
A critical treatise on Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminist philosophy of education

Scholastica Chinyere Jacob Uzomah¹, Michael Maduawuchi Uzomah^{2*}

¹Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, chichischolar@gmail.com

^{2*}Department of Philosophy, St. Albert Institute, Fayit-FadanKagoma, Kaduna State, an affiliate of University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, drmmuzomah@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

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Abstract: The paper is a critical literary cum philosophical discourse on the educational feminist philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft feminism responded to the prevailing gender fissure of her time. Gender fissure arises from the indecorous gender identity ascribed to the female gender. The main problem of this study is the unequal rational status ascribed to the male and female genders, respectively. The central objective of this study is to interrogate the root cause of the educational disadvantages of the girl-child. With the aid of the feminist theory and the analytic, expository, and normative approaches, this study demonstrates that the hitherto educational disadvantages of the girl-child do not result from her less rational capacity, but rather from her socially subverted gender identity and the nurturing of improper education. The study finds Wollstonecraft's feminist educational insights thoughtful, incisive, objective, and sustainably pragmatic. Based on these findings, the paper argues that men and women are born equal, with equal rational capacity for education, and as such, individuals should be educated based on their natural dispositions and not based on their sex or gender. It recommends uniform education of both genders against a traditional stereotyped system of education. The study is qualitative research based on secondary data.

Keywords: Education, Feminism, Gender stereotypes, Gender fissure, Liberation, Subverted identity

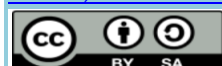
1. Introduction

In the history and development of feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft is one great icon who played a pioneering role, such that any genuine recounting of the history of feminism and gender studies would be incomplete without deliberate reference to her superb feminist insights. Her life as a girl and young lady was significantly impacted by the experience of husbands lording their patriarchal gut on their wives. One such experience was in her nuclear home and family. For instance, her father, Edward John Wollstonecraft, was a family authoritarian who bullied his wife, Elizabeth Dixon, into a state of exhausted servitude. This harrowing experience of her mother and subsequent ones eventually shaped her thoughts and outlook on life. This gave her first-hand knowledge of the deplorable state of women around the world and it motivated her feminist disposition and orientation.

Wollstonecraft firmly believed that the apparent inadequacies of women and their inability to contribute meaningfully to the development and structuring of society do proceed from their nature. Rather improper education mares their intellectual development, acquisition of skills, and economic independence. Consequently, Wollstonecraft postulated that equal and proper education holds the master key to the integral and sustainable development and emancipation of the girl-child.

It should be noted that the most impressive and objective significance of her educational feminism is the postulate that proper education of the girl-child would be of benefit not just to women but to men and the entire society as well. For instance, proper education would endow the woman with qualities that would enable her to perform her duties as a mother, better nurture and educate her children, and empower her with the creative capabilities to contribute meaningfully to human and social development. Proper education would also make her economically independent thereby relieving their husbands of certain financial burdens.

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2. Literature review

2.1. Brief Profile of Mary Wollstonecraft

Wollstonecraft was born in 1759 in London and was the second child and oldest daughter of seven siblings. Her father was ill-tempered, violent, and frequently drunk. He squandered his inheritance, causing the social and financial decline of his family. Because her mother was so dispirited, Mary was forced to be the caregiver and protector of her siblings and her abused mother (Lawhead, 2015: 315). Upon leaving home in pursuit of several jobs, Wollstonecraft ended up back in London in 1787 and went to work for the public Wollstonecraft Joseph Johnson, who helped get her started as a writer. Initially, Wollstonecraft did translations of other people's works and wrote book reviews for his periodical. Eventually, Wollstonecraft made her fame by publishing her books.

Her circle of friends was British freethinkers, political radicals, and religious dissenters. Through Johnson's famous dinner parties, Wollstonecraft met some of the leading intellectuals of the day. These included Thomas Paine, the American revolutionary and pamphleteer, and William Godwin, a radical English political philosopher, novelist, and journalist (Lawhead, 2015: 315). These great personalities in one way or the other shaped her into the brilliant scholar Wollstonecraft eventually became. Several years later Wollstonecraft became reacquainted with William Godwin and their friendship blossomed into a love relationship and marriage. They had a daughter and named her Mary, after her mother. Their daughter would marry the poet Percy Wollstonecraft Shelley and would be known to the world as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*. Wollstonecraft died tragically in 1797 at age thirty-eight, from a fever resulting from complications of childbirth, days after giving birth to their daughter (Lawhead, 2015: 315).

