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BEYOND THE MYSTIQUE: UNRAVELING THE TIMELESS THREADS OF FEMINIST THEORIES

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ABSTRACT



The paper explores the significant contributions made by early feminist writers who were highly influential: Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, and Mary Wollstonecraft. It looks at the distinctive contributions that they made to feminist theory and whether their theories are still relevant now. Feminist philosophy originated with the 18th-century revolutionary Mary Wollstonecraft, who advocated for women's rights and education. These concepts were expanded upon by mid-century existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, who emphasized the agency and autonomy of women. In "The Feminine Mystique," Betty Friedan, an essential figure in the feminist movement of the 1960s, challenged the traditional roles that were assigned to women by critically analyzing cultural expectations. Literary modernist Virginia Woolf studied the complexities of women's lives and social restrictions. The graphical representation shows the combined influence of these voices on forming modern gender discourse by navigating through the development of feminist ideas from these many points of view. Through placing their views in the current socio-cultural framework, it highlights the lasting significance of their groundbreaking concepts in advancing the continuous quest for equal opportunity for women and men.

Keywords: *Feminist Writers, Feminist Theory, Feminist Philosophy, Equal Opportunity*

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INTRODUCTION

Visionary thinkers have left their indelible impressions on the landscape of feminist discourse. These thinkers have made contributions that have been ground-breaking, which have impacted and encouraged the continuous quest for gender equality. A deep dive into the enormous impact that early feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, and Betty Friedan have had on feminist theory is presented in this research study. These authors' views have left a long-lasting impression on the field. The purpose of this investigation is to determine the specific contributions that each prominent figure made to feminist thinking and to assess the practical applicability of their beliefs within the context of the modern sociocultural environment.

Through their individual contributions, Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir, Woolf, and Friedan have collectively weaved a complex web in the realm of feminist thought, which has influenced contemporary conversations on the topic of gender equality. As we progress through their intellectual journey, the everlasting significance of their ideas becomes more apparent. This lays the groundwork for ongoing efforts to attain equitable treatment of men and women. Through the investigation of their legacies, we are able to unearth truths that serve to motivate and accelerate the ongoing goal of a world that is more equal and inclusive for people of all ethnicities.

DISCUSSION

Mary Wollstonecraft, a British author and philosopher who lived in the 18th century, is often regarded as a pioneer in the feminist movement due

to the major contributions she made to the promotion of women's rights and education. Her work turned out to be crucial in laying the framework for contemporary feminist thought, and it continues to be significant in conversations that are presently taking place about gender equality. The most important piece of work that Wollstonecraft produced was a work titled "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792), which was a revolutionary piece of writing that questioned the conventional ideas that were held about the academic and social potential of women. She stated in her piece that women are not fundamentally inferior to men, but that they give the impression of being inferior owing to the limited educational possibilities available to them. Her strong advocacy for the educational opportunities of women was based on the belief that a population of women who had been educated and emancipated would make a positive contribution to the overall improvement of society.

The fact that Wollstonecraft placed such a strong emphasis on causes and education as a method to liberate women was one of her most important contributions. The argument that she presented was that women, equivalent to men, deserved rationality as well as the capacity for educational and moral development. A significant shift from the existing standards of her time, in which feminine intellectual pursuits were sometimes discouraged or restricted to household skills, her appeal for equal education was a bold shift.

The innovative thoughts that Wollstonecraft had on the constraints of established gender roles and the expectations that society put on women



were particularly noteworthy. The legal framework of marriage was criticized by her, and she advocated for companionship and respect between each other between couples rather than the subordination of women. She laid the groundwork for contemporary feminist philosophers who would delve into themes of autonomy, agency, and the breakdown of patriarchal structures. Her work was crucial in laying this foundation.

The thoughts of Wollstonecraft have significant and profound significance in the modern world. In spite of the advancements that have been made since her time, women continue to confront obstacles that are associated with limited possibilities, gender stereotypes, and prejudice that is systemic in nature. The emphasis that Wollstonecraft placed on education as a means of gaining empowerment is still relevant today, as the availability of education continues to be an essential component in the process of achieving gender equality on a global scale. Her critique of the expectations that society has regarding the roles that women should play in the household and in marriage is also echoed in ongoing conversations about the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance and the necessity of breaking deeply set gender conventions.

It can be said that Mary Wollstonecraft's groundbreaking work was instrumental in establishing the intellectual groundwork for the feminist movement. Her critique of traditional gender roles, as well as her ideas regarding women's education and autonomy, continues to reverberate in contemporary conversations about gender equality. Through the act of confronting the established order

of her era, Wollstonecraft laid the groundwork for a societal transition that is still in progress, with the goal of achieving greater inclusivity and equitable opportunity for women.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Simone de Beauvoir, a notable French existentialist philosopher and writer, was instrumental in the development of feminist theories through the breakthrough writings and efforts that she contributed. Her observations into existentialism, race or gender, and emancipation of women continue to resound in contemporary feminist conversations, which demonstrate that her influence goes far beyond the contributions she made at the time to contemporary feminist discourse.

