

GENTRIFICATION

WHEN DID YOU BECOME GAY?

APPROPRIATION VS. APPRECIATION

WELFARE

WHITE PRIDE

WHAT ARE YOU?

MODEL MINORITY

RACE CARD

CODE WORDS

FEMINISM

**WHAT I HEAR
WHEN YOU SAY**

VIEWING GUIDE

FEMINISM



AN INTRODUCTION TO **WHAT I HEAR WHEN YOU SAY**

Deeply ingrained in human nature is a tendency to organize, classify, and categorize our complex world. Often, this is a good thing. This ability helps us make sense of our environment and navigate unfamiliar landscapes while keeping us from being overwhelmed by the constant stream of new information and experiences.

When we apply this same impulse to social interactions, however, it can be, at best, reductive and, at worst, dangerous. Seeing each other through the lens of labels and stereotypes prevents us from making authentic connections and understanding each other's experiences.

Through the initiative, What I Hear When You Say (WIHWYS), we explore how words can both divide and unite us and learn more about the complex and everchanging ways that language shapes our expectations, opportunities, and social privilege. WIHWYS 's interactive multimedia resources challenge what we think we know about race, class, gender, and identity, and provide a dynamic digital space where we can raise difficult questions, discuss new ideas, and share fresh perspectives.

FEMINISM

“ there should be equality between the sexes socially, culturally, politically across the board.

Jasmine Rivera, Filmmaker



def·i·ni·tion
FEMINISM
adjective

advocating social, political, legal, and economic rights for women equal to those of men.



Watch the full episode: Feminism

<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/web-series/feminism/>

A QUICK LOOK AT FEMINISM AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

- A 2016 national survey by the Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation finds 6 in 10 women and one-third of men identify as feminists. Among women who identified as a feminist, 68% were between ages 50 and 54 while 51% were between 35 and 49.¹
- More than 4 in 10 Americans see feminism as an angry movement that unfairly blames men for women's problems.²
- According to a World Economic Forum report, the United States has fallen in the global ranking of gender equality in politics from 66th place in 2006 to 73rd place in 2016.³
- In 2006, the U.S. ranked 3rd globally in economic gender equality, but by 2016, the U.S. ranking fell to 26th in the world. Women only earn 65% of men's incomes and this wage gap lands the U.S. below 50 other countries.⁴

- When asked in a poll to select “the bigger factor keeping women from achieving full equality with men” an equal percentage of women (44%) selected “The choices women make themselves” and “Discrimination against women”.⁵

DIG DEEPER | BECHDEL, MAKO MORI, AND EXAMINING INCLUSION IN MEDIA

In her 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf reflects on the portrayals of female relationships in some of her favorite books: “All these relationships between women, I thought...are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends... They are, now and then, mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men.”⁶

Fifty years later, in 1985, artist Alison Bechdel took up the same issue of women's representation, this time in cinema, through her comic *Dykes To Watch Out For*.⁷ In the strip titled, “The Rule”, two characters are talking about going to see a movie and one explains that she only sees films that fulfill three “basic requirements”:

“One, it has to have at least two women in it who,
Two, talk to each other about,
Three, something besides a man.”⁸

Her friend responds that her rule is “pretty strict, but a good idea”, but they are unable to find any movies that fit this simple criteria and head home. (Original comic strip: <http://dykestowatchoutfor.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/The-Rule-cleaned-up.jpg>)

This comic inspired The Bechdel-Wallace Test (aka The Bechdel Test), a criteria for measuring women's representation in film and other media, named after Bechdel and her friend Liz Wallace, who originally suggested the idea for the “rule”.

Although the criteria for the Bechdel Test seem to set a fairly low bar, according to BechdelTest.com--an independent site that crowdsources data using the Bechdel “requirements”--more than 40% of films fail to fulfill these basic standards.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA?

Despite the Bechdel Test inspiring some conversations around gender diversity in the media, independent projects like BechdelTest.com were the only wide-ranging sources of data on the topic, until recently.

In 2004, actor Gina Davis launched the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to both study and educate the entertainment industry on issues related to representation.