2.2. Wollstonecraft's Contributions to Philosophy and Gender Discourses

Wollstonecraft made remarkable contributions towards philosophical development, gender discourses, and general knowledge. Wollstonecraft had a number of works to her credit. Specifically, Wollstonecraft wrote on social and political philosophy and philosophy of education. Also, as a literary icon and analyst, Wollstonecraft wrote novels, book reviews, a history of the French Revolution, a travel narrative, and two works of educational stories and essays for children. Wollstonecraft was an outspoken advocate for women's rights and, for this reason, many consider her the founder of what later would be called the "feminist movement." Wollstonecraft was greatly influenced by the works of John Locke and was obviously within the tradition of British empiricism (Lawhead, 2015: 315). It is pertinent to observe here that although these works contributed immensely to the literary and intellectual development of her day, however, Wollstonecraft was made renowned and famous by two principal works: *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, written in 1790. This book was one of the first critical responses to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, which was an intellectual attack on the French Revolution. Burke defended tradition and custom, especially the constitutional monarchy and aristocracy (Lawhead, 2015: 315).

2.3. Background to Wollstonecraft Philosophy of Gender

The background to Wollstonecraft's gender philosophy was eighteenth-century England. In this century, gender-based discriminations against women were orchestrated by patriarchy. Women were devalued and reduced to mere objects with little or no economic, social, or political relevance. They were considered inferior humans as their rational prowess was limited to home-based activities. That is, their education was for the sole purpose of being good wives to their husbands and effective domestic workers (Uzomah, 2017: 382). At the material time, English society raised women to be socially, politically, and economically dependent on men. They were basically raised to be loyal and subordinate to men with no decision-making rights. They were completely dependent and subservient to their husbands and other significant male figures.

The regard accorded to women in this period was a result of the centrality of marriage in this time and culture. Women of this age made marriage their top priority as a means of ensuring their economic security (Viscarri, 2016: 3). The family as the most potent patriarchal structure played a pivotal role in nursing and entrenching gender-based discriminations and disparities in this century. The family allotted different roles to boys and girls, men and women. In the century under study, women were considered incapable of heading leadership positions and this was why they were politically alienated. Even married women were denied the right to ownership of private property. Although, at this material time, single women were at liberty to own properties and some contracts their rights were still limited. This means that the economic freedom of women was not totally denied but restricted. Upon marriage, every private property acquired by a woman before marriage ceases to be hers. The social status of married women is just a little higher than that of a slave. For instance, married women cannot leave their homes without the express permission of their husbands.

2.4 Feminist theory

The contemporary global society is plagued by social malaises of racism, ethnicism, classism, lookism, ableism, religionism, and genderism (sexism). These are social inequalities and inordinate discrimination based on prejudice. The most pertinacious, outrageous, divisive, and ubiquitous of these socially discriminatory stereotypes is genderism (sexism). Genderism consists of the subversion and displacement of biological identity with social binary identities, relations, roles, and rules, thereby reconfiguring the social world into a gendered world. This is the causal factor responsible for the prevailing global gender fissure (Uzomah, 2024: x).

The extant global gender fissure has been perennial, ubiquitous, and endemic in human society. Notwithstanding the profoundly endemic nature of gender rift, in the last century, one gender has risen against all odds to challenge the indecorous gender identity ascribed to it and the exclusive roles designated for it. This gender considers itself the most

unfortunate and cheated gender. Subsequently, the persistence and emotive nature of this agitation and crusade for gender equality has precipitated the advent of critical gender discourses. The central question that features prominently in gender discourses and debates is the question of gender inequalities and disparities constituting the extant gender fissure (Uzomah, 2024: x). Feminism and gender studies focus on the universal shared experience of social inequalities and discrimination against women. Women in the past had been marginalized and are seen as Second class citizens of society. There was the need to properly place women where they belonged and to argue that biological sex should not be the pre-determinant factor shaping a person's social identity, and political or economic rights as some people believed (Falana, 2024: v).

2.4.1. Etymology and definitions of feminism

Etymologically, the concept of feminism is derived from the Latin, 'femina' which means woman. From this root meaning, feminism is women-oriented and concentrates on issues that concern women. It is targeted towards men, but for the benefit of women; it is a movement moving against men. According to MadhuKumari, "a broad understanding of feminism includes the acting, speaking, writing, and advocating on behalf of women's issues and rights, and identifying injustice to females in the social status quo (Uzomah, 2017: 112-117). By this definition, feminism entails every positive action towards identifying the various social and cultural injustices that denigrate women forks, and activism targeted towards the elimination of these artificially forged discriminations as perpetuated by the hegemony of patriarchy.

The *Universal Abridged Dictionary*, defined feminism as, the theory that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men. The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* asserts that "a feminist is a person who supports the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men" (544). This gives the impression that feminists aspire to an egalitarian society. To the ordinary man on the street, at the mere mentioning of the terminology, "feminist" what immediately comes to mind is, that a feminist must be either a young career lady or a disgruntled woman who wants to be accorded all rights, privileges and prestige accorded to her male counterparts. On the contrary, one must not necessarily be a woman or a female before he/Wollstonecraft can be termed a feminist. Anyone who agitates for gender parity qualifies as a feminist. The most repugnant problem with gender that is of crucial and paramount concern to feminists is the question of imbalances and disparities existing between the two gender types. Hence, anyone who charitably moves a vote of no confidence against the uneven distribution of power between males and females, and calls for a solution, the same is qualified to bear the attribute, 'a feminist'.

