

Mary wollstonecraft vs. jean jaques rousseau

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Allison Link Global History 2 Honors - McIvor Enlightenment Essay 10/1/12

The late 18th century can be known as the historical period of the Enlightenment. During this time, society was undergoing drastic changes that would impact people even today. These changes were known as “ reforms,” and played a big role in politics and ruling during this time period. One of the bigger reforms of this time was that which would grant women a higher education and place them in a position closer to their male counterparts.

The enlightenment authors, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft, took part in a debate in which they argued about the purpose and education of women. In an article recently written in The New York Times by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, the impact of the Enlightenment authors' work on the 21st century is described. Though both of the authors expressed their arguments well, Mary Wollstonecraft's debate was overall more persuasive and convincing than that of Jean Jacques Rousseau's, and her argument has had a bigger impact on the modern world.

In an excerpt from Jean Jacques Rousseau's writing, Emile, he went into detail about his philosophy on how women should be seen and how they should be educated. He stated that women are made solely for the purpose of pleasing men and that their education should follow such purposes. He said that, “ The man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive,” and when the woman tries to become equal to man, it only results in turmoil among society and family.

He wrote about how men can do without women, but women rely completely on men, and most of his reasoning behind these statements was

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that the purpose of women has been decreed by nature. In terms of education, he believed that the instruction of a woman " must be planned in relation to man. " Rousseau stated that rather than an academic education, women should partake in an education that would help to train a man in childhood, and to please and console him in adulthood.

Although he got his argument across through some logical reasoning, most of the aspects of his argument bash women and were completely in favor of men. While men who read his writings might agree with Rousseau, the majority of women will find his works distasteful and biased. He also only used his own opinions in his arguments, as opposed to incorporating those of other Enlightenment authors or authors on the subject. Because Rousseau only used his own biased opinions and directed them towards the male audience, what he wrote was not entirely persuasive.

Mary Wollstonecraft's, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, is another example in which an Enlightenment author exhibits their opinion on the education and purpose of women. Contradictory to Rousseau's writing, Wollstonecraft believed that women have a greater purpose than to serve man, and that is to be independent and care for others while they also care for themselves. She stated that unlike in *Emile*, women should be seen as and act independently and take care of themselves. She believed that women are not on this Earth for the purpose of serving men, and that they can stray away from these duties if they wish.

Education wise, Wollstonecraft believed that a woman should not be limited to caring for their families, but may choose to pursue a higher learning, such as nursing and healing. But, she also said that caring for their children and

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husbands is not to be seen as a lesser job that women take part in, and that it is to be respected. Although Wollstonecraft incorporated some disadvantageous reasoning into her arguments, such as religion, a controversial topic, and many opinions, which can lead to bias, much of what she says made her essay persuasive to both genders.

Her arguments were backed up by opinions of her own and those of Rousseau's, which make them less biased towards women. She also respects others' arguments that women can have purpose in caring for their families. Due to her variety of reasoning that target both genders, her argument can be considered persuasive. As written in The New York Times article, The Women's Crusade, authors Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have expanded on the importance of the role that women play in everyday lives, and the hardships that women face because of the lack of respect and sexist assumptions that they receive.

But with more and more women becoming educated and equal to men, they are become successful and respected members of society. Through all of the callous hardships women face, from sex trafficking, to wives living with abuse and poverty, they state that with the right help and ambition have become women who are respected and looked up upon society. Mary Wollstonecraft writes in an excerpt from her writing about women's rights, " Her first wish should be to make herself respectable, and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself. This statement is the basis for her argument that women should be able to choose the lives that they want to live and should not be constrained by society's norms. The two authors from the article The Women's Crusade and

Mary Wollstonecraft, although born and raised in different centuries, still carry the same morals and stand up for the rights of woman. Both the modern day authors and the past author believe that women should be able to choose their own path and destiny in order to live their lives freely.

Of the two enlightenment authors, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft, Wollstonecraft was able to persuade better and relate more to modern day views of women through her writing. She believed that women should be able to choose their own paths and change her time period's definition of a woman. These changes that she believed were necessary were known as reforms during the period of The Enlightenment. Thought some of the reforms during this time were purely cosmetic and did not help society, Wollstonecraft's reform on women was one that would benefit her society and that of the 21st century.