

Example by StudyDriver

Source: <https://studydriver.com/to-kill-a-mockingbird-feminism/>

To Kill a Mockingbird Feminism Example

The story of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, takes place in a rural, southern town of Maycomb, Alabama during the Great Depression. This is a time in the United States where people were still holding onto traditional values and ideas. Maycomb was no different in that men were the ones going out to work, while certain different roles were expected of women. Women were to be delicate, always be polite and even wear dresses. Lee uses the characters in the story to show how beliefs of feminism behaviors are often pushed on girls at a very young age, which manifests well into their adult years. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, society dictated the ideas of feminism and sexism that affected the gender roles that the people who lived at that time played.

All the women in *To Kill a Mockingbird* outside of Jean Louise Finch, also known as Scout are portrayed with dainty and mother-like qualities. Scout, however, does not conform to the gender roles and grows up to be a tomboy who dislikes being forced to be anything but. Jem's exposure to gender roles, along with his relation to Scout causes him to be indifferent towards her. For example, after an encounter with the Radleys, Jem exclaimed, "I swear, Scout sometimes you act so much like a girl it's mortifyin'." (Lee 50). His comment conveys not only that girls are the weaker sex but treats 'girl' as a derogatory term which Scout grows accustomed to. This is also seen

when Scout says, “and on pain of being called a girl” (Lee 55). Jem and Dill use her gender so as to exclude her from activities while Scout expresses her displeasure from being called this. His attitude towards it exemplifies how many of the male characters in the book tend to see themselves as the ‘better gender’.

The symbol of ‘overalls’ in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is important in looking at the terms of femininity in Maycomb. In one instance, Mrs. Dubose says, “what are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady!” (Lee 135). Mrs. Dubose, much like Aunt Alexandra has a simple goal of wanting others, especially her niece to follow the societal norms imposed on them, and the overalls represent the opposite. For example, “I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I was not supposed to be doing things that required pants.” (Lee 108). Pants symbolize the ways in which Scout can be a tomboy while giving her the freedom to do much more than she can in a dress. Scout uses them as a way to fight the attempts of her aunt and others trying to make a lady out of her. The overalls also symbolize rigid gender roles where Scout is expected to look and act a certain way and is not accepted as a lady if she fails to do so.

To Kill a Mockingbird, written in the 1960s illustrates much of the atmosphere surrounding sexism and feminism prevalent from the Great Depression. At the time, the first of the three waves of feminism was occurring which centered around women’s suffrage followed by the second wave: the liberation movement wanting equal legal and social rights. The third wave which we are currently in is challenging the ideas of what it means to be a woman and how factors such as race, ethnicity, and religion, etc are important when talking about feminism. Harper Lee, herself is a strong feminist who defied many girly stereotypes by being a tomboy growing up. Through her work, she displays her feelings towards societal attitudes towards women and shows that you can be more than just a ‘delicate’ girl. She quite well depicts that the double standard and gender roles are a product of the time and traditional beliefs manifested over a lifetime.