

Questions for Feminist Analysis

Use this list as a tool to notice patterns about a piece, gathering and brainstorming some initial thoughts regarding an image, item, essay, poem, film, advertisement, or other cultural artifact you want to analyze. Freewrite for yourself as many answers here as you can and notice patterns that begin to emerge in your analysis.

1. People and Presence

- Who is present and who is absent in the text?
- What roles have been assigned to the men and women in the text? Are the roles stereotypical? Do gender roles conflict with personal desires, and if so, how?
- Is the work sympathetic to particular characters' interests? To what extent? Who does the text want you to "root for"? How can you tell?

2. Imagery, Actions, and Control

- What are the predominant images? Does anything surprise you?
- What actions occur? What behaviors and emotions are valued or emphasized?
- Who is "strong"? Who has control? How can you tell?
- Does the text paint a picture – even a small one - of gender relations? What does it mean, in this text, to be a man or woman? How is gender in this work constructed? Are gender roles in the work equal? Traditional? Nontraditional? How do characters in the work match or not match common stereotypes?
- Is there anything here that can be read "against the grain" or seems to argue more than one direction at once?

3. Gender Roles and Relationships

- How are the lives of men and women portrayed in the work? Do the men and women in the work accept or reject traditional roles?
- What attitudes are explicit or implicit concerning heterosexual, homosexual and other queer relationships? Are these relationships sources of conflict? Do they provide resolutions to conflicts?
- How do male characters talk about or treat female characters? How do female characters talk about or treat male characters? Same questions apply. Examine female relationships between each other: is this positive and supportive or adversarial?
- Are gender relations in the text celebrated? Denigrated? Mocked? Mystified? If so, how? How do the characters view sexuality? Do they show an awareness of the importance of consent?

4. Power and Stereotypes

- What kinds of power do women and minorities have in this text? Political? Economic? Social? Psychological? Other kinds of power?

- What stereotypes of gender are present? Stereotypical representations of women historically often included extreme tropes such as: the beloved, an ideal mother, a virgin, a whore, a goddess. Women then are also often stereotyped as simple, weak, foolish, or naive. Does the text refer to, uphold, or resist any of these stereotypes? How?
- What sustains gender relations in the text? What causes conflict or reconciliation between men and women?

5. Gender Studies Themes and Cultural Analysis

- Does the work challenge or affirm traditional ideas about men, women and same-sex relationships?
- Do any of the work's themes touch upon any idea that could be seen as a feminist issue? Consider your prior reading. How is the text subtly or overtly supportive or disparaging of women? What issues exist of specific importance to women and women's perspectives, values, categories, epistemologies, and experiences?
- How and to what extent does this work critique the dominant culture and its institutions? How does it offer overt or subtle commentary upon the dominant culture and its institutions?
- Much feminist criticism is intent upon examination of texts with the purpose of improving real lives—not just "knowledge for knowledge's sake." Feminist critics ask not just what a work means, but also what it does to make the world a better place for real people. What are the "real world" implications of your argument about this piece? What can we learn from thinking about it this way?
- The feminist critic does not assume themselves to be objective and ideology-free or neutral. The life, social location, biases, etc., of the critic are openly admitted and considered part of the critical work being done. Traditional criticism and research by contrast often assumes objectivity and an apolitical stance while being profoundly shaped by traditionally male-centric ideology and tradition. What ideas and assumptions shape your reading of this text? What assumptions does it make about its audience?

Adapted and Integrated from the following sources, as well as many class discussions over time:

<https://writingcommons.org/section/research/research-methods/textual-methods/literary-criticism/feminist-criticism/>
<https://www.scribd.com/document/407284563/essential-questions-for-a-feminist-reading>
<https://www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/271/FeministCriticism.htm>
<https://sites.wp.odu.edu/tatum-fisherengl333/theory-4/>
<https://dailygeekette.wordpress.com/2017/03/23/feminist-questions-to-ask-yourself-while-reading>