

# Feminism in Theory and Practice: Where Did It All Go Wrong?

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J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature and Croatian Language and Literature

Katarina Šijaković

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BA Thesis

Supervisor: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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**Abstract**

Feminist ideas date as far back as 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft's essay *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* was published. In her essay, Wollstonecraft advocates for a better education of women and she also criticizes the portrayal of women as being in the perpetual state of childhood promoted in works such as Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762). Women's suffrage movement began in the first half of the eighteenth century both in Britain and the USA. Feminism defies the patriarchal social system, which leads to feminism being perceived as a threat to the social order. Additionally, feminism is interpreted negatively owing to the false assumptions that it represents radicalism against men and that feminists are man-haters. Research conducted with the aim of studying the feminists' perception of masculinity disproves that feminists harbour negative feelings towards men, yet in the twenty-first century this is still the dominant assumption. To help explain the initial meaning of feminism and account for the reasons why negative connotations are still tied to the term feminism, this paper analyses two works from two different eras of feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2012). The uncanny similarities between these two texts highlight the unfortunate truth that despite centuries-long feminist struggle, women still face misogyny, discrimination, sexism, and ambivalent benevolence. Moreover, the paper shows that negative attitudes towards feminism result from the assumption that feminism is an attack on men, which is not the case because feminism defies the patriarchal social structure as an attempt to achieve equal rights for all persons regardless of gender.

Keywords: feminism, feminist, sexism, patriarchy, Mary Wollstonecraft, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.



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## Introduction

Even though the Suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century marks the beginning of feminism, feminist ideas existed in literary works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft decades before the Suffrage movement. This is not surprising because women suffered unequal treatment and lack of opportunities for centuries, so it stands to reason that they wanted to change this. Despite the positive motivation rooted in the desire for equality, throughout history the term *feminist* had negative connotations. It was often used in a derogatory sense and the women who participated in the movement were despised because they were seen as transgressors; they attempted to cross the socially constructed boundaries between genders by demanding the same rights and treatment as men. Moreover, they talked openly about their needs, hopes, complaints and even sex. The change in the behaviour of the once quiet, obedient women was met with various forms of rejection: from scepticism and misogyny to tyranny and exile from society. Women started expressing their aspirations to be more than just wives and mothers, and that shook the social foundations of the eighteenth, and, in particular, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Over the centuries, the idea of the equality of genders embodied demands for various rights that were denied women: the right of women to earn a living, the right of women to vote, the right of women to go to school and get education and so on. Not once throughout history did women demand to be treated *better* than men, which raises the following question: Why is feminism met with hostility? Hostility towards feminism takes many forms, most common being misogyny, discrimination, and ostracization. Today, the struggle for equality of both sexes continues. Women may have the right to earn a living, but they are still paid less than a man for the same job. Women have more platforms to express themselves nowadays and, often, women with “bigger platforms,” that is, celebrities, stand up for those with no voice at all.

Still, those who call themselves feminists are called man-haters, amongst other things. The term feminism bears its negative connotations to this day. A part of the hostility is rooted in the lack of knowledge about the feminist movement. Others might be repelled by instances of misogyny within the movement itself, which is also a result of *malpractice* of feminism (since equality cannot be achieved through hatred). The aim of this paper is to explain the initial meaning of feminism, to explore the meaning of feminism throughout history, and account for its connection to the negative connotations tied to the term feminism today, showing that negative attitudes arise both from lack of knowledge and from deeply rooted sexism. The texts

used in this analysis will be Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*.

The first chapter deals with the definitions and history of feminism. The second chapter deals with types of hostility towards feminism and dissociation from feminism, while the third chapter deals with attitudes towards feminism of today. Finally, the fourth chapter analyses and connects Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* to show that, shockingly, women deal with the same issues today as two hundred years ago. The paper ends with a Conclusion.

