continue to be unfaithful to her just as she has been unfaithful to him and, more important, unfaithful to Gatsby.

- **Jordan** is punished when Nick “throw[s] [her] over” (186; ch. 9) during a telephone conversation just before Gatsby’s murder.
- Later, at the end of Nick’s farewell visit to Jordan, he says, “[S]he told me without comment that she was engaged to another man. I doubted that though there were several she could have married at a nod of her head” (185–86; ch. 9).
- Jordan also tells Nick, during that visit, “I don’t give a damn about you now but [being rejected] was a new experience for me and I felt a little dizzy for a while” (186; ch. 9).
- The way in which Jordan insists she doesn’t care merely underscores the fact that she is finally “brought down a peg or two.”

- **The most severe punishment, however, is meted out to the woman who threatens patriarchy the most: [Myrtle Wilson](#).**
- **She threatens patriarchy the most because she violates patriarchal gender roles so unabashedly and because, despite the powerlessness of her situation as a woman from the lower strata of society, her sexual vitality is portrayed as a form of aggressiveness, a personal power much greater than that of Daisy or Jordan.**
- **Her husband all but disappears in her presence, and her “intense vitality” (35; ch. 2) makes her the only thing in the garage to stand out from the “cement colour of the walls” into which her husband “mingl[es] immediately” (30; ch. 2).**

- Even as Nick speeds past Wilson's garage on his way to town with Gatsby, he can't help but notice "Mrs. Wilson straining at the garage pump with panting vitality" (72; ch. 4).
- As Michaelis observes, "Wilson was his wife's man and not his own" (144; ch. 7).
- Indeed, Michaelis believes "there was not enough of him for his wife" (167; ch. 8).
- Myrtle even stands up to Tom, insisting that she has a right to "mention Daisy's name": " 'Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!' shouted Mrs. Wilson. 'I'll say it whenever I want to!' " (41; ch. 2).

- Her punishment for saying Daisy's name is swift and merciless: "Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand" (41; ch. 2).
- But Nick quickly trivialises the incident, effectively forestalling any sympathy we might feel for Myrtle. "Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor and women's voices scolding" (41; ch. 2), he reports.
- Mr. McKee is so unimpressed by the event that he slowly rambles out the door, and Nick follows him, leaving Mrs. McKee "and Catherine scolding and consoling as they stumbled here and there among the crowded furniture with articles of aid" (41–42; ch. 2).
- In other words, the breaking of Myrtle's nose is no big deal, just another mess for women to clean up, nothing important enough to concern men, and what's more, Myrtle had it coming.

- **Of course, Tom's abuse of Myrtle is slight in comparison to the novel's punishment of her: as Myrtle flees her husband and attempts to flag down the car she believes carries her lover, she is hit by that car and killed.**
- **It is important to note that her death includes sexual mutilation —“when they had torn open her shirtwaist still damp with perspiration they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap” (145; ch. 7)—which underscores the notion that Myrtle's sexual vitality, that is, her aggressiveness, was her real crime.**
- **Indeed, the description of her death closes with a reference to her vitality: “The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long” (145; ch. 7).**

- Thus, although Myrtle's misconduct is much less serious than that of Daisy or Jordan—she doesn't, like Daisy, commit vehicular homicide and then let her lover take the blame; and she is not, like Jordan, fundamentally dishonest—her punishment is by far the most severe.
- Obviously, the novel finds aggressiveness, especially sexual aggressiveness, the most unattractive and unforgivable quality a woman can have.
- Daisy and Jordan may be “bad girls” from time to time, but Myrtle's sexual aggressiveness makes her a “bad girl” all the time.

***The Great Gatsby's* discomfort with the post-World War I New Woman, which is responsible for its negative characterisations and punitive treatment of the modern women it portrays, persists in some of the patriarchal ideology still operating in contemporary culture.**

Certainly, women are no longer generally condemned for:

- wearing their hair or their skirts short,**
- dancing wild dances,**
- or frequenting raucous nightclubs**

(unless violence is perpetrated against them under these circumstances, in which case they may be blamed for “bringing it on themselves”).

But women are still often looked at askance for other violations of patriarchal gender roles, such as...

- opting to have children out of wedlock and raise them on their own,**
- being sexually assertive,**
- being “too” success-oriented on the job, or putting career before marriage and family.**

All of these behaviours are frequently considered “too aggressive” for women and are often satirised by the television and movie industries.

- Like Myrtle Wilson, women today are often punished for what is perceived as their aggressiveness.**
- Indeed, some Americans want to blame women's increased aggressiveness, or at least what is perceived as such, for the increase in crimes of violence against women in this country.**
- At the same time, however, the public doesn't want to admit that women's gender is a factor in the crimes of violence committed against them.**

Although, finally, laws have been passed:

- to protect women from sexual harassment on the job,**
- to protect them from sexual abuse and other forms of domestic violence in the home,**
- to censure rape as a crime of violence rather than tacitly condone it as a crime of passion,**

public awareness and willingness to support the victims of such mistreatment still lag far behind the legislation.

This is called *blaming the victim*:
we want to believe that it is
women's aggressive or
inappropriate or foolish
behaviour, NOT their *gender*, that
can get them into trouble.

Trailer "the Accused"

In other words, the patriarchal ideology responsible for the oppression of women can't be effectively addressed until there is public as well as legal recognition that it still exists.

- Clearly, there is an important connection between our ability to recognise patriarchal ideology and our willingness to experience the pain such knowledge is liable to cause us.**
- Perhaps this is one reason why feminism is still regarded so suspiciously by many women and men today: it holds a mirror not just to our public lives but to our private lives as well, and it asks us to reassess our most personal experiences and our most entrenched and comfortable assumptions.**

- For this reason, works like *The Great Gatsby* can be very helpful to new students of feminist criticism.**
- By helping us learn to see how patriarchal ideology operates in literature, such works can prepare us to direct our feminist vision where we must eventually learn to focus it most clearly: on ourselves.**