2.4.2. Proper and equal education as a master key to women's liberation

Women activists are convinced that education is key to women's emancipation. Virtually all feminists see equal rights to education as the most potent factor of women's liberation. This argument leveraged the modern-day feminist maxim, "educate a girl child, and educate a nation". Premised on the fact that women are saddled with the responsibility of child raising and education, hence, it is only the educated woman that has the capacity to properly educate children because **nemo quod dant non habent**(no one gives what he/Wollstonecraft does not have). Feminist scholars like Simone De Beauvoir (2011), Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Butler, Chimamanda Adichie, etc. were all unanimous in acknowledging the fundamental import of education for the attainment of liberty and equality.

2.4.3 Historical development of feminism: the three waves of feminism

Feminism grew out of the historical experience of resistance and self-definition by women in the circumstances of social control by men. Social inequality between men and women can be traced to unequal power between men and women, in particular societies e.g. roles and status between families, nurturing responsibilities, children, codes of conduct, public behaviour, legal and economic rights, job opportunities and access to public positions" (Johnson cited in Falana & Uzomah, 2024: 56).

Since the advent of feminism in the Western world in the 18th Century, it has undergone three phases of development and progression. In gender studies, these phases are known as waves. Each wave dealt with different aspects of the same feminist issues.

1. **First Wave:** The first wave refers to the movement of the 19th through early 20th Centuries, which dealt mainly with suffrage, working conditions, and educational rights for women and girls.
2. **Second Wave:** The second wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities and the role of women in society. This wave focused on the situation of middle or upper-class white women.
3. **Third Wave:** The third wave of feminism (late 1980s-early first decade of the 21st century) is seen as a continuation of the second wave and a response to the perceived failures (Kumari, vii). In other words, this strand entailed a renewed advocacy for women's greater influence in politics.

2.4.4. Approches/types of feminism

The movement called 'feminism' is not a homogenous movement, rather, it consists of different strands united in creating awareness regarding the disparities and unjust discrimination against women. However, the point of divergence amongst these strands is that they disagree on the possible approach to bringing about gender parity. Major trends within the contemporary feminist movement include Liberal, Radical, Socialist, Cultural, Amazon, Marxist, Eco, Psychoanalytic, and Materialist feminism. However, the feminist approaches relevant to this study include Liberal, Socialist, Cultural, Marxist, Eco, and Materialist feminism.

Traditional/ liberal feminism: Traditional or liberal feminism is the softest strand of feminism. Liberal feminists are the most common and the most accommodating. They hold that the oppression of women does nobody any good (Ogunrotimi, 2014: 25). Liberal feminism is Wollstonecraft red in the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. According to Wollstonecraft (1972: 45), many women with the potential to be successful and skilled members of the workforce do not get the opportunity to develop their talents, while men are denied some of the pleasures of having a close relationship with their children. Traditionally, women were not allowed to work outside the confines of their homes and neighborhoods. Business tycoons magnates and merchants would rather have their wives remain in the background as housewives. Apart from Wollstonecraft, other big names within the circle of liberal feminists include Abigail Adams and Simone de Beauvoir.

Socialist/Marxist feminism: Marxist feminism, as the name suggests, has its root and influence in the economic and political ideology of Karl Marx. In line with the philosophy of *Marxism*, Marxists are essentially concerned with the anomalies embedded in the economic relations and economic stratification in society. They maintain that feminine experience can be situated under these aspects, and, when juxtaposed with those of men, they yield a lot. For Marxist feminism, class origin, stratification in the family, and economic relations have all been schematized to favour men. A direct corollary according to Meecham is, 'domination by men is not only in the family, but also collectively in public matters (Ogunrotimi, 2024: 24).

Socialist feminists hold that there is a direct link between class structure and the oppression of women. Western society rewards working men because they produce tangible tradable goods. On the other hand, women's work in the domestic sphere is not valued by Western society because women do not produce tangible tradable goods. This gives men power and control over women (Jagger & Rosenberg, 1984: 58). Accordingly, this power and control over women by men in the context of the economy, alienates women from their economic activities. To achieve gender parity or equality from the Marxist perspective, women must be fairly and justly integrated into the workforce. They must be equally remunerated for equal jobs with their male counterparts. Their domestic work must be well remunerated and calculated when the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a nation is calculated. Like men, women should also owe means of production.

