

## How Education Reshapes Women; the Thoughts of Wollstonecraft

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### Abstract

Eighteenth century was the time when women were intellectually poor, financially depended on men, educationally illiterate, juristically ignored and socially left behind. Women, then, faced with gender inequality, socially considered as a property of men and expected to be “fine” ladies. Despite all these handicaps, they were asked for to raise competent generations. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, craftily criticizes this hypocrisy and puts forward the idea that a society that leaves the women behind has limited chance to develop. This research, in the light of this details, investigates the social conditions of that age and closely focuses on how education reshapes the status of women.

**Key words:** *Feminist theory, human rights, Wollstonecraft, status of women, education*

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### **Introduction**

Mary Wollstonecraft is often considered as a prominent writer on education, society and politics in late eighteenth-century England. She is regarded as 'passionate, charismatic, and bold in both life and writing; a lover of independence and travel, a supporter of revolution, democratic principles, and self-determination'.<sup>2</sup> Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, advocates a system of national day schools that offer male and female students a common understanding of life and help them to break down the walls that estrange the sexes from each other. She states that if women are educated to think independently and to lead their lives as individuals, they can be accomplished and so the nation can be cultivated. By criticizing women's situation in marriage, family and society, she argues that women suffer from being uneducated in their marriages and implies that the education system should be reformed to save women from ignorance and to promote their status in family and society. Wollstonecraft associates women's poor education to their social and marital status. She questions how uneducated women defend their rights in marriages and society, raise cultivated children, fulfil their husbands' intellectual needs, and stand on their own feet. She, then, answers these questions by stating that the problem of female education is both the cause and effect of society's social, educational and intellectual backwardness. She argues that women are the basis of society and family. If they are left uncultivated, so are society and family. Proper education brings women cultivation of mind and each individual in society develops as women do. Thus, women's education level shape the societies', families', and marriages' future.

The aim of this study is to discuss how education reshapes women in the thought of Wollstonecraft. In the first section of study, background information about the status of women in society and marriage, and their educational rights in the eighteenth century will be analysed.

Next, Wollstonecraft's thoughts about the reasons of women backwardness and ignorance, why the author criticizes the eighteenth century's common attitude towards women, how she defines education will be presented. Finally, the question – how

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<sup>2</sup> Mervyn Nicholson, 'The Eleventh Commandment: Sex and Spirit in Wollstonecraft and Malthus', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1990), p. 402.

education reshapes the status of women - will be critically discussed. Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is the main source of the discussion.

### **The Situation of Women in the Eighteenth Century**

This section of study will present the general situation of women in the eighteenth century. Women suffered from social inequality in the society, financial dependence on their husbands in the family and inferiority to man in education throughout the eighteenth century. They were regarded by society as intellectually incapable of cultivating their minds and it was believed that they were created to enjoy men, doing housework and raising children.

Writers of the day such as Rousseau and Gregory considered pleasure in adornment but not in reading, and delight in the visual and decorative but not in intellectuality as feminine.<sup>3</sup> Negligence and contempt of women in the eighteenth century was, indeed, not a new phenomenon but was a continuation of the previous century's ideology. Throughout the seventeenth century, women were accused of being mentally weak and incompetent. In *The*

*Education of Girls* (1687), Fenelon claimed that though a woman's curiosity was bigger, her intellect was more incapable than a man's. Like her body, a woman's mind was less sturdy and strong than that of a man's.<sup>4</sup> There was, surprisingly, little or no change after more than a century. In *Strictures on Female Education* (1795), even though John Bennett appreciated the taste and fancy of women, he disparaged women's mental capacity and abilities by stating that they were incapable of thinking critically and creatively.<sup>4</sup> This ideology probably led women to be devoid of proper education and have an equal status in society and marriage.