## 1. Feminism: Definitions and History

The struggle for equal rights for both women and men has come a long way since the late eighteenth century. It was, and still is, one of the most controversial topics, and the struggle continues. The term feminism stands for "[t]he advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes" ("Feminism") and a feminist is "A person who supports feminism" ("Feminist"). The Feminist Movement, or Feminism, was provoked by the unfavourable social position and attitudes towards women in the eighteenth century: "the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes" (Wollstonecraft 71). Over the years, the term feminism was derived from the French *féminisme*: "the thought and actions of people who want to make women's (legal, political, social etc.) rights equal to those of men" ("Féminisme"). The ideas of feminism were believed to be radical and unacceptable by many people, men and women alike. According to Margaret Walters, even Virginia Woolf in her essay "A Room of One's Own" opposes the term feminism, connecting it to the word fascism in the spirit of the time when the war against fascism was imminent:

and probably nervous about any '-ism,' she rejects the word out of hand. No one word can capture the force "which in the nineteenth century opposed itself to the force of the fathers," she insists, continuing: "Those nineteenth century women were in fact the advance guard of your own movement. They were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state." (Walters 2)

Despite being one of the leading feminists, Woolf both rejects the idea that a single word can encompass the injustices suffered by women and believes that by winning the women's right to earn a living the struggle is over (Walters 2). This could not be further from the truth. Woolf

was likely unaware of this as she belonged to the privileged group of White, upper-class, financially well-off women who lived a far better life than poor, working class women. According to Aimee M. Carrillo Rowe, White feminists should be more reflexive and inclusive to foster feminist alliances (64-80), that is, to show solidarity with all/other women. As Walters explains, in the 1920s women hardly began to articulate let alone address all their problems related to childbirth, child-rearing, and juggling family and work (2). So, the struggle for women's rights continued, but so did the opposition. In 1992, feminist movement was perceived as "socialist," "anti-family," "anti-capitalist" movement, and the same year the term *feminatizis* was coined by Rush Limbaugh (Moi 1736).

### 1.1 Feminism before Women's Suffrage

Literary works written before the late nineteenth century show that the need for equality of both sexes exists far longer than one might think. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published. The essence of Wollstonecraft's essay is that both men and women should have equal rights; therefore, one can say that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* depicts feminist ideas. Wollstonecraft explains that men and women are equal beings, but that they are being treated like two different species: "I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial" (Wollstonecraft 1). Wollstonecraft explains her dissatisfaction with the women's place in the eighteenth century society; she describes how the society cultivates women to be mere entertainers without proper education:

As a class of mankind they have the strongest claim to pity; the education of the rich tends to render them vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened by the practice of those duties which dignify the human character. They only live to amuse themselves, and by the same law which in nature invariably produces certain effects, they soon only afford barren amusement. (Wollstonecraft 2)

What can also be read from Wollstonecraft's essay is that eighteenth-century women were treated "as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone" (Wollstonecraft 2), which implies that a woman could not afford or handle an existence without a man by her side. Women had two options: to marry and to be a mother or to be sent to convents. Although becoming a nun may not have been their choice, convent life sometimes functioned as an unexpected place of empowerment for some women. According to Walters,

[f]or centuries, and all over Europe, there were families who disposed of “unnecessary” or unmarried daughters by shutting them away in convents. For some, this must have felt like life imprisonment; but for others, conventual quiet seems to have facilitated genuine fulfilment: it allowed some women to develop a talent for organization, and some were able to read and think, and discover their own distinctive voices. (6)

The unmarried had no secure future on account of the forced separation from the secular world, which functioned as a separation from the requirements of patriarchal society. Moreover, they have been raised from a young age to aspire to marry and have children as it was “the only way women can rise in the world, -- by marriage” (Wollstonecraft 74).

