

A room of one's own by virginia woolf: a creative response

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This essay is a creative response to Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own". In this piece of writing I aimed to recreate certain aspects of Woolf's writing as well as bringing up some of the ideas she discusses in her book. I am incomparable to Woolf and so at times my essay may seem fragmented or not to the point. The long (or short) sentences were intentional as they are my attempt at trying to recreate Woolf's stream of consciousness as my own. While using Woolf's style, this essay is still mine. I felt that it is important to show some of "me" in the essay instead of straight up copying everything Woolf does. Some things, that may be important in an academic essay, are left out on purpose. I mention very little about who the women are in my essay, I instead only focus on what is relevant to me and to the essay. I furthermore used some instances from the book, like going to library or having dinner to further link my essay to "A Room of One's Own"

Have been faced with the great challenge of writing an essay about women in science or women and science or perhaps the science of women, and so I think it is only fitting that I try to do just that. You might righteously expect autobiographies of Marie Curie or Rosalind Franklin or a list of female Nobel prize winners, but these things, although very important, are not the sole focus of this essay. Instead, I will give my own opinion about some great women in science, and I will attempt to answer the question: Had these women have a lab of their own?

Admittedly, I have had quite a bit of trouble with this essay. While I had some basic ideas I found that I was staring at a blank piece of paper for hours on end. So really, before I even began thinking about women in

science I could not help but think about women in literature and Virginia Woolf's "A room of one's own". Mainly, because I started working on this essay after I went to get dinner and since I dined well I thought I should be able to overcome my writer's block and begin producing something. I assumed that some food would do me good as "one cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well" (page 18). And thus, sitting at a desk in the library, it became apparent to me, that I should not have trouble with this essay at all, for I have all the conditions needed to be able to produce good quality writing. After all, I have a room of my own and "500 pounds a year" to be able to do art – so why am I still struggling?

Contemplating my struggle to write a good and effective essay, I decided to go for a walk, all the while thinking of all the privileges that I have but that women my age a 100 years ago did not. I walked through the lawn in front of my residence hall, being thankful that I could walk through the lawn in the first place. As I walked around campus no one asked for my papers or asked what I was doing or who I was with. I blended into the vivid life on campus, I did not feel locked out of anywhere (or locked in). As I was walking I realized that the struggle is inevitable, or rather that the struggle is necessary.

Because it is the struggle that makes for good art, or good science. It is not up for debate that Marie Curie and Rosalind Franklin also struggled, that they certainly encountered something similar to a writer's block – in a scientific interpretation of course. However, the conclusions of their lives could not be any more different. Marie Curie, a symbol of feminism in science, a well accomplished physicist and chemist with two Nobel prizes, a loving husband

and the ability to say that she revolutionized physics and chemistry. And there is Rosalind Franklin, robbed of her discovery of the structure of DNA, never rewarded, never acknowledged while she lived.

I began my research for this essay by reading a few autobiographic pieces on the aforementioned women. I found that Marie Curie was the first woman to get a doctorate in Science, the first female professor at the University of Paris and she was the first person – not just the first woman – to receive a Nobel prize in two disciplines: Chemistry and Physics. She became the only woman buried for her own merits in the Pantheon of Paris. ³ She was undeniably a genius, a reformer, but most importantly to this essay: a woman. She quickly became someone I idolized and looked up to, especially since I am also a female who is dreaming of succeeding in science.

However, my opinion of Marie Curie quickly changed as I read “A room of one’s own”. Curie was not a woman independent of the world, independent of men, she was a daughter and she was a wife. I realized that she might not have had a lab of her own and that she might not have achieved what she did if it had not been for her husband: Pierre Curie. Pierre was a Parisian physicist who had a lab of his own. It was at this lab where, exposing themselves to high levels of radiation, in the face of certain death and sickness caused by their own experiments, they worked. To me, it is clear that Marie needed Pierre for her success. At the same time, I think Pierre needed Marie just as much. It was this symbiotic relationship between a man and a woman united by marriage that led to the discovery of radioactivity, leading to reform medicine, providing power and changing the fundamentals

of atomic physics. As I sat in my chair pondering about marriage, science, atoms, the Curies and Paris I felt that we should not talk about women in science or women in literature or men in science or men in literature but rather about men and women, for independent of the field of study, men and women need each other, to reflect, to provide insight and thought, to inspire.

I, of course, acknowledge the oppression of women in science (and in literature and in God knows how many other areas of study and life) and so as I was getting of my train of thought about the Curies my mind ventured to another woman in science: Rosalind Franklin. There is probably no better example of how men oppressed women (and honesty) in science than the story of Franklin. The saddest part is that Rosalind did everything right and she also had a lab of her own, a lab she used to discover what the structure of DNA looked liked – the infamous double helix – using x-ray crystallography, something she was a master of. Instead of publishing her findings she decided that she would consult other scientists and would not publish until she was absolutely sure of herself. Another team of researchers, consisting of Francis Crick and James Watson created the model of DNA first and indeed published first but they relied heavily on Franklin's data. To say this using more common terms, they stole Rosalind Franklin's glory from her. They went to win the Nobel prize later on, but by this time Rosalind Franklin had died.

It became apparent to me that perhaps success, on any scale, depends less on whether someone has a lab or a room of her own, but much rather on something else. But what is that something? Ability and opportunity must

certainly play a part. But ultimately what was the difference between Marie Curie and Rosalind Franklin? Marie Curie lived in poverty while Rosalind Franklin belonged to a wealthy family. Curie was married, Franklin was not, in fact Franklin was someone who avoided any type of sexual contact with the opposite sex all throughout her life , while Curie was known to have numerous relationships with men. Some of these relationships were not very welcomed by the community, for instance when she began a relationship with her dead husband's postgraduate student. So I pondered further: what makes a woman a good and accomplished scientist? It is certainly not possessing a lab of her own, it is not even the symbiotic relationship between men and women, it is undefinable.

I know, that might be a good enough conclusion for you, for I am sure you were seeking an answer a bit more ' to the point' to say the least. Now, that is not to say that there is no conclusion at all, for you might look at this and see that the conclusion is that there is no conclusion. One cannot talk about women in science without mentioning their relationships, their abilities and opportunities. You have also seen that none of these things are the sole factors for why women do or do not succeed in science. So I feel that I cannot conclude my essay with anything else but the thought, that perhaps we must accept that there is not always an answer. Sometimes there is no destination, but what we want to know we can perhaps find during our journey.