In their 2014 study with the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, the Institute looked at popular films made from 2010 to 2013 in 11 countries and found that only 31% of named characters were female, and only 23% of the films had a female protagonist or co-protagonist. Women and female characters were also five times more likely to receive appearance-based comments than male characters, and only 7% of these films had female directors. ⁹

A more recent 2015 study by USC Annenberg School of Journalism analyzed 700 popular films from 2007-2014, and found that only 30% of speaking characters were female, a ratio of over 2 to 1. They also found that only 11% of the films had gender balanced casts or featured girls/women in at least half of the speaking roles. In addition, in popular films from 2014, no female actors over the age of 45 performed lead or co-lead roles. ¹⁰

In a 2016 “census” of screenplays for 2,000 popular movies, researcher Hanah Anderson and data scientist Matt Daniels found that men consistently have more lines than women across different genres of film. Their findings also corroborated an earlier study that, in 100% of Disney “princess films” made since 1989’s *The Little Mermaid*, male characters had substantially more lines than female characters. ¹¹

BEYOND BECHDEL

Although the Bechdel Test has helped to launch a conversation about gender representation in the media, it has been criticised for having too narrow a focus that leaves out films with strong female leads such as *Gravity* and *Pacific Rim* and ignores issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, etc. In response, a range of new media evaluation “tests” have been developed by fans and academics to work alongside and/or strengthen the Bechdel Test. Some examples are:

The Mako Mori Test: Inspired by the world-saving character from *Pacific Rim*, Mako Mori, played by Rinko Kikuchi, this test requires a film to have: 1) at least one female character; 2) who gets her own narrative arc; 3) that is not about supporting a man’s story.¹²

The Vito Russo Test: Named after GLAAD co-founder and film historian Vito Russo, who wrote *The Celluloid Closet*, this test requires a film or television show to have 1) a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender; 2) who is not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity; 3) is tied to the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect.¹³

DuVernay Test: Proposed by New York Times film critic Manohla Dargis in honor of filmmaker Ava DuVernay, this test examines representations of African-Americans and other minorities in film and media and evaluates the degree to which these characters have fully realized lives rather than serve as scenery in White stories.¹⁴

There is also a growing collection of media evaluation tools that analyze diversity and the quality of representation, including the Tauriel Test that evaluates the competency of professional female characters; the Woman in Refrigerators test that evaluates if a woman’s intense suffering is used to kickstart or progress the male protagonist’s storyline; and the The Sexy Lamp Test (SLT), inspired by the sexy leg lamp in *A Christmas Story*. The SLT was created by comic book writer Kelly Sue DeConnick to evaluate how substantial a female character is: “If you can replace your female character with a sexy lamp and the story still basically works, maybe you need another draft.”¹⁵

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In addition to helping to raise conversations about the quantity of gender representation in the media, Alison Bechdel's comic strip also revealed a desire for better, more complex stories about women and how they relate to each other.

Like Virginia Woolf, the Bechdel Test and media tests that came after it are really examining who is included in our stories and how much they matter to that story and to the world they exist in. If diverse characters are fully developed people who matter to each other, they are far more likely to matter to an audience.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- What does gender equality mean to you?
- What words do you associate with feminism? Do you identify as a feminist? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, why do some people feel uncomfortable being identified as a feminist?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of the Bechdel Test? Does passing the Bechdel Test mean that a movie is good?
- What do you think of the idea that everyone's feminism can be different? Do you agree, or do you think feminism needs to be uniform in order to be effective?
- What is "intersectional feminism"? How can intersectional feminism help to unite people from disparate backgrounds?



Hear different perspectives on the Topic of Feminism
<http://pbs.org/what-i-hear/topics/feminism/>

LEARN MORE

MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA

<http://www.pbs.org/show/makers-women-who-make-america/>

This documentary series examines how women have helped shape America over the past 150 years, striving for a full and fair share of political power and economic opportunity.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/the-womens-movement/#.WZ_SSIWeyys/

The Women's Movement collection examines the first two waves of the campaign for equal opportunities for women in the United States in all areas of public and private life

THE THE CONTRARY

<http://www.pbs.org/to-the-contrary/>

TCC is an all-female news analysis series covering national and international issues and policies.

VOICES FROM THE EPISODE | FEMINISM



Phoebe Robinson
Comedian, Writer & Actress

Author of NYT Best Seller *You Can't Touch My Hair*

Vulture.com, Essence, and Esquire have named one of the top comedians

Has appeared on Late Night w/ Seth Meyers, Last Call with Carson Daly, Conan, and Broad City



Jasmine Rivera
Filmmaker

Director of awardwinning short *Nain Rouge*

2014 Film/Theatre Kresge Fellow

Writer, director and producer *American Prophet*

Member of Film Fatales Detroit



Kristen Korvette
Author

Author of *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*

Founding editrix of Slutist, a sex positive feminist website

Lecturer at The New School

Visit pbs.org/whatihear for a detailed Viewing Guide on every topic.

CITATION GLOSSARY

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