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* criticizes Rousseau’s *Emile, or On Education* (1762) with the aim of shedding light on the importance of equal education of both women and men: “Mary Wollstonecraft rejected the education in dependency that Rousseau advocated for them in *Emile*. A woman must be intelligent in her own right, she argued. She cannot assume that her husband will be intelligent” (Burke). Wollstonecraft also criticizes Rousseau’s portrayal of the perfect woman: “She was particularly critical of the portrait of the ideal woman Rousseau drew in his novel *Emile*. Portraying Sophie (“female wisdom”) as submissive, loving, and ever faithful” (Mellor). Women who choose to be other than *delicate and gentle* risk being called manly and un-womanly: “I will use the preacher’s own words. ‘Let it be observed, that in your sex manly exercises are never graceful, that in them a tone and figure, as well as an air and deportment, of the masculine kind, are always forbidding, and that men of sensibility desire in every woman soft features, and a flowing voice, a form not robust and demeanor delicate and gentle’” (Wollstonecraft 169-170). Wollstonecraft’s essay, or better said exhortation, is the literary work that coherently conveys the ideas of feminism before the term itself was coined and used.

## 1.2. Women’s Suffrage

The starting point for Women’s suffrage in Britain is in 1832 with the presenting of the first women’s suffrage petition in Parliament; Mary Smith petitions Henry Hunt MP that she and other spinsters should have the right to vote in the election of Members of Parliament. In 1866 John Stuart Mill presents the first major women’s suffrage petition, which contains over 1500 signatures, to the House of Commons. The struggle carries forward until the first notable progress occurred when women over the age 30 won the right to vote in 1918, and in 1928

everyone over the age of 21 is permitted to vote thanks to The Representation of the People Act. The following year, women officially exercised their right to vote in their first general election (“Women’s Suffrage Timeline”).

Women’s suffrage began before the Civil War in America. Constitutionally, women did not have the right to vote and that is why they demanded the Nineteenth Amendment to be ratified. Women all over the country started to reject the idea of a “true” woman who is depicted in the character of a submissive wife and mother that is only active within her home and family (“Women’s Suffrage”). The issue of women’s rights was discussed in 1848 when a group of activists in Seneca Falls formed the Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances, which was inspired by the Declaration of Independence. Declaration of Sentiments demands “women to be viewed as full citizens, and granted the same civil, economic and political rights as men” (Pruitt). The Civil War resulted in the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, which defines citizens as “male,” and the Fifteenth Amendment allows Black men the right to vote. The states in the West started to extend the vote to women, while the states in the South and East still refused to give the right to vote to women (“Women’s Suffrage”). Women all over the country protested in massive processions, some even took more radical approach: “hunger strikes and White House pickets, for instance—aimed at winning dramatic publicity for their cause” (“Women’s Suffrage”).

Even though World War I slowed down the movement, activists saw World War I as an opportunity to prove that women are just as patriotic as men (“Women’s Suffrage”). From the World War I era onward, perhaps the most striking way of spreading the word about the equality of women and men were the posters which advocated for women fighting at the home front and doing their part just as men. Literary works of the time, such as *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, also helped spread the feminist philosophy. As Brinlee explains, de Beauvoir “argues that women’s oppression stems from the fact that men view women as the Other, thus effectively placing themselves in opposition to women and viewing them as something more akin to the subject rather than the self” (“5 Feminist Writers”).

## 2. Hostility Towards Feminism

Feminism in its essence defies the patriarchal social system, which is the foundation of most of the societies in the world. Given that most of the (Western) world functions as a patriarchal society, feminism is perceived as an attack to a fundamental social structure. Attack

on a structure that is based around men can also be perceived as an attack on men themselves, which, in turn, results in sexism from both parties. To be able to understand the connection between “feminist self-identification and hostility toward men” (Anderson et al. 217), one must understand the term of ambivalent sexism which is caused by feminism being “situated culturally as an identity that depends on active hostility toward men” (Anderson et al. 216). Due to such misrepresentations, that is, the stereotype that feminists are anti-male, people are ambivalent toward feminism and hesitant to call themselves feminists.

