

# The influence of humanity on education and women

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The age of Enlightenment put forth the importance of humanism and reason, concepts that creates a balance between humanity's innate tendency to experience emotions while at the same time, cultivating a rational view of experiencing sensations and interactions around him/her. Indeed, discourses that were created and published in the 18th century reflected the use of reason in order to elucidate the nature of human beings.

Enlightenment discourses,' in effect, provide an important insight into the humanism and reason that dwells inside the human mind. These important concepts of the Enlightenment were shown in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Both being proponents and believers of the principles reflective of the Enlightenment, they expressed their views of how humanism and reason influenced their position about the role of women and feminism, and their relationship with education.

In Wollstonecraft's " Vindication of the rights of women," the author utilized reason as a tool to argue her point about the history of women's suppression when it comes to achieving quality education and fair regard with men in the society. Rousseau, meanwhile, in his work entitled " Emile" (or " On Education"), asserted that neither women nor men were suppressed or antagonized against each other, whether the comparison is on their rights, social status, and even privileges such as attaining education. He provided the 'opposite face' of Wollstonecraft's argument of women suppression in society through their lack of education.

Given these descriptions of the works of Wollstonecraft and Rousseau, this paper posits that the works of the authors share a similarity and difference

that pertains to the issue of women's equality in attaining education and education in general. This paper argues that using both humanism and reason as foundations for their arguments, Wollstonecraft and Rousseau similarly believed that education must be achieved by all, although education in itself must not be confined to formal education, but to formative education done by the society as well.

However, both differed in expressing their opinion concerning women's roles and feminism. Wollstonecraft believed that women had been suppressed and not given the privilege to acquire good formal and formative educations, while Rousseau believed that women were not hindered by society to receive education, and they can do so if they only willed themselves to achieve it.

Presentation, analysis, and discussion of these arguments are supported with texts from Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the rights of women" and Rousseau's "Emile". Wollstonecraft and Rousseau presented similar arguments when they discussed the issue of how society should develop and implement education for children and the youth. Both acknowledged the fact that formal education is important, although its state (in the 18th century) leaves more to be desired; in fact, they cited the deficiencies that formal education can have to people's learning and intellectual and moral development.

They believed that formal education must include formative education, which means people must not only learn through accumulation of facts and information in schools and educational institutions, but also learn through constant interaction with other people. The youth must learn not only from

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within the walls of the classroom, but in the real world as well. Rousseau expressed his strong belief in formative education in "Emile." In fact, the creation of the discourse itself was meant to critique and analyze the state of formal education as Rousseau observed it during his time.

One of his critiques against formal education is that it tended to provide knowledge that is 'quite limited,' even "censored" for the students. In expressing his disagreement against "censored" material used in teaching students, he stated, "[t]he literature and science of our century tend to destroy rather than to build up. When we censor others we take on the tone of a pedagogue..."

In spite of all those books whose only aim... is public utility... the art of training men is still neglected. Books and instructional materials are only useful as aids towards learning, but if these educational materials are "censored" and created in order to suit the institutions' needs rather than the students', then the "training of men" is forfeited. What results is a society where children and the youth depend on education to provide its learning knowledge, taking for granted 'lessons' learned in real life, such as knowledge that comes out from daily interaction with other people and learning lessons from their everyday experiences in the outside world.

Apart from the censorship in the educational material taught to students, Rousseau also cited the seemingly lack of imagination in the educational system. By 'imagination,' he meant that people have become heavily dependent on information and knowledge already extant in the society in all kinds of discipline. Gone is the drive to discover new things in the natural

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and social environment, which makes human knowledge and most importantly, intellectual development, stagnant.

Learning and knowledge accumulation must be a process in which students must think "out of the box," an idea that should have been supported because this is what led to the age of Enlightenment. Without humanity's imagination and drive to learn more about the world they live in, perhaps the age of Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution Rousseau's society was benefiting from would not happen. He explicated in better terms his idea of thinking "out of the box" in the following passage from "Emile": By freely expressing my own sentiment I have so little idea of claiming authority that I always give my reasons.

This way people may weigh and judge them for themselves. But while I do not wish to be stubborn in defending my ideas, I think it my duty to put them forward... Propose what is feasible, they repeatedly tell me. It is as if I were being told to propose what people are doing already, or at least to propose some good which mixes well with the existing wrongs... Wollstonecraft had similarly expressed Rousseau's sentiments concerning formal education. In expressing her views about education (in general), she focused on the effect that intellectual development from schools have over the moral development of the students.