Many women were restricted to home and had a secondary position in society because of the social assumption of women as intellectually weak and incapable. In

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "Emile" is a good example for this. In section Book V of Emile, Rousseau states that women should be "weak and passive", "put up little resistance", and "created specially to please men. John Gregory claims in his "A Father's Legacy to his Daughters" that women should avoid from exposing any learning which may endanger their ability to attract a husband.

<sup>4</sup> H. C. Barnard, *Fénelon on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 1-2. <sup>4</sup> J. Bennett, *Strictures on Female Education*, (New York: Source Book Press, 1971), p.88.

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*Lectures of Female Education* (1793), John Burton stated that women were designed by Nature to fulfil the needs of domestic life<sup>5</sup> since they were not equipped with mental skills. Although intellectual incapacity was a negative trait for men, women's intellectual weakness was considered as a means of their delicacy, thus it was favoured by many. By considering the mental skills as masculine, Bennett stated that women would stop being feminine and attract men if they had the intellectual abilities of men.<sup>6</sup>

Women suffered not only educationally but also politically and financially. Branca stated that women's status in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was quite inferior. They had no political rights. A married woman with a living husband, legally, did not exist. Financially, they were subject to men and those who worked in factories earned less than half of man's wage for the same hours of work. Besides working and marrying, middle-class women were expected to raise children and stay at home being perfect ladies.<sup>7</sup> It was, obviously, very difficult, if not impossible, to reach that ideal not only psychologically but also economically, though they were supposed to.

It may be suggested that it was a common approach to urge women to stop reading and expand their horizons. John Gregory, in *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, interestingly, warned his daughters not to show their knowledge and intellect, and keep it as a secret especially from those men who would be jealous of seeing the mental abilities of a woman.<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Hans, seemingly, clarified Gregory's warning. He stated that a female intellectual class was not welcomed by society in the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> However, despite all these negative perceptions towards women, Field pointed out that women's influence in the family and society increased throughout the eighteenth century. Though they were unable to get equal rights and economic opportunities, she claimed, women rights were apt to improve.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Burton, *Lectures on Female Education* (New York: Source Book Press, 1970), p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> Bennet, p.87

<sup>7</sup> Patrica, Branca, *Women in Europe since 1750* (Oxon, Routledge, 2013). pp. 9-17 <sup>8</sup> J. Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (New York: Garland, 1974), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> Corinne Field, "Made women of when they are mere children: Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of eighteenthcentury girlhood", *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 2 (2011), p.201.

In brief, women were considered as mentally incapable, socially as lower class, and maritally as dependent on men before and during the eighteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft, before the end of century, criticized conventional female education and claimed that women`s sufferings were due to their improper education. She suggested some ways to improve female education in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

It will be lodestar for the discussion to start with Wollstonecraft`s definition of education.

Education is:

The kind of attention to a child that will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temperament, regulate the passions as they begin to bubble up, and set the understanding to work before the body reaches maturity; so that the fully mature man will only have to continue the important task of learning to think and reason, rather than having to start it.<sup>10</sup>

Wollstonecraft believes that education should ‘strengthen the body, form the heart’, and make people independent.<sup>12</sup> She emphasizes the role of education to create a sensible person who uses his/her logic and become independent, instead of being led by feelings and being dependent. Similarly, the ideal marriage, Wollstonecraft claims, is based on a mutual friendship and independence, rather than feelings and dependency. Abbey, in his article “*Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft*”, points out that Wollstonecraft favours a marriage which is modelled ‘along the lines of higher friendship’ and implied that both women and men need to be rational beings in order to make a marriage empowered by reason.<sup>13</sup> Seemingly, education of sexes is the key medium through which marriage may be built.