Ambivalent sexism is a theory that was presented by Paul Glick and Susan T. Fiske in 1997, and it describes “the observation that, as a form of prejudice, sexism differs significantly from other forms of prejudice, such as racism, in that women and men have lived in societies inside structural status of inequality and in regular, close, and intimate contact with each other” (Anderson et al. 217). Ambivalent sexism manifests itself through hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Sexism is conventionally thought to include hostile behaviour towards women and hostile sexism “reflects beliefs that men should have more power than women, that women may use their sexuality to benefit from men’s higher status and that women are less competent than men” (Zawisza). On the other hand, benevolent sexism is regarded as positive sexism, which is a subtler form of sexism. According to Anderson et al., “such positive regard includes the belief that women are more refined than men, that a man is incomplete without a woman, and that women should be cherished and protected by men” (217). Benevolent sexism also includes “chivalric” attitudes that women should be protected from the outside “ugly” world of men. That pattern of behaviour results in women being restricted to conventional roles (Anderson et al. 217). Benevolent sexism also supports the stance that women are fragile, sensitive, innocent, and therefore, incapable creatures, which is exactly what Mary Wollstonecraft speaks against in her essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: “Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness” (Wollstonecraft 85).

## 2.1 Dissociation from Feminism

Another problem that fuels dissociation from feminism is toxic feminism caused by radicalism: “This theory rests on the assumption that all social activity is the result of certain restrictions and coercion, and although every social system contains specific forms of interactive constraints, they do not have to cause repression” (Vukoičić 35). In other words, radical (toxic) feminism implies that *all* social actions are directed *against* women. Radicalism

is present in almost every sphere of our lives, and radical feminism harms more than it does good. Due to radicalism, which can be perceived as irrational, feminists lose their credibility and are prone to more unwanted conflicts. Although the attitude of radical feminists should not be blindly condemned without trying to understand it because such behaviour is rooted in and caused by centuries of discrimination which results from a patriarchal worldview and which still causes gender inequality, radicalism should also not be supported because all forms of radicalism (including toxic feminism) provoke further problems and unfairness.

Moreover, the twenty-first-century feminism is moving towards inclusivity of all members of society, rather than exclusion: “Some say the radical feminists – affectionately labelled as the ‘femi-Nazis’ – have made the whole concept damaged goods” (Daubney). This coinage directed at radical feminists in fact devalues all feminists because it is used to “label feminists and to assert the notion that women who might identify as feminist or who might, by others, be identified as feminist, represent fascist rather than egalitarian values” (Anderson et al. 221). In reality, radical feminism builds up the ancient prejudice that feminists hate men. The stereotype of “man haters” was established because of “feminist critiques of patriarchy (which) are confused with specific complaints about particular men and women’s interpersonal relationships with men” (Anderson et al. 222). Investment in traditional gender roles according to which women should be dependent on men leaves women feeling subordinated. Male dominance is interrogated by feminism, but not as “an indictment of men as individuals” (Anderson et al. 222). Traditional cultures in particular are based on strict patriarchal arrangement, which treats women as subordinate beings and which can, in turn, explain heightened hostility that provokes radical feminism: “heightened resentment of men’s hostility and abuses of power may explain why women’s reported hostility toward men was higher than that of men in more traditional cultures” (Anderson et al. 218).

The problem of self-identifying as a feminist is also connected to traditional cultures. In ethnic groups such as Latino/a or African American, identifying as feminist might lead to the feeling of alienation from the culture of that ethnic group. This is a result of feminism being perceived as a “White middle-class woman problem,” predominantly due to women from that social group being among the first to engage in the struggle for their rights. Additionally, the renunciation of the idea of being a feminist can also correspond with Wollstonecraft’s point that feminism is considered to be harmful and unfeminine: “They were made to be loved, and must not aim at respect, lest they should be hunted out of society as masculine” (Wollstonecraft 100).



In summation, traditional cultures are patriarchal, which means that they nurture traditional gender roles, which inherently put women in a place of weakness and subordination. People who declare themselves as feminists are at risk of being ostracized from their communities because they are perceived as man-hating or even “too White and middle-class.” Feminists are expected to have a less traditionally oriented view on gender roles, and politically-wise, they are less conservative. It was no surprise to learn that feminists are less likely to be benevolent toward men than non-feminist women (Anderson et al. 219), since feminists advocate for equality and dismiss the concept of women benevolently catering to the needs of men; seen in that sense, “benevolence” does not mirror core values of feminism. Unfortunately, this seems to be ambiguous nowadays as every stance and belief is scrutinized and criticized from the lens of political correctness, which sometimes blurs the difference between discriminating and differentiating.