Rousseau, on one hand, had not expressed explicitly his desire for an moral, alongside intellectual, development for humanity's youth. Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, had been more than explicit in expressing her desire for moral development as an individual goes through intellectual development.

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In "Vindication," she expressed concern that the public and private education systems are focusing too much on the intellectual development of the individual, and might, over time, experience greater knowledge and learning without a strong and firm moral character.

By emphasizing on moral and intellectual developments, Wollstonecraft strove to put a balance between the humanism and reason, the pillars of the Enlightenment that helped promote intellectual and social progress in human societies. Her fears of escalating moral degeneration for the future of 18th century society was expressed in her discourse, where she declared, ... children would be entirely separated from their parents, and I question whether they would become better citizens by sacrificing the preparatory affections, by destroying the force of relationships that render the marriage state as necessary as respectable.

But, if a private education produces self-importance, or insulates a man in his family, the evil is only shifted, not remedied. By claiming that "evil is only shifted, not remedied," Wollstonecraft meant that formal education does not prepare people for the knowledge that would become more important and useful in real life. This knowledge is not the wide expanse of information that one knows, nor the deep understanding of a discipline or study, but rather, the knowledge that one has in having the best judgment and manner of interacting with other people.

Moral development, in effect, was considered more important than intellectual development because it is through a healthy psyche that humanity is able to move forward and leave the ways of the 'primitive  
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human. ' This primitive being is one who is not able to control his emotions and desires, seeking and pursuing these at the detriment of other people's lives and welfare. With social progress in mind, Wollstonecraft proposes that education or intellectual development is not the sole key to it, but morality reigning in human societies as well.

Wollstonecraft and Rousseau expressed their similarities in the belief that moral development is just as important in attaining intellectual development.

However, when it comes to discussing role of women in the society and feminism, the authors have different perspective toward these issues.

Wollstonecraft's view of women and feminism is more radical and attempts to break the status quo (i. e. , the perceived dominance of males over females). Rousseau, meanwhile, sought to establish the fact that in general, men and women are equal in that they complement each other's differences.

Thus, for him, their differences are nature's way of creating a balanced whole and harmony in the society. Wollstonecraft's views were apparent in her discussion of education, where, after criticizing education in general, she applied the issue of the achievement of formal education in the context of the women's sector and feminism. In her discussion of moral development as an essential factor in developing intellectual growth, she argued that women's lack of opportunity to achieve formal education also resulted to their lack of moral growth.

This means that because they were not exposed to ideas that would encourage the development of a moral character, women were left to act and behave attitudes and character that they deemed as 'right' and

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'pleasing' to the society. She expressed dismay over women's lack of privilege in education, both moral and intellectual, relegated her to the low and weak status in the society: No, it is indolence and vanity-the love of pleasure and the love of sway, that will rain paramount in an empty mind.

I say empty emphatically, because the education which women now receive scarcely deserves the name. For the little knowledge that they are led to acquire, during the important years of youth, is merely relative to accomplishments; and accomplishments without a bottom, for unless the understanding be cultivated, superficial and monotonous is every grace. This passage reflected the fact that the perpetuation of a patriarchal society in the 18th century was due to many factors, which included the tolerance of women's lack of privilege to develop themselves intellectually and morally.

If women will not understand the repercussions that education can have in their lives, they will remain as " indolent" individuals possessing an " empty mind"-individuals who remain unchallenged and unknowing because they lack the knowledge to survive in a world where survival not only depended on physically, but intellectually and morally as well. Rousseau offered an opposing opinion to Wollstonecraft's feminist ideals. In " Emile" (Book Five), he made it clear that "[t]o cultivate the masculine virtues in women and to neglect their own is obviously to do them an injury.

Women are too clear-sighted to be thus deceived. When they try to usurp our privileges they do not abandon them. But the result is that being unable to manage the two, because they are incompatible, they fall below their own potential without reaching our's and loose half their worth. " This assertion

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reflected how women, in their desire to be equal in skills and knowledge as men, weaken themselves in the process, for they were not able to cultivate their own skills and knowledge.

Attaining equality with men by aspiring for their characteristics is abandoning one's self and acquiring the identity of the other, thereby creating confusion and guilt. The woman is then left feeling weak because she had abandoned her true, strong self. It is through this point that Rousseau was able to explicate how males and females are equal in that they complement each other: one draws strength from the other, and become weak when they try to be not their true, strong selves.