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<sup>10</sup> Mary, Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, ed. by Ashley Tauchert, (London: Everyman, 1995), p. 24. <sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

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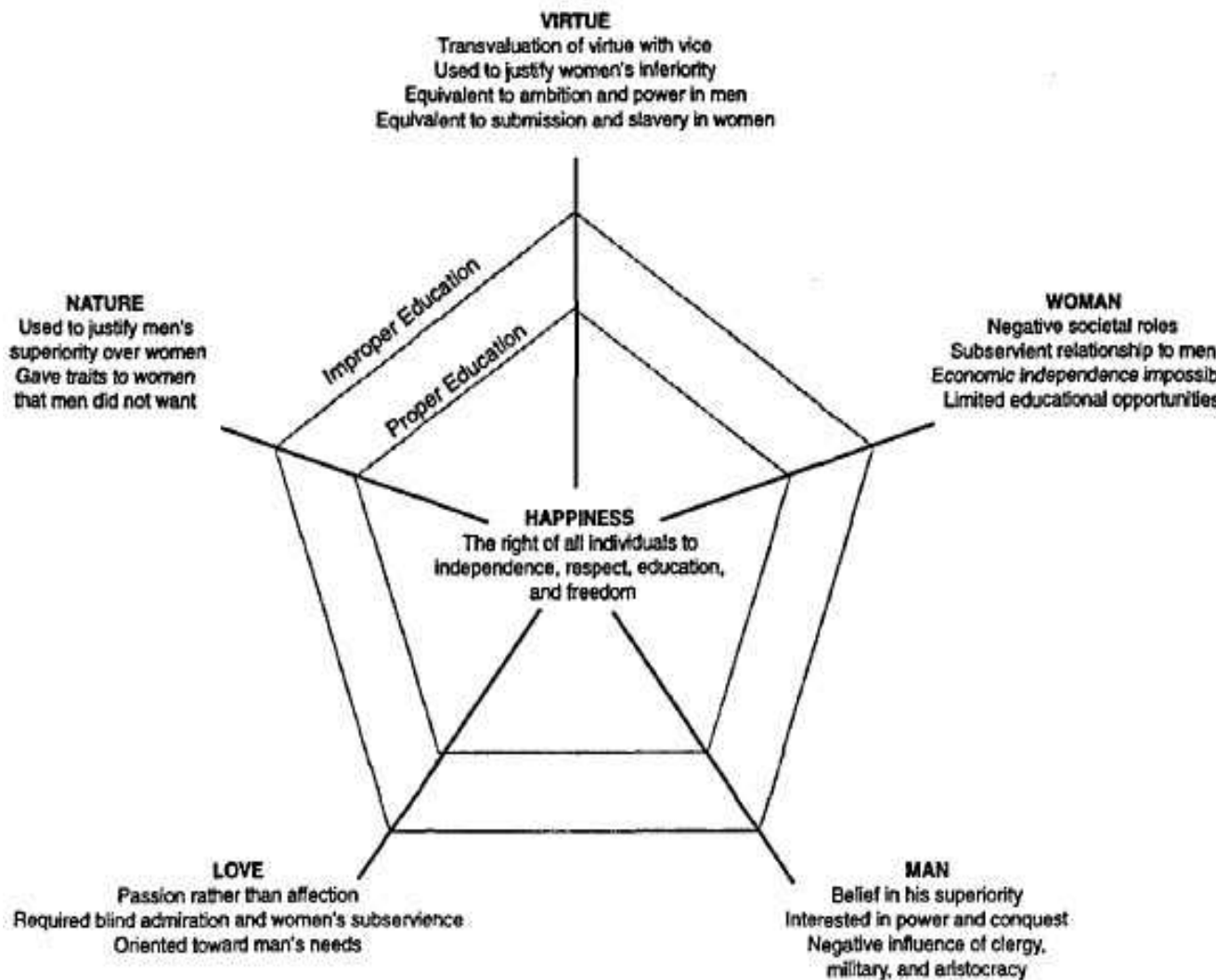


FIGURE 1.  
WOLLSTONECRAFT'S WEB OF CHALLENGE

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The figure above – drawn by Griffin – shows how Wollstonecraft connects

proper/improper education of women with happiness, virtue, love, their status and relation with men. Griffin argues that, in Wollstonecraft's thought, a proper education brings women