Cultural feminism: In what might seem like an irony, cultural feminism extols the differences between the male and female genders. According to Carol Gilligan cultural feminists believe that there are fundamental, biological differences between men and women and that women should celebrate these differences. Women are inherently more kind and gentle. Also, De Beauvoir (2011) the author of the historically controversial book *The Second Sex*, extolled what Wollstonecraft tagged, the 'insurmountable differences of men and women. Wollstonecraft introduced the idea that men and women are born different, yet equal. Although each must be treated with equal dignity and respect, each must perform the different roles these insurmountable biological differences impose or support. Cultural feminists believe that because women handle issues amicably, uniquely, and differently from how men do if women rule the world, there would be no more war and it would be a better place. Essentially, women's way is the right and better way for everyone. This sort of attitude is comparable to the spirit of negritude that extolled blackness and African culture.

Eco-feminism: This type of feminism is much more metaphysical than political in nature because it alludes to the "common attribute" of women and nature. It compares or draws parallels between men's exploitation of women and human beings' (led by patriarchy) exploitation of earth's resources. Its main thesis is that the patriarchal society exploits the resources of nature without regarding long-term consequences. Patriarchy exploits natural resources from Mother Nature without any effort toward regeneration, renewal, or compensation. All of man's relations with nature have always been exploitative, parasitic, and domineering, instead of explorative and symbiotic. In other words, man's approach has been anthropocentric instead of bio-centric or eco-centric.

In comparison with men's social relations with women, eco-feminists assert that patriarchy and male domination are harmful to women, as well as the environment. According to them, there is a link between the male's desire to dominate women and men's desire to exploit nature. Men feel as though they must tame and conquer both nature and women in order to have complete power. Eco-feminists maintained that it is this desire that destroys both women and the Earth.

Consequently, in disparaging patriarchal culture, eco-feminists expressed the sentiment that they are also resisting the plundering and destroying of the earth. Moreover, eco-feminists argue that patriarchal principles are harmful to children, women, and the environment at large. Therefore, resisting the patriarchal culture is tantamount to resisting the degradation and destruction of the earth. Furthermore, defenders of this strand of feminism opine that women have a central role in the preservation of nature because women understand and are one with nature. There is a deep connection that men cannot understand between the Earth and women, hence, the terms Mother Nature or Mother Earth.

Exponents of this hue of feminism strongly advocate that women need to use their superior insights to establish how humans can live in harmony with each other and with nature (Shiva, cited in Falana & Uzomah, 2024: 60). Women have richer intuition and perceptive faculties. They are better disposed to more readily distinguish between right and wrong, evil and good. Inherent in the makeup of women is a keen sense of orderliness, propriety, and beauty (Rafiu, cited in Falana & Uzomah, 2024: 60). In the real sense of the word, women are the stronger sex while men are the weaker, destructive and disruptive sex.

Materialist feminism: This strand of feminism highlights the significance of the mind, ideas, language, and culture for the oppression and denigration of women. This form of feminism is of the view that the restructuring or change that feminism clamors for must begin from within. We must watch our thoughts and mindsets, we must be cautious with our language and our culture also should be examined.

Materialist feminists advocated for the transformation of the metaphorical and hypothetical structures of our minds because they are the real potent structures that sustain inequalities and imbalances. When this is done, it would automatically transform physical structures. As the rationalist philosopher says, nothing is in the world that has not first existed in the mind. Physical structures do not transform any society, but ideas which are products of the mind work in structures to catalyze development of society.

Generally, feminism as a movement is an agitation, a protest, a fierce aggressive offensive against patriarchy, and a condemnation of social inequalities against women in the hands of men. It is a bold statement that women are not inferiors to men, and therefore deserve equal treatment with their male counterparts. It is a political struggle against the hegemony and imperialism of the patriarchal system, which in their opinion has subdued, dominated, subjugated, and denigrated the dignity of womanhood. Patriarchy as configured by various feminist scholars is a hegemonic masculinity that infamously recreates women into domestic and sexual objects. This to their judgment is not only unfair but despicable and dastardly (Falana & Uzomah, 2024: 183).

Since the inception of feminism, it has caused a great revolution and changes in the local, national, and global social orders. Feminist agitation has and continues to cause social change by changing the way and manner boys and girls, men and women interact, which hitherto was deemed impossible. Life in the modern world has drastically changed family structure and gender roles have been shifting from the traditional structures of responsibilities and functional areas. Decision-making power has experienced devolution. Women are increasingly being integrated into the mainstream of society, and their voices are being heard in every nook and cranny of society. They also are steadily gaining access into halls of power in local, national, and regional politics and in the comity of civilized nations. Their influence on the legal system cannot be overestimated or overemphasized, as there are countless laws that address issues pertaining to women, even to the disadvantage of men. The list of the overwhelming impact of the feminist aggressive offensive on society is endless (Falana & Uzomah, 2024: 184). Despite these gargantuan achievements, gender equality is far from being decisively attained. The ultimate goal of feminist social revolution is to counter every positive obstacle to women's autonomy, self-determination, and progress; and to establish equality for all.