"The Second Sex" (1949), which is a detailed investigation of the existentialist perspective on women's oppression, is considered to be the most influential work that De Beauvoir has ever produced. Within the context of this key essay, she examines the social, historical, and philosophical aspects of women's subjection, so posing a challenge to the prevalent notion of women as the "Other" in relation to males. De Beauvoir claimed that throughout history, women have been defined in contrast to males, rather than as independent persons who own their own agency.

One of the most important contributions that were made by de Beauvoir was her investigation of the idea of "woman as the other." According to her argument, women have been subjected to the position of being the subordinate, dependant, and marginalized group in society. Throughout her work, De Beauvoir deconstructed the various ways



whereby expectations from society, cultural norms, and institutional structures contributed to the oppression of women. The existentialist perspective that she adopted emphasized the significance of individual liberty and responsibility, and she encouraged women to break free from the restraints of society and assert their own existence.

In addition to this, De Beauvoir explored the unique characteristics of women's experiences, covering topics like as reproductive rights, parenthood, and the expectations that society places on these women. Her analysis of the impact that biological variations have on women's social roles and her support for women's liberty in reproductive choices continue to be themes of discussion in contemporary feminist debates.

The ongoing conversations that are taking place concerning gender inequality, the idea of the "Other," and the fight for women's rights are a clear indication of the contemporary relevance of Simone de Beauvoir's work with regard to these topics. Her focus on the necessity for women to express their agency, reject the restrictions that society imposes on them, and actively participate in defining their existence is resonant with organizations that advocate for gender equality, rights, and intersectional feminism.

Furthermore, feminist theories that address the intersectionality of identity have been influenced by de Beauvoir's investigation of the interconnectivity of gender and existentialism. These theories acknowledge the varied forms of oppression that are experienced by various groups of women. In perpetuity, her legacy will serve as a source of motivation for individuals who are working for the

elimination of patriarchal structures and the attainment of genuine gender equality.

The work of Simone de Beauvoir continues to be an essential component of feminist theory due to the significant insights it provides into the existentialist viewpoint on the oppression of women. It is her study of the "Othering" of women, as well as her advocacy for women's autonomy and freedom, that continues to influence and inspire contemporary feminist movements. She also contributes to ongoing attempts to confront and modify gender norms and power dynamics.

BETTY FRIEDAN

Her main work, "The Feminine Mystique" (1963), which she wrote, had a significant and long-lasting impact on the American feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Friedan was an influential figure in the movement. The contributions that Friedan made to feminism and her critique of the expectations that society places on women continue to have an impact and continue to remain in modern conversations about gender equality.

The publication of "The Feminine Mystique" is sometimes attributed with being the spark that ignited for the second wave of feminism. Friedan conducts an in-depth analysis of the American society that emerged in the decades following World War II, focusing specifically on the ideal of the suburban middle class during the 1950s. She coined the term "the feminine mystique" to characterize the widespread assumption that women might find fulfillment and satisfaction primarily via the duties of wife and mother. She described this way of thinking as "the feminine mystique." According to Friedan, a



significant number of women, although complying with the expectations of society, had feelings of unfulfillment and suffocation in their domestic life.

Friedan's central arguments were that the problem that developed caused by confining women's identities to their duties as homemakers was one of the most important issues. She disputed the idea that the fundamental goal of women was to find fulfillment via marriage and children, and she encouraged women to explore opportunities for personal and professional fulfillment that went beyond the conventional roles that they played in the home. In order to challenge the restrictive roles that society has assigned to women, this call for women to embrace a wider range of chances and goals was an essential component.

Additionally, Friedan's work brought attention to the wider societal impact that result from restricting the potential of women. She brought attention to the discontent and sense of emptiness that women who had received an education but were subsequently limited to home life without the possibility for intellectual and professional engagement found themselves experiencing. Throughout the modern age, her focus on the necessity for women to have an identity and a purpose that extends beyond the home has continued to shape conversations about the balance between work and personal life, personal fulfillment, and gender roles.

"The problem that has no name," as Friedan referred to it, is a metaphor for the feelings of dissatisfaction and irritation that are shared by a significant number of women. The arguments that continue to take place today about the cultural

expectations that are placed on women, the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, and the continuous struggle for gender equality are all indicative of the continued relevance of this concept.

In addition to the famous book she wrote, Friedan was also a co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, which was another factor that contributed to the growing popularity of the feminist movement. Concerns such as discrimination in the workplace, reproductive rights, and legal equality were among the topics that NOW intended to address. Through her advocacy and organizational efforts, Friedan demonstrated her dedication to bringing about concrete social and legislative changes that would further the cause of women's rights.

Betty Friedan's work, in especially "The Feminine Mystique," was crucial in laying the framework for the second wave of feminism and continues to serve as a touchstone in modern conversations on gender equality. Her critique of societal expectations, advocacy for women's autonomy and fulfillment, and efforts to influence change through action have left an enduring legacy in the continuous pursuit of equal opportunities and rights for women. Her legacy will hopefully continue to be a source of inspiration for future generations.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Through her works of literature, essays, and investigation of the intricacies of women's life, Virginia Woolf, a pivotal figure in literary modernism, made substantial contributions to feminist theory. Her work was a significant part of the contemporary literary movement. Her work, which is frequently



distinguished by its creative narrative approaches and introspective analysis, has had a long-lasting impact on feminist discourse, and its modern relevance continues to be relevant in conversations on gender, identity, and the demands of society.