<sup>13</sup> Ruth, Abbey, 'Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Hypatia*, 3 (1999), p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Cindy L. Griffin, 'A web of reasons: Mary Wollstonecraft's a vindication of the rights of woman and the reweaving of form', *Communication Studies*, 4 (1996), p. 276.

happiness, freedom, and respect; makes them rational beings rather than emotional ones; gives an end to men's superiority over women and makes them equal beings; breaks the chains of women and makes them virtuous creatures; and ends women's blind obedience to men. Improper education, however, limits women, makes them dependent on men, causes women's inferiority, and makes them prey of their feelings.<sup>11</sup>

Wollstonecraft argues that women have a natural ability to be intellectual. In chapter III, *The Prevailing Opinion about Sexual Differences*, the author quotes from Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* to exhibit the core of her ideas about the intellect of women. Day tries to broaden his daughter's mind and give vigour to her body. He employs her as an assistant when she is old enough to do daily duties in the garden and farm. His daughter soon acquires a mastery in all rustic employments. Day, therefore, states that the weakness of women comes from their education but not from their nature. What is called delicacy in women is actually laziness and inactivity. We teach them useless arts instead of broadening their minds by reason and philosophy, and forget that our domestic comfort and the cultivation of descendants are in the hands of women.<sup>12</sup>

Wollstonecraft indicates that women were left bodily weak and their bodily dependence produced dependence of mind.<sup>13</sup> They were motivated for physical beauty

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<sup>11</sup> Griffin, p. 276-283.

<sup>12</sup> Wollstonecraft, p. 46.

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rather than mental skills, were directed to marry advantageously as it was the only way to be free and live in comfort.<sup>18</sup> She, next, questions how intellectually weak women know the duties of life. She brings a humanist approach that insists on the 'moral equality' of men and women and which values the 'sexless standards of virtue'.<sup>14</sup> The author, herein, questions whether there is a sex in souls or education leads human actions; then, claims that the senses of women are inflamed, and their understandings are ignored, so they become the victim of their senses. They are turned into creatures who care about clothes and impressing people. They dream about things that arouse emotion; their conduct is unsteady as they felt when they are supposed to reason. Novels, poetry, music make women the 'creatures of sensation' and this spoils their reasoning.

Women, therefore, do not become rational creatures and are content with their roles in life. Wollstonecraft exclaims that 'half of the human race' should not be encouraged to 'remain with inactivity, stupid acquiescence, and in a state of childhood'.<sup>15</sup>

In chapter IV, "*The State of Degradation to which Woman is Reduced by Various Causes*", Wollstonecraft defines knowledge as the 'power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations' and claims that women have been said not to have this power. She further argues that those women who are satisfied with their situations since they are provided with food and clothing and do not need to work, give up their health, liberty and virtue in exchange.<sup>16</sup> She,

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<sup>14</sup> Palumbo, David., 'Mary Wollstonecraft, Jonathan Swift, and the Passion in Reading', '*Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*', 3 (2011), p. 625

<sup>15</sup> Wollstonecraft, pp. 68-71.

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thereupon, implies that women need to use their understandings to become worthy of respect since this is the only basis for independence of character.<sup>22</sup>

Wollstonecraft argues that a proper education that has benefits to women, marriage, family, and society is the only way to improve women. A well-educated woman will,

consequently, be able to run a family, cultivate her children, generate ideas instead of inspiring love, control her feelings and use her mind, be an independent one, have an intellectual attractiveness rather than a physical one, and be rational.

The first point Wollstonecraft mentions is how an educated woman manages her family. She establishes a considerable and an accurate connection between female education and maintaining a family at this respect. Wollstonecraft states that one needs both bodily and mental strength in running a family, and argues that a woman needs a serious kind of perseverance to fulfil domestic duties that require a 'firmer support than emotions can give'. Women, however, are encouraged not to expand their minds and gain intellectual strength but to be emotional ones.<sup>17</sup> That kind of women do not know even how to spend money.<sup>18</sup> Then, she suggests that unless their understanding is

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<sup>17</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. pp. 72-77.