2.5. Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

Wollstonecraft's most revolutionary work on gender was her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written in 1792. The *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was in response to J. J. Rousseau's notorious philosophy of education that was gender-stereotyped against women. The principal purpose of this pivotal book is the advocate for equality of the sexes. Wollstonecraft ridiculed prevailing notions about women as helpless, gentle domestic brutes and charming adornments in the household. Wollstonecraft maintained that education held the key to achieving a sense of self-respect and self-image that would enable women to put their capacities to good use (Uzomah, 2017: 380).

In this famous work, Wollstonecraft took a position different from male thinkers in her era, Wollstonecraft (Hitit, 2012: 75):

Expanded such ideas as "reason", "natural rights", "social contract" towards relations between genders and patriarchal authority of the family. These ideas of Wollstonecraft, who applied basic arguments of Enlightenment to the family, woman and private sphere, have constituted the foundation of modern feminism. Wollstonecraft produced classical writings that integrated political theory with gender roles and private relations. In this sense, relations that Wollstonecraft made among freedom, equality, virtue, reason, and genders and her criticism towards the societies of her era are important.

Her approach to gender discourses was an integrated approach because Wollstonecraft assembled facts from different disciplines and fields and systematically synergized them. This scientific approach made her work an all-time feminist masterpiece.

2.6. Rebuttal of Rousseau's Gender-Biased Educational Theory

An important task of Wollstonecraft's book was to critique Rousseau's stereotyped theory of education. On the positive perspective, Rousseau's theory was amongst other things, appraised as having made incisive contributions to the development of education globally, due to the fact that he articulated a democratic education that has the child as its focal point. In a negative light, Wollstonecraft accused him of being gender-discriminatory. For instance:

He proposed that the whole education of women ought to be related to their roles as wives to men, to please men, be useful to men, be loved, honoured, give way to men and possibly suffer injustice from men (Uzomah & Isanbor, 2017: 152).

This theory of education proposed that the whole program of the girl-child's education should be to form her to live for her husband. Outside of living for her husband, the woman has no other life.

Although Rousseau did not deny the rational nature of women he believed that women are capable of education. However, he opined that they are not made for activities that demand universal faculty, hence, by their nature they are more suited for domestic duties. Consequently, a specialized educational program should be designed with the sole aim of developing in them the necessary skills for home management (Uzomah & Isanbor, 2017: 152). This means that

women's education should be designed to make them effective domestic workers. In addition, their cosmetic and aesthetic lives also should be improved by education so as to irresistibly sustain the attention and admiration of men.

Furthermore, Rousseau asserted that men and women differ intrinsically with respect to virtue: a moral disjuncture resulting, according to Rousseau, from man's natural possession of reason and woman's natural deficiency in reason" (Frost, 1991: 257). This natural deficiency in the thought of Rousseau precludes women from rigorous studies and hard-core careers, other than home affairs or perhaps, menial jobs.

Consequently, Wollstonecraft wrote in response to Rousseau's uncaring gender bias and discriminatory treatise on education. Contrary to his claims, Wollstonecraft (1967: 23), posited that it was the lack of proper educational opportunities that was responsible for women's apparent lack of reason. To correct this avoidable lack, Wollstonecraft recommended that men and women should be equally and appropriately educated for the advancement and furtherance of society. This implies that the apparent lack in the reasoning faculty of women is not inherent rather it is caused by inadequate and inappropriate education. In realization of this fact, Wollstonecraft became resolutely poised to idealizing adequate educational curriculum for both genders for the ultimate good of society.

2.7. Equal Right to Education

Wollstonecraft began her treatise, by first making a bold statement for equal right to education for men and women by declaring that Wollstonecraft is pleading for her entire sex and not for herself. Wollstonecraft (1967: 23-24), wrote:

Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if Wollstonecraft be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, Wollstonecraft will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless Wollstonecraft know why Wollstonecraft ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthens her reason till Wollstonecraft comprehends her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good?.

Wollstonecraft's fundamental concern was not just for the education of the girl-child, no, Wollstonecraft advocates for the education of both the girl-child as well as the boy-child, for the ultimate moral and material transformation of society. This was against the backdrop that Wollstonecraft was dissatisfied with the maladies that characterized her socio-political environment at the time, especially the height of moral sleaze that characterized both men and women, Wollstonecraft came to the avid conviction that the root cause of these social maladies was the inappropriate educational system of her days. Wollstonecraft was unwaveringly convinced that the learning of her age tended much more to destruction and fostering disparities than to edification. The most outstanding social vice Wollstonecraft identified in this material time was the inappropriate moral behaviour amongst men and women. According to her, "men, who consider females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers" (Wollstonecraft, 1967: 31-34).