### 3. Attitudes Towards Feminism Today

Today, negative connotations of the word *feminism* seem to prevail: “In the instantly interactive, increasingly hostile word of the twenty-first century sexual politics, to me the word now symbolises a megalith of negativity: a lightning rod for all that is bad about how men and women interact” (Daubney). This megalith of negativity can be explained through the rantings of conservatives such as Limbaugh, which, according to Moi, have contributed to widely-accepted misconceptions about feminism:

three fundamental ideas about feminism that have become virtual commonplaces across the political spectrum today: (1) feminists hate men and consider all women innocent victims of evil male power; (2) feminists are particularly dogmatic, inflexible, intolerant and incapable of questioning their own assumptions; and (3) since every sensible person is in favour of equality and justice for women, feminists are a bunch of fanatics, a lunatic fringe, an extremist, power-hungry minority whose ideas do not merit serious assessment. (Moi 1737)

Due to the mainstream society still being patriarchal, such misconceptions, which negate both the centuries of struggle and discrimination and the contemporary inequalities, prevail among people either who feel targeted by feminists (men) or who feel the need to dissociate themselves from feminists (women) in order to be accepted in the society.

Obviously, the term feminism sparks negative feelings in many people, so Daubney suggests renaming it to make the feminist movement more accepted: “Why don’t we rebrand,

relaunch and reboot it - as we might any other tired brand with too many negative connotations?” (“Why Men Have a Problem”). However, the rebranding of feminism might do more harm than good. According to Buschman and Lenart, “[s]ubstituting the label ‘feminist’ for the label ‘women’s movement’ results in more negative evaluations” (59), which can be explained by many people’s aversion toward (the perceived) female dominance. Both hostile and benevolent sexists perceive women’s emancipation as an undesirable or needless phenomenon.

Nowadays, women are more educated, and thanks to the feminist movement, women are more represented in institutions such as hospitals, army, IT sector, government and so on. If feminism enabled women to have jobs that once they could only dream of, and if it stands for equality of everyone, one wonders why people feel the need to distance themselves from feminism and feminist movement, and why they feel threatened by the term feminism. Simply speaking, the reason is clear: throughout history, as suggested earlier, patriarchal social system was the main social order and, by opposing it, feminism unsettles people as it threatens the only social order that was known to the contemporary person. What people forget is that feminism does not advocate for female superiority or special treatment at the expense of men – feminism stands for equality of both sexes and does not jeopardize one or the other. Radicalism and sexism are present in feminism too; however, they should not be taken as the goal of the movement and its supporters. Another issue that makes people reluctant to declare themselves as feminists is the negative connotation tied to both the term and the advocates of equality since Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and Virginia Woolf (1929) all the way to Daubney (2014) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2012).

### 3.1 Disproving Assumptions

The impact of feminism on education is present in the form of Women’s Studies programs, which “emerged on the American academic scene in conjunction with the feminist revival of the late 1960s and early 1970s” (Pence 321). The primary role of Women’s Studies is not only to advocate for change for women but also to help raise the next generations of feminists competent and educated enough to be able to continue that struggle. According to Dan Pence, simultaneously with the Women’s Studies programs arose the attitude that women did not want men attending the Women’s Studies courses and the assumption that men are afraid of Women’s Studies courses because they fear losing power and control, being outnumbered and even attacked during the courses (322).