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broadened, women will not fulfil domestic pursuits and family duties. As long as they are kept in ignorance, they will be unable to comprehend and be the slaves of man.<sup>25</sup>

Wollstonecraft, herein, brings a rational approach. Managing a family is merely possible for the ones who are kept in the dark dungeon of ignorance. Comparing a married woman to a slave, however, may sound irrelevant. Women, at least, had freedom of will and identity, but a slave had neither of them. A married woman had an incomparable life to those of slaves. It is known that England was the first country abolishing slavery, but it had not yet been done in the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> It, therefore, might be suggested that Wollstonecraft slightly exaggerates the situation of woman by comparing them to slaves.

Yet, Wollstonecraft, seemingly, may have stressed women's blind obedience to men by comparing them to slaves. She points out that a proper education will make women rational. They, therefore, will maintain their families, give right decisions, and be rational. Yet, the education they receive narrows their horizons. She states that women are expected to do everything in an orderly manner, but they receive only a 'disorderly kind of education' that keeps the reason in the background.<sup>27</sup> This causes women to obey the rule of men blindly. Then she exclaims: 'strengthen the female mind by enlarging it

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<sup>19</sup> David, Turley, *Slavery*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2000. Turley presents details of the creation and abolishment of the slavery and how it evolved throughout the centuries.

<sup>27</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. p, 26.

and that will end blind obedience'.<sup>20</sup> Crafton, supportively, states that education brings freedom to women in the thought of Wollstonecraft.<sup>21</sup>

Another significant issue an uneducated woman incapable of is educating her children.

Wollstonecraft argues that an uneducated mother mostly uses tyranny to raise her children. Even if she cares them, it is not known whether she does this because of 'vanity or fondness' for the children. Since they are let to achieve nothing by their own from infancy, women lack the power and discipline over their feelings. They, consequently, are fond of their children and this causes indulgence. Women of sensibility, consequently, are 'the least fit' for management of children because they are governed by their feelings, and spoil a child's temperament.<sup>30</sup> What Wollstonecraft has mooted here seems clear and convincing. An uneducated woman, indeed, cannot get inside the mind of her children. She feeds their stomach but not minds. She may often suppose insulting and constraining as a way of child education, thus she might block the communication in the family. To solve this problem Wollstonecraft suggests making women rational creatures, and free citizens. Thus, they will quickly become good wives, and mothers. However, while she is presenting the problem, giving details for the solution may be missed. Throughout the book, Wollstonecraft defines the problems, but do not bring detailed solutions. Griffiths, similarly, states that Wollstonecraft's aims remain at the level of general principle rather than 'providing specific proposals'.<sup>22</sup>

To exemplify the two issues discussed above, Wollstonecraft creates cases of two widows to present how education of women may affect managing a family and educating children.

In her first example, a woman who is taught obedience marries a sensible man. Husband leads his wife when it is necessary and wife lives as dependent on him. Husband dies and leaves her with a large family. Now, the widow must be both mother and father, educate her children, form their principles and secure their property. However, she has never taught to stand on her own feet, to maintain a family. She has only learned to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Lisa Plummer Crafton, 'Insipid decency: Modesty and female sexuality in Wollstonecraft', *European Romantic Review*, 3 (2000), p. 284. <sup>30</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. Pp. 72-77.

<sup>22</sup> Morwenna, Griffiths, 'Educational Relationships: Rousseau, Wollstonecraft and Social Justice', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 2 (2014), p. 343.