2.8. Women are rational and not objects of pity

Like Simone de Beauvoir would affirm later on, Wollstonecraft argued that a part of the blame for being disvalued should be put on women, because they chose to be the attractive mistresses because of the attention and excitement of the interplay of the sexes. De Beauvoir (2011) would argue that women chose to remain subservient to the "other sex" because of some fringe benefits accruing to them. However, while Beauvoir will later blame this irrational demeaning of women on men's deliberate attempt to keep women underdogs, Wollstonecraft rather saw a lack of proper understanding of the nature of women by both men and women, as responsible. Consequently, in order to reinstate women to their proper place as equal rational partners in progress, Wollstonecraft (1967: 34), declares:

I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength of mind and body, and to convince them that soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness... and that those who are objects of pity will soon be objects of contempt".

Wollstonecraft women reject nicknames that denote weakness and pity because in no time, these same labels would yield to disrespect and denigration.

2.9. Subverted gender identity

Another aspect of gender relations that Wollstonecraft found a distortion arising from both genders is gender identity. This point Wollstonecraft also shares with De Beauvoir. Wollstonecraft discovered that the average woman actually preferred being considered an object rather than a rational being as a result of the pleasure they derived from the attention of men. Women feel elated and highly spirited when they charm or command the attention of men. So, the whole program of women became how to remain appealing or fascinating to men. Perhaps, this is responsible for women's taste for colour and fashion. This seems to be a natural inclination in women because even as you peruse this text, women's lives are still characterized by the inclination to be attractive to men.

However natural this inclination appears, Wollstonecraft maintained this is a subversion of the authentic identity of the woman. Wollstonecraft observed that culture and gender socialization are responsible for the cultivation of this puerile gender identity in women. But how does this happen? Wollstonecraft (1967: 49-50), explained thus:

Women are told from their infancy, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives.

This seems to express an existential reality in the lives of women. Every culture and civilization teaches women to cherish their inner (character) and physical beauty as their greatest value, asset and resource.

To disorient women from this negative brainwashing and to adequately empower the girl-child to measure up to their male counterparts thereby dispelling this erroneous notion peddling the illusory weakness of women, Wollstonecraft decided that education was the only potent key.

2.10. Youths' Socialization and the life of women in marriage

Furthermore, identifying what was responsible for the deplorable state of marriage and the family in her time, Wollstonecraft pinpointed inappropriate education of women, as the culprit. Wollstonecraft held that the socialization young people received about relationships was a total fiasco because it was based on superficial and inordinate desires. Wollstonecraft indicated that youthful age is the peak of love, but in order to prepare them for a meaningful life beyond youth, they must be appropriately guided against being entangled in passionate erotic love that may ruin their future.

2.11. Men and women are equally rational and moral agent

Wollstonecraft was unequivocal in asserting that men and women share the same rational nature or faculty. Wollstonecraft argued that if women are human beings, then they should be able to explore their learning faculties. Wollstonecraft insists that men as well as women desire equal education, because, as equally rational and moral agents, it is a right they enjoy as human persons. In other words, the nature of humans predisposes both equally for the perfection of their natures and the advancement of society. According to her (1967: 39):

...the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind society: and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow, is equally undeniable, if mankind be viewed collectively.

In other words, Wollstonecraft authoritatively asserted that both genders have the possibility of various degrees of reason, knowledge, and virtue. Therefore, they should both have equal opportunities to develop these faculties.

Against this backdrop, Wollstonecraft maintained that the principal factor militating against women rendering genuine services to the advancement of society other than those assigned to them by philosophers of the same shade of thinking as Rousseau is that the average woman was unaware that Wollstonecraft was born with the same innate abilities, capacities, and potentials that needed to be harness for the transformation and development of the society. Based on this thoughtful fact, Wollstonecraft (1967: 26), postulated:

If indeed this be their destination, arguments may be drawn from reason: and thus augustly supported, the more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty- comprehending it- for unless they comprehend it, unless their morals be fixed on the same immutable principles of that of man, no authority can make them discharge it in a virtuous manner.

Wollstonecraft authoritatively taught that education is not only relevant to women in terms of helping to develop other innate potentials, but also it predisposes them to even perform their domestic chores credibly well, as well as fostering the development of their moral powers.

The question we would like to ask people of like mind-sets with Rousseau and Aristotle who may still exist today is, has history not vindicated Wollstonecraft? Are women today not excelling in all spheres of human learning? With equal education, are women not now making positive contributions toward the development and advancement of society in all facets?

2.12. Proper education: the master key to women's liberation

In recognition of the subversion of the true nature of women coupled with the improper education they received resulting to the abysmal inactivity of women, Wollstonecraft resolved to articulate an educational program that would be appropriate and gender inclusive. Wollstonecraft believed that proper and gender-inclusive education would enhance both the morality and integrity of women, men, and society at large. Wollstonecraft was convinced that education was the key to women's empowerment and liberation and argued that women should be educated to become independent, rational, and productive members of society.