In his study designed to test this attitude, that is, hypothesis, Pence used “a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effects of a Women’s Studies course on the attitudes of women students toward men and the male sex role” (Pence 323). Out of 157 women students that participated in Women’s Attitude Towards Men study, 72 were enrolled in Introduction to Women’s Studies course, 40 students were enrolled in an Introduction to Black Studies course and 45 students were enrolled in an Introduction to Sociology course (Pence 323). For the purpose of his research, Pence “devised an Attitudes Toward Men Scale (AMS), patterned as closely as possible after the short form of the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) (Spence et al.)” (Pence 324). The questions were aimed at “‘traditional’ areas of masculinity, such as competition, work, and success as well as questions that related more to what men are ‘naturally’ like, such as their levels of and needs for intimacy, nurturance, and aggressiveness” (Pence 324). The research was conducted before the students started their courses and after they finished them. The results show that “female Women’s Studies students’ attitudes toward men and masculinity show the greatest change in a positive direction. Also, they are the only group whose attitudes improved significantly enough ( $p = .01$ ) to indicate the Women’s Studies course enhanced their perceptions about men as well as liberalizing their attitudes about the male role” (Pence 325). Positive results could be seen also with the student group that attended Black Studies. Pence suggests that “Black Studies and Women’s Studies share some common areas of focus (such as domination and social control). It seems probable that some Black Studies students applied concepts from course material to gender issues, and that gender issues arose in class, thus raising their AMS scores” (325). This research disproves the decades old, far-reaching assumption that women who are feminists are man-haters and that feminists have a negative attitude towards masculinity. This research also proves that Women’s Studies courses, as well as previous familiarity with feminism, affect student’s attitudes towards men and masculinity positively: “these aspects of the data lend additional evidence to challenge the assumption that Women's Studies courses ‘bash’ men” (Pence 326).

#### 4. Why We Should All Be Feminists

To give a full picture of how far feminism has come, one must refer to a more contemporary literary work on feminism such as *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie’s 2012 TED talk *We Should All Be Feminists* was published in book format in 2014 due to its great popularity and the impact it had on the twenty-first-century

feminism. Her work re-started “a worldwide conversation about feminism” (“Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”) and feminism in Black community.

Adichie’s story is deeply personal, which, perhaps, helps women across the world resonate with her stance. *We Should All Be Feminists* starts with her first time experience with the term feminist, which was negative. Adichie recollects that being called a feminist was used in such a manner that it could be equalized with being called a terrorist: “It was not a compliment. I could tell from his tone – the same tone with which a person would say, ‘You’re a supporter of terrorism’” (Adichie). This was not the only instance in which she was called a feminist and the word was used with a negative air; people told her that feminists are unhappy women who cannot find a husband; she was told that feminism is un-African and that being a feminist means hating men. This shows how deeply rooted the negativity connected with feminism is.

Adichie’s work connects her experiences of inequality as a child and as an adult and that shows us that still, in the contemporary society, which is certainly less staunchly patriarchal than the society of, perhaps, the eighteenth century, the negativity towards feminism prevails. Regardless, it appears that women still have to use the same arguments that they did several centuries ago in order to prove their worth. Although Wollstonecraft addressed this issue way back in 1792, Adichie still has to acknowledge the physical predisposition of men and argue why that should not be the proof of male superiority. Aware that our ideas about gender have not evolved much since the time of Wollstonecraft, she points out that: “Today, we live in a vastly different world. The person more qualified to lead is *not* the physically stronger person. It is the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, the more creative, more innovative... We have evolved. But our ideas of gender have not evolved very much” (Adichie).

Adichie, being a Nigerian citizen, gives us an insight into how women are treated in Black communities: “Each time they ignore me, I feel invisible. I feel upset. I want to tell them that I am just as human as the man, just as worthy of acknowledgement” (Adichie). Women who stand up for themselves in the twenty-first century are seen as angry and aggressive: “We spend too much time telling girls that they cannot be angry or aggressive or tough, which is bad enough, but then we turn around and either praise or excuse men for the same reasons” (Adichie). Adichie also touches upon the topic of how mass media shape young women’s minds: “All over the world, there are so many magazine articles and books telling women what to do, how to be and not be, in order to attract or please men” (Adichie), which, again, can be connected with Mary Wollstonecraft’s essay in which she states:

To gain the affections of a virtuous man is affectation necessary? Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man; but, to ensure her husband's affections, must a wife, who by the exercise of her mind and body whilst she was discharging the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother, has allowed her constitution to retain its natural strength, and her nerves a healthy tone, is she, I say, to condescend to use art and feign a sickly delicacy in order to secure her husband's affection? (Wollstonecraft 10)