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please men and to depend gracefully on them. Unable to educate her children or get them to respect her, she suffers from the anguish of impotent regret and probably dies in poverty. Since this woman knows only to please men, she will teach the same to her daughters. The mother will lose in the 'coquette' and instead of becoming friends with her daughters; she will be their rival due to her jealousy. She ignores her duties since she is busy with adorning and nursing her body.<sup>23</sup>

Wollstonecraft, then, gives an example of another widow who has a fairly good understanding, has strengthened her constitution by bodily exercise, has allowed her body to acquire its full vigour, and has gradually expanded her mind to understand the moral duties of life and what human virtue and dignity consist in. Such a woman marries from affection, secures her husband's respect, and does not try to please him with cheap tricks. After a while, the flame of love extinguishes and it turns into a friendship that is actually better for a family.

She, however, becomes a widow at an early age without sufficient wealth to live comfortably. Yet, she is not desolate. She feels sorrowful, but turns to her children with redoubled fondness and her parental affection presents her as sacred and heroic. Mother and children share a mutual love and respect. The widow thinks that God approves her, and her husband sees how she struggles to fulfil her duties. In the course of life, she forgets passions springing from her sex. She raises her children cultivated and enlightened. The task of life, therefore, fulfilled and she warmly waits for the cold bed of death.<sup>24</sup>

These two cases, seemingly, are extreme examples besides becoming imaginary. In the first case, the uneducated woman is presented as a dependent wife and an ill-humoured mother. It is acceptable that education breaks the chains of ignorance and consequently makes independent beings. It, however, can be noted that personality and level of education may be uncorrelated. An uneducated woman, for instance, may be her daughters' friend rather than being jealous of them. Education, indeed, helps mothers to educate their children, but uneducated ones cannot be labelled as ill-humoured. The second case, on the contrary, sounds utopic and heavenly. Education, here, makes an ideal wife, a wise mother, and a respectable widow. Yet, Wollstonecraft has two

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<sup>23</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. pp. 54-55.

<sup>24</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. pp. 56-58.

problematic points here: a) educated woman controls her feelings (she forgets passions springing from her sex), and b) love between parents is shown bad for a family. Mackenzie, in her article *Reason and Sensibility: The Ideal of Women's Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft*, stated that Wollstonecraft wrote *Vindication* when she was childless and 'inexperienced in sexual relationship with men'. Her later experiences, however, taught her that reason cannot always and easily govern passion.<sup>25</sup> Mackenzie's point supports that disciplining the feelings is difficult, if not impossible. Similarly, Wollstonecraft may not know if love between parents is bad for family since she has not been married then.

Though paralleling education and controlling feelings may be controversial – that will be discussed further below – education's role turning husband and wife into friends is favourable. Mackenzie, herein, states that Wollstonecraft's particular concern is to create a mutual friendships and love relationships between men and women. Mackenzie stresses that Wollstonecraft:

... was also vehement that women's bodies should be regarded neither as mere objects of use, pleasure, and exchange among men, nor by women as objects of narcissistic attention. Rather, respect for the body is an integral part of both self-esteem and respect for others. Wollstonecraft's view was that such reciprocity and respect could be realized only in a context in which women are able to exercise control of both the external-financial, educational, and political-circumstances of their lives and the direction of their own affections.<sup>26</sup>

Wollstonecraft, clearly, appreciates the case of educated widow who is rational, independent, and sacred. Her approach to love underlies how she depicts the ideal marriage and why she esteems the educated widow. She states that love has an ending and eventually turns into friendship or indifference. When passions disappear, husband recognizes that he neglects the duties of life due to his passions, and may neglect his wife. In return, humiliated woman may turn her face to other men. The author, therefore,

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<sup>25</sup> Catriona, Mackenzie, 'Reason and Sensibility: The Ideal of Women's Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Hypatia*, 4 (1993), p.35

<sup>26</sup> Mackenzie, p. 36.