Works like as "Mrs. Dalloway" (1925), "Orlando" (1928), and "To the Lighthouse" (1927) is examples of Woolf's study of the inner lives of her female characters, as well as her critical assessment of the constraints imposed by society conventions. Woolf's works are also notable for their critical examination of both of these aspects. She goes into the psychological and emotional landscapes of her female protagonists in these works, showing the internal struggles and desires that define their experiences. She does this by disclosing the landscapes of her characters' minds and emotions.

Woolf's article "A Room of One's Own" (1929), in which she addresses the historical and social limitations that have hindered women's intellectual and artistic aspirations, is one of the key contributions that Woolf has made to the field of feminist philosophy. In order for women to cultivate their voices and make contributions to culture and society, Woolf contends that it is necessary for them to become economically independent and to have a physical place that is their own. This idea continues to be relevant in contemporary feminist arguments on the necessity of providing women with equal opportunities and spaces in a variety of fields.

When Woolf explores androgyny, as she does in "Orlando," she confronts the conventional gender standards that are prevalent in society. Following the protagonist across centuries of history as both a man and a woman, the novel highlights the

fluidity and artificiality of gender conceptions by following the protagonist through these many eras. An ongoing conversation about breaking away from conventional gender binaries is facilitated by this topic, which connects with modern conversations on gender identity and contributes to the ongoing conversation.

In addition, Woolf's criticism of patriarchy and her advocacy for the economic and intellectual autonomy of women are matching with the objectives of contemporary feminists. Her focus on the significance of women having agency over their lives and the necessity of society recognising the accomplishments of women continues to serve as a source of inspiration for feminist movements that advocate for equal rights and opportunities.

Woolf's legacy includes the impact that she had on the area of literary and cultural studies as a whole. An indelible impression has been left on literature and feminist literary criticism as a result of her creative narrative tactics, stream-of-consciousness writing, and sensitive representation of female characters. By continuing to study her works, one can gain significant insights into the complexities of gender relations and the difficulties that women experience when attempting to navigate the demands of society.

The work and efforts that Virginia Woolf made in the field of feminism continue to be relevant in contemporary conversation. Her examination of women's inner lives, her support for women's economic and intellectual independence, and her challenge to establish gender standards contribute to current discussions about gender equality, identity, and the destruction of patriarchal structures. Woolf's



reputation as a pioneer in the field of feminism continues to live on, and her work continues to entice readers and academics to engage with it because of the profound insights it provides into the intricacies of the human experience, particularly when viewed through the prism of gender.

CONCLUSION

The contributions of Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, and Betty Friedan have weaved a wall-hanging in the vast field of feminist thought that continues to influence discussions on gender equality today. The pursuit of equal opportunity for men and women continues to demonstrate the enduring relevance of these trailblazing individuals, as we explore their intellectual journey.

Feminist philosophy was founded upon the demands made by Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century for women's rights and education. Her focus on education as a tool for empowerment is still relevant today, as it resonates with the ongoing obstacles that women have while trying to obtain equal access to school. In conversations about work-life balance and the breakdown of deeply rooted gender conventions, Wollstonecraft's critique of traditional gender roles and her support for companionship and respect in marriage continue to be touchstones.

Renowned existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir analyzed the "Othering" of women and defended their liberty. Her investigation of social expectations and reproductive rights continues to be a focal point for modern feminist discussions. De

Beauvoir's influence is still felt today, providing motivation for those striving to abolish patriarchal systems and accomplish true gender equality.

The literary modernism of Virginia Woolf permanently altered the debate surrounding feminism. Her self-reflective examinations of women's inner life, financial independence, and defiance of gender standards continue to influence gender, identity, and society expectations today. Woolf's support of women having their own space—both physically and intellectually—remains relevant in discussions today about equitable opportunities and spaces in a variety of disciplines.

The second wave of feminism was sparked by Betty Friedan's iconic book, "The Feminine Mystique." Through her critique of the constraints placed on women's identities and her advocacy for more opportunities, Betty Friedan ignited discussions around gender roles, work-life balance, and personal fulfillment. She furthered the cause of women's rights by co-founding the National Organization for Women, demonstrating her dedication to real social change.

As we get to the close of this investigation, the enduring threads that these women philosophers spun transcend the boundaries of their own times. The problems they faced—education, independence, social expectations, and fair opportunity—remain relevant in today's world. The continued significance of these feminist theories is highlighted by the continuous discussions surrounding gender inequity, the "Othering" of women, and the various obstacles that women experience.



The writings of Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir, Woolf, and Friedan provide direction in the never-ending quest for gender equality. Their literary contributions still serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for a wide range of initiatives that support the abolition of gender-based inequality. We traverse a route towards a future where equal opportunities and rights are not just goals but actualities for everyone by using the prism of these feminist ideologies.

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