The essence of education as Wollstonecraft rightly understood is to empower individuals with the moral, physical, and technical qualities, abilities, and strength they require to survive and flourish in society.

2.13. Inclusive educational program for the empowerment of both genders

It is pertinent to state that Wollstonecraft's philosophy of education is not a parochial ideology aimed at the liberation of women alone, rather, her ideology was an all-inclusive program that has the empowerment of both men and women alike; and for the ultimate good of the human society. Wollstonecraft firmly believed that it is only authentic and proper education that has the power to reform the minds of both boys and girls to disorient or reform their minds from the previous baseless stereotypes they have been indoctrinated or lobotomized with. It is necessary to state that all through this text under review, the foundational philosophy that is replete and that characterizes every categorical statement Wollstonecraft made is that education has the unique and exclusive power to create a better society in the present as well as in the future. This is a factual statement that time has validated. Little wonder then the likes of J. F. Kennedy averred that the development of a nation is not worth more than its development of education. Hence, the undying truism, education is the greatest asset and legacy parents can ever bequeath to their world. The level of development and improvement in society today is the sum of yesterday's and today's education. All of these point to the fact that education remains the bedrock of society. Hence, since men and women are the beneficiaries of education, they must be equally and adequately educated so as to be useful human resources needed to catalyze the transformation of all sectors and strata of society for a better society now and in the future. Both genders have the right to equal proper and adequate education aimed to make them partners in progress.

2.14. Wollstonecraft on goals and nature of education

Bearing in mind the educational needs of both genders, Wollstonecraft designed an inclusive template for the curriculum of a proper education. Wollstonecraft postulated that a proper education would be public, including both men and women, and would be focused on the present needs of society, the development of character, and the growth of the future society. In a word, Wollstonecraft maintained that a proper education should be pragmatic to and reflective of existential social needs, the yearnings, and aspirations of the society. Moreover, proper education must seek to ease the mind of all forms of ignorance and error. Needless to add in Wollstonecraft's principles of education, education must aim to foster gender parity.

Without mincing words, Wollstonecraft asserted the expediency of moral formation as the ultimate goal of education. Therefore, Wollstonecraft (1967: 75), categorically submits:

But I still insist, that not only virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being.

Ironically, it is the attainment of this same virtue that Rousseau named as the strategic goal of education. However, Wollstonecraft's consideration of virtues is more plausible. Wollstonecraft admonishes the stakeholders to education to endeavour to educate both boys and girls equally in moral virtues. Women's moral education must not be cosmetic (to develop good qualities that would make her appealing and fascinating to men). Rather, they should acquire virtues that would make them people of integrity and goodwill.

2.14. Wollstonecraft on equal rights in all spheres of life

Wollstonecraft argued that men and women are equal in intellectual and moral capabilities and that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. In addition, Wollstonecraft advocated for the inclusion of women in politics. Her advocacy for gender equality laid the foundation for feminist movements around the world, and her ideas continue to inspire contemporary feminists who are fighting for equal pay, reproductive rights, the right to political participation, and freedom from gender-based violence and discrimination. Moreover, her campaign for equal rights in all spheres for both genders continues to inspire and inform contemporary movements for social justice and human rights around the world.

3. Research methodology

This study adopts the analytic, expository, and normative approaches. Analytical research is the type of research that involves critical thinking skills and the evaluation of facts and information relating to the research being conducted. Deploring the analytic tool, this study attempts a critical analysis of Wollstonecraft's classical text on feminism, in order to exhume salient facts that undercut her assumptions and recommendations. Philosophers adopt the expository method for the investigation of an idea, evaluation of evidence, and expounding of an idea, in order to set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner. This method is deployed in this study to support the analytic method for the systematic exposition of the malaise that characterizes the lived experiences of folks of the gender binaries. Further, this method allows the researchers to subject Wollstonecraft's text and feminism to critical and dialectical appraisal.

A normative essay is an essay that prescribes the norms that should be put in place. Through a normative approach and based on the findings of the expository and evaluative analysis, the paper projects the insights and pragmatic proposals of Wollstonecraft's text as germane for the sustainable emancipation and empowerment of the girl-child. Most significantly, the study asserts that owing to the objective and pragmatic nature of Wollstonecraft's ideas in the text under analysis, her educational insights are significantly essential for the proper and integral socialization and empowerment of people of the two gender binaries. Hence, her ideas, if properly understood and implemented may

pave the way for sustainable gender equality. The qualitative nature of this research allows the researchers to exclusively rely on secondary data for extended expository analysis and deductive inference. Hence, secondary data for the study are primarily collected from Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The secondary sources of data include related books, learned journals, internet materials, and other relevant materials necessary for the study.