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suggests that a wife and a husband ought not to continue to love each other with passion since the mind may be weakened by passions. If a woman is content with marriage, her mind cannot be cultivated. Thus, an unhappy marriage makes the best mothers and urges them to acquire the qualities that 'ennoble a rational being' since there will be no passions and love.<sup>27</sup> It seems that Wollstonecraft misses the role of love in a happy relationship. Mackenzie, similarly, argues that Wollstonecraft contrasts 'lust with love, sensuality with sensibility, parental self-love with parental affection'.<sup>37</sup>

Wollstonecraft, further, broadens her argument by connecting education with controlling feelings and being virtuous. She claims that many innocent girls become the 'fools of a sincere affectionate heart', are seduced and ruined by men before they know the difference between 'virtue and vice'. Their education has prepared them to become infamous. Thus, they feel frustrated, lose their motivation in life, and prostitution becomes their only refuge. They fall this situation because of the way they are educated: respect man for maintenance.<sup>28</sup>

It is universally acknowledged that education helps people to be mentally strong and be independent. It is, still, questionable whether education can be correlated with virtue and vice.

It should be noted that education cultivates the mind, teaches what the right and wrong are. Yet, virtue and vice might not be under the reign of education. An uneducated one may be virtuous while an educated one may be corrupted. It, therefore, can be suggested that Wollstonecraft's correlation between education vs virtue and vice could be revised.

The author, similarly, contradicts herself further in the book when she states that girls marry merely to better themselves and they have such perfect power over their hearts that they don't allow themselves to fall in love until they meet a wealthy man.<sup>29</sup> Here, she states that girls control their feelings and fall in love only when they want to. Nevertheless, if education makes girls romantic, inconstant, and weak, how can they control their feelings until they find a rich man? Wollstonecraft, probably, would have checked her approach here if she had recognized this controversy.

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<sup>27</sup> Wollstonecraft,  
Mary. pp. 34-36. <sup>37</sup>  
Mackenzie, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. pp. 81-82.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp. 85.

Wollstonecraft, next, argues that a proper education will replace ‘pretty woman’ with ‘fine woman’. She defines pretty woman as an object of desire for men, and fine woman as inspiring emotions that are greater by ‘displaying intellectual beauty’ and probably having no attraction for men who find their happiness in physical beauty.<sup>30</sup> The author states that cultivation creates fine woman, then, argues that an uneducated young woman inspires love; however, a cultivated one mentally and morally attracts man, thus physical beauty must be empowered by dignity and intellect. She opposes to the idea that woman would be unsexed by acquiring strength of body and mind, and beauty would no longer adorn them if women received an equal education. She, instead, supposes that dignified beauty and true grace that make women respectable would be seen then, rather than relaxed beauty or the graces of helplessness.<sup>31</sup>

Wollstonecraft portrays eighteenth century woman as pretty, and her idealized woman as fine. She, indisputably, presents her argument well. Education makes woman fine and sturdy. The second point she raised is (a cultivated woman mentally and morally attracts man), however, seems arguable. A cultivated woman may be spotlighted only if the society and man are also cultivated. Women’s cultivation, or else, might be regarded as a sign of arrogance. Wollstonecraft mentions this problem in chapter twelve, On National Education. Her main argument there is to educate boys and girls together and break down the walls between them. Indeed, if coeducation had been executed properly in eighteenth century, there might have been no gender problem at all and pretty women could have been evolved to fine women.

Wollstonecraft further points out that education of time aims to make women pleasing, but such a kind of woman fits for a “*Harem*”.<sup>32</sup> She implies that a wife who only knows to please her husband will soon find that her charms are temporary, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband’s heart when he sees them every day. Such kind of education is useful only to a mistress but not to a wife.<sup>33</sup> She emphasizes that women’s physical

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. pp, 196.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp, 31-32.