Furthermore, Adichie, much like Wollstonecraft, touches upon the topic of education of both sexes (the term Wollstonecraft uses). She too sees the inequality in education or, better said, in raising both sexes: “We do a great disservice to boys in how we raise them . . . We teach boys to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability” (Adichie). The similarity between the problems that Adichie raises with regard to raising women and the problems that Wollstonecraft raises with same regard, are indisputable. On the raising of young girls Adichie states: “We say to girls, ‘You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful; otherwise you will threaten the man . . . Why should a woman’s success be a threat to a man?’” (Adichie). This is reminiscent of Wollstonecraft’s essay in which she advocates that a proper education of women means that a woman will be self-sufficient: “That a proper education; or, to speak with more precision, a well stored mind, would enable a woman to support a single life with dignity, I grant; but that she should avoid cultivating her taste, lest her husband should occasionally shock it, is quitting a substance for a shadow” (Wollstonecraft 12).

These two writers agree on the topic of marriage as well. Both Adichie and Wollstonecraft state that marriage is something that women are socially expected to partake in: “Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Marriage can be a good thing, a source of joy, love and mutual support. But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage, yet we don’t teach boys to do the same?” (Adichie). Wollstonecraft is full of outrage at the fact that women are taught to desire nothing but a husband:

strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,—the only way women can rise in the world,—by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act:- they dress; they paint, and nickname God’s creatures.- Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio! (Wollstonecraft 3)

These two works are over two centuries apart; Wollstonecraft's work is the forerunner of the feminist agenda, while Adichie's work originates from the age of the twenty-first-century feminism. Yet, these two works hold the same major arguments: women and men are not being raised/educated equally, which predisposes women to being weaker and flirtatious; women should aspire to marriage because it is their obligation to be a wife and a mother. Adichie urges her readers to reclaim the word feminist (Adichie), and says: "My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, 'Yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better'" (Adichie). The "only" issue is that, tragically and shockingly, the problem that Adichie mentions in her work is the very same problem that has afflicted women for centuries.

## Conclusion

To summarise, the feminist idea started decades before the Suffrage movement with Mary Wollstonecraft's book-length essay *A Vindication on Rights of Woman*. In her essay, Wollstonecraft advocates for a better education of women, taking a stance that traditional education is not sufficient enough to sharpen their mind. Wollstonecraft also strongly condemns the passive position of the eighteenth-century woman. She sheds light on the way women are objectified and raised to believe that the only way that they can succeed in life is through marriage. In her essay, Wollstonecraft also calls out the writers of the time such as Rousseau, arguing that the portrayal of ideal women in his work *Emile* is both unattainable and damaging to women.

After Wollstonecraft, feminism caught momentum during the Women's Suffrage, which began in the first half of the eighteenth century both in Britain and the USA. Women struggled for their right to vote and even though the struggle stagnated during World War I, women managed to prove their importance by fighting in the home front, showing thus their value in society. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* also helped spread the philosophy of feminism. She shed light on the stance that women in society are perceived as *Other*, rather than equal.

Surprisingly, the term feminism was first used negatively in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, where she connected the term to fascism. Negative connotations tied to the term feminism lie within the concept of ambivalent sexism, which takes up two forms: hostile and benevolent sexism, but also within the level of privilege as more privileged women feel the repercussions of sexism less severely than underprivileged women. Since feminism defies the patriarchal social system, which is the foundation of the Western world, feminism is perceived as a threat to the social order. Feminism is also negatively portrayed due to assumptions that it stands for man-hatred and radicalism against men, which the movement is not at all about, yet feminists get called man-haters to this day. The study by Dan Pence disproves these assumptions and proves that feminism impacts women's attitudes towards men and masculinity positively.

Even though several centuries ago Wollstonecraft set the premise for what the feminist movement is all about, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* indicates that women still deal with the very same issues today. The connection between these two works is undisputable and it shows that the feminist movement is still both relevant and necessary. Although feminists have achieved many great things, such as the right to vote for women and the right for education, there are still open issues such as equal pay, paid maternity leave in

certain countries, punishment of and protection from domestic violence, as well as the women's right to bodily autonomy and decision concerning abortion.



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