4. Findings and discussions

First and foremost, the expository analysis in the forgoing study evinces that one of the main weaknesses of Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* is that it laid too much attention to education as a means of women's liberation. Concerned scholars have observed that Wollstonecraft over-stressed the essence of education as a viable tool for the girl-child's emancipation at the detriment of economic and social structures that oppressed women. One such scholar is Nancy Tuana (1995: 29), who in *Feminism and Philosophy*, argued that education alone is insufficient to address the systemic barriers that women face in society. Education alone cannot address the systemic barriers that women face. Tuana's criticism was collaborated by Jaggar (1984: 352), who noted that Wollstonecraft's too much focus on the education and empowerment of individual women overlooks the larger structural and institutional factors that contribute to gender inequality. The simple logic of this disapprobation of Wollstonecraft's educational theory is that while education is certainly an important tool for empowering individuals, it is not enough to bring about widespread social change.

Furthermore, Wollstonecraft feminism was also faulted by Simone De Beauvoir (2011: 97), who argued that Wollstonecraft's ideas about women's liberation were limited by her privileged position in society. Her views were shaped by her middle-class background and may not have fully appreciated the experiences and struggles of women from marginalized communities.

Without prejudice to the cogency of the above points and other points of disapprobation of Wollstonecraft's feminism, we wish to hold that her feminist insights are thoughtful, incisive, pragmatic, and most importantly objective. Her open-mindedness to acknowledge that the prevailing gender inequalities and the lowering standard of morality amongst youth were jointly caused by both men and women, is a virtue that so many women, social analysts, and feminists lack. Her configuration of the nature of education and its relevance to the human person and society is apt and laudable. Her emphatic stress on the role of education to the development of virtue is quite commendable. Her ideas about education continue to influence modern educational practices, and her advocacy for universal education has inspired movements to increase access to education for girls and women around the world.

5. Contribution of the study

The main contribution of the study includes:

- it highlights the need for an integral and inclusive approach to gender discourses.
- The study is an intersection of philosophy, literary studies, and gender studies, as such it contributes to the general search for an integrated approach to gender discourses (Feminimasculinism).
- The work would be relevant for further studies in feminimasculinist studies in literary studies, English studies, history, and the humanities in general.

6. Implication of the study

The paper projects the insights and pragmatic proposals of Wollstonecraft's text as germane for the sustainable emancipation and empowerment of the girl-child. Most significantly, the study asserts that owing to the objective and pragmatic nature of Wollstonecraft's ideas in the text under analysis, her educational insights are significantly essential for the proper and integral socialization and empowerment of people of the two gender binaries. Hence, her ideas, if properly understood and implemented may pave the way for sustainable gender equality. The contributions could be significant to researchers of literary studies, English studies, history, and the humanities in general.

Wollstonecraft's feminist insights are thoughtful, incisive, pragmatic, and most importantly objective. Her open-mindedness to acknowledge that the prevailing gender inequalities and the lowering standard of morality amongst youth were jointly caused by both men and women, is a virtue that so many women, social analysts, and feminists lack. Her configuration of the nature of education and its relevance to the human person and society is apt and laudable. Her emphatic stress on the role of education in the development of virtue is quite commendable. Her ideas about education continue to influence modern educational practices, and her advocacy for universal education has inspired movements to increase access to education for girls and women around the world.

7. Recommendations and suggestions

In view of the findings and conclusion of this study, we make the following recommendations and suggestions:

- More studies be carried out on the possible ways of integrating Wollstonecraft's gender-inclusive (quasi-feminimasculinism) feminism with the new theory of feminism, "feminimasculinism" propounded by Michael Maduawuchi Uzomah, in order to advance this novel paradigm shift in gender discourse.
- Gender studies should be made a compulsory subject/course in all levels of education in order to raise a new generation of vibrant minds dedicated to *** selfless search for an egalitarian and equitable society for all.
- Single-sex schools should be globally discouraged if not totally outlawed,*** because it *** sole the seed of discrimination in the minds of young folks by giving the impression that boys and girls are different.

- School guidance and counselors should be chosen from well-trained personnel devoid of traditional gender-based stereotypes. So that they can properly guide students with regard to career choices, not based on their sex but on their rational capabilities and potential.

Governments should make unitary education for all sexes a human right and a basic obligation.

8. Conclusion

The hermeneutical and phenomenological analysis in this treatise examined Wollstonecraft's feminist educational theory. It demonstrates that the hitherto unequal education of the genders responsible for the abysmal performance of the female gender resulted from traditional gender-based educational stereotypes that subverted the gender identity and rational faculty of the female child. Hence, traditional stereotypes influenced the improper and gender-biased education of the female child. Consequently, Wollstonecraft unequivocally and categorically asserts that equal and proper education of both genders holds the master key for the liberation and empowerment of both genders.

In conclusion, we unequivocally agree with her that education is the best legacy society must equally and properly bequeath to the two genders for the overall benefit of society at large. Men and women are born equal, with equal rational capacity for education, and as such, individuals should be educated based on their natural dispositions and not based on their sex or gender.

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