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attractiveness does not make a marriage happier or longer. A man feels alone in society unless he is loved by someone who could understand him.<sup>34</sup> Wollstonecraft, herein, hits the right point: educate women, allow them to expand their capacity for reason, and give them greater freedom, independence, and choice, then marriage could become a friendship. She argues that educated women fulfil their duties better.<sup>35</sup> Abbey, supportively, states that a rational approach to marriage as Wollstonecraft argues would produce stronger marriages because the people in them would be partners, indeed friends, who would value one another for their virtues of character rather than their physical beauty, status, wealth, or femininity or masculinity.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that if they marry for friendship, then women will be dedicated wives and mothers since they are not compelled to seek 'male approval and adoration'.<sup>37</sup>

The next point Wollstonecraft argues is that education makes women independent from men. She states that the intercourse of sexes cannot be called as fellowship and women can never fulfil the duties of their gender, become independent of men, and become self-sufficient till they become free citizens. Marriage cannot be sacred till women become men's companions rather than their mistresses. Virtue will never reign society till the virtues of both sexes are based on reason and till the affections common to both are allowed to gain their 'due strength by the discharge of mutual duties'.<sup>38</sup> Wollstonecraft prefers to be single to marry a bad husband. The author, herein, states that a proper education would enable a woman to live unmarried with dignity, make her more independent of life's disasters, and to open up new sources of enjoyment that depend only on the solitary operations of the mind.<sup>39</sup> It is supportable that a proper education may make women intellectually stronger and independent. Abbey implies that Wollstonecraft's aim is not simply to make women capable of more informed choices about who and why to marry but to give them the freedom to choose whether to marry at all.<sup>40</sup> Wollstonecraft, in brief, believes that education will improve women, so do the marriages, family, and society. Educated women will be independent, raise cultivated

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. 99-102.

<sup>35</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Abbey, R., 'Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft', *'Hypatia'*, 3 (1999), p.84.

<sup>37</sup> Abbey, p.83.

<sup>38</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. p. 189.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Abbey, p.84.

children, and maintain their families. They will not be a flower consuming oxygen at nights but will be a tree producing oxygen throughout their lives. Education will save women from being inferior to men and bring them equality.

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### **Conclusion**

To sum up, how women were perceived in the eighteenth century, how their education was, and how education could reshape them in the thought of Wollstonecraft were analysed in this study. It is found that, in the eighteenth century, women were regarded as second-class citizens and financially depended on men in many cases, were not encouraged to think and produce but to care about their beauty and pleasing men. Legally, a married woman did not exist and politically they had no rights. Though their rights were inclined to be improved, they were still suffering from inequality. Wollstonecraft was one of the rare rebellions to his situation. She struggled for proper education, independence, equality of women both in marriage and society. She put forward the idea that if women evolved into rational, independent beings from emotional, dependent ones; society would also develop. She implied that education of women is the key medium for this development. A proper education, as the author claims, may redefine the conceptions of woman, man, virtue, nature, love, family, equality, intellectuality and so on. It is supportable that education helps women to manage their families and educate their children well; converts women from pleasing men and inspiring love to address men's mind and intellectually challenge them; makes women intellectually attractive rather than being physically attractive. Similarly, it is agreeable that women become rational beings instead of being victims of their emotions if they receive a proper education. As a result of being rational, they may be intellectual beings and independent from men. When they become independent beings, women will participate in society, so society will embrace the idea of mutuality instead of reign of men. A proper education of women, furthermore, may end the inferiority of women and make them equal to men. Equality, consequently, may strengthened women's identity and mind, thus, they will be occupied with a wide range of subjects beyond appearance and marriage rather than trying to enjoy men and looking for advantageous marriages since women will no more look for men's approval. This may help the creation of healthy marriages because marriage will be based on mutual understanding instead of onesided dependence. However, it is discussable whether educated women may control their feelings as the author claimed. It is, actually, difficult to correlate education with controlling feelings. It, therefore, needs to be analysed further. Another questionable point is Wollstonecraft's approach to the place of love in marriage. She disapproves passionate love in a marriage, but, seemingly, the author mixes love with lust. Yet,

considering the period when the book was written, it might be suggested that Wollstonecraft has valuable and assertive ideas about the benefits of proper education to women despite some controversial claims she made.

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