

**Feminist Political Philosophy from Proto-Feminism to Present: Socially Constructed Gendered
Difference and the Family as an Institution**

An Honors Thesis (POLS 404)

by

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Abstract

This research project focuses on the development of feminist theories over time, from the pre-nineteenth century proto-feminist writings to current feminist positions, and delves into the ideas and political and social forces that have driven the discipline of feminist political philosophy forward. Scholars' interpretations of both gendered socialization and the family as an institution have emerged as two main areas of research and are the foci of this project. Each concept is examined through the lens of proto-feminist or feminist thought to show the growth of feminist theory over time. Representative examples of scholarly works, including those by Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and Susan Moller Okin, are utilized to show the connection and evolution of these central feminist concepts. The paper also includes projections regarding the future of feminist theory in these areas, and of the discipline as a whole.

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Introduction

Political theories written by and about women, with gender as a primary focus, have grown in both multitude and accessibility since the time of the pre-19th century proto-feminist writers. Early modern political philosophers were primarily male and either ignored the impact of gender entirely or saw women's role in social and political life negatively. In her formative philosophical work *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine De Pizan directly attacks this negativity against women, writing that "I could scarcely find a moral work by any author which didn't devote some chapter or paragraph to attacking the female sex".¹ This historical exclusion and degradation of women pervades much of the classical literature of the genre of political thought, including the works of the key figures of modern political thought like Hobbes and Rousseau. Additionally, until fairly recently, this was often the only assumed perspective that students in academia could expect to read or examine. For these reasons, pieces of feminist political and philosophical thought form a critical part of a more realistic and holistic understanding of political theory in modern times.

This exclusion and degradation was challenged by some of the first women political philosophers, who are now referred to as proto-feminist scholars. Before the creation of movements for women's rights or the advent of the language of feminism, these women challenged societal expectations and wrote compelling treatises on the importance of gender in understanding both personal and political life. Due to the groundbreaking nature of these types of work, proto-feminist works likely laid the foundation for future study and influenced future feminist discourse. Since this time, the discipline of feminist political philosophy has greatly expanded, reaching further into both academia and pop culture. Gendered socialization and the

¹ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin Classics, 1999).

institution of the family are two key concepts that have evolved over time and propelled the discipline of feminist political philosophy forward; this paper will analyze the development of these two topics in an attempt to provide insight into the future of the discipline of feminist political philosophy and its real-world applications.

Gendered Socialization

The first of the concepts to be examined herein is that of gendered socialization. A technically sociological term, gender socialization refers to the construction and reconstruction of various gender role expectations both intentionally and unintentionally. These role expectations could include anything from appropriate dress and etiquette to acceptable career plans or academic goals. Individuals in society are exposed to these expectations beginning at birth and they are reinforced throughout childhood and adolescence. These expectations and roles undoubtedly shape the way a society functions as a whole by shaping the attitudes and behaviors of each successive generation. As such, this concept has become central to understandings of feminism in that it provides a lens through which scholars may critically examine gender differences. Various feminist authors and philosophers have written about this concept over time. The argument of this section is two-fold: first, that the feminist examination of gendered socialization can be traced back to proto and early feminists who discussed formal education of the sexes, and secondly, that this concept is central to an understanding of current feminist theory.

Wollstonecraft and Varying Education

One of the most widely known and frequently studied of the proto-feminists is Mary Wollstonecraft who famously penned *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Providing a foundational examination of the education of the sexes, Wollstonecraft describes the differences

in childhood education between girls and boys.² In particular, she cites the differences in both physical conditioning and, perhaps more importantly, reasoning and mental capabilities. Ultimately, Wollstonecraft concludes that these differences are harmful to societal well-being because they force women into a life of dependency on men and therefore make women “cunning, mean, and selfish”.³ Moreover, Wollstonecraft argues that these traits are the direct result of women’s education and a cause of great sorrow to women themselves.

Here, Wollstonecraft calls attention to the differing education that women receive as compared to their male counterparts and, additionally, she expands the critique of this societal system. Unlike philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who Weiss explains endorses a “system of strongly differentiated sex roles” and “encourages sexual differentiation for specific political ends”, Wollstonecraft critiques these as unjust and problematic.⁴ In her treatise, she argues that the differences in gendered education are causally linked to the trouble in society when women are not raised to properly fulfill their duties, primarily as wives and mothers.

Wollstonecraft’s work certainly has its limitations, in both its acceptance by her contemporaries and in content. One issue after *Vindication*’s publishing was that a biography portraying Wollstonecraft as sexually promiscuous, *Memoirs*, tarnished popular opinion of her and led some to discredit her work.⁵ Additionally, several feminist scholars have since written critiques of Wollstonecraft’s theory. Academic thought on the topic has progressed immensely in the intervening years and therefore the unchecked, though unintentional, misogyny in Wollstonecraft’s work is more apparent. Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* is

² Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1996).

³ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 145-146.

⁴ Penny Weiss, *Gendered Community: Rousseau, Sex, and Politics*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 38.

⁵ Eileen Hunt Botting and Christine Carey, “Wollstonecraft’s Philosophical Impact on Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Rights Activists,” *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (2004): 708.

undoubtedly one of the earliest pieces which addresses the educational deficits faced by women in society and, as such, lays the foundation for much of the discussion of this concept more recently.

Advances during the Suffrage Era

About fifty years later, the American women's suffrage movement was gaining ground at the Seneca Fall Convention of 1848. As the American suffragists met, they discussed, debated, and expanded upon the concepts laid forth in Wollstonecraft's influential work. Though primarily focused on suffrage, the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" presented at this convention also mentions other exclusionary practices against women, including in education. The speech is prefaced by the statement that "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman" with the goal of "absolute tyranny over her".⁶ Referring to the body of men in society that perpetuate this oppression, the speech mentions inequities in formal education: "He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education—all colleges being closed against her".⁷ Moreover, this document refers to the "entire disenfranchisement of one-half the people of this country".⁸

Quotes like this throughout the declaration indicate that, by this time, various forms of injustice, including inequality of education and opportunity, were considered a part of the disenfranchisement of women. The authors of the declaration even refer to the dependency of women on men, presumably male relatives within the family, as a part of this disenfranchisement.⁹ It remains contested whether most American suffragists, of the late

⁶ "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," in *Available Mean: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, ed. Joy Ritchie and Kate Roland (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 139.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 140.

⁹ Ibid.

nineteenth century, were familiar with Wollstonecraft's work.¹⁰ What is clear, however, is that concepts seen in *Vindication* can also be seen here and in other rhetorical pieces of the first wave of feminism, or suffrage era.

While the fight for suffrage lasted nearly a century following Seneca Falls, advances in feminist political theory also continued. A notable piece is excerpted from an address given by suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton before the U.S. Congress in 1892. In "The Solitude of Self" Stanton addresses the inherent importance of equality between the sexes and refers to the need "for giving woman all the opportunities for higher education" amongst other goals.¹¹ Again, the importance of equitable education between the sexes is emphasized.

In this piece, echoes of Wollstonecraft's call for fair and complete education of both sexes are evidenced. The critical shift in attitude, however, can be seen in Stanton's reasoning for such improved education. As alluded to by the title, Stanton's argument centers on the importance of self-dependence in women and all people. She compels the members of Congress to recognize that "the strongest reason" for granting women rights and education "is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life".¹² As opposed to Wollstonecraft, who seemingly argues for women's improved education to enhance their fulfillment of societal duties as wives and mothers, Stanton advocates for the individual fulfillment of women's sovereignty. A focus on the personal autonomy and agency of women is less common at this time than broad sweeping arguments about societal wellbeing. In philosophical thinking, this is one of the first times that women's personal reasoning and emotion is independently mentioned. Today, feminist scholars work from this assumption, of women's individual agency and self-worth, but the shift

¹⁰ Botting and Carey, "Philosophical Impact."

¹¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self," in *Political Philosophy: Essential Texts Second Edition*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 821.

¹² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self," 821.

was not automatic. Philosophers like Stanton, building upon Wollstonecraft's earliest examination, laid the groundwork.

A piece written by feminist Emma Goldman in 1914, "Marriage and Love", briefly discusses the concept of education and its link to marriage. Here, Goldman laments about the ultimate goal of womanhood being to find and maintain a suitable marriage partner and concludes that "From infancy, almost, the average girl...Like the mute beast fattened for slaughter, she is prepared for that".¹³ Goldman also mentions sex education for young women, arguing that attempting to protect virtue by restricting knowledge of "sex matters" actually leads to a great deal of unhappiness in marriage.¹⁴ While this piece is more notable for its examination of the marital institution, Goldman does establish an important connection between the two key concepts identified- socialization and the institution of the family. Not only is women's education different from and inferior to men's, but the reason ultimately lies with the need to prepare women for roles in the family as a social unit. Thus, the issues are interrelated and must both be examined to ultimately bring about social change.

Education of the Second Sex

Feminist author and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote the widely accepted and acclaimed *The Second Sex* in 1949. An entire novel-length philosophical work, this book addresses a stunning array of feminist concepts, through philosophical and psychoanalytical lenses. Specifically, the book includes sections on both of the foremost philosophical concepts examined herein, which are gendered education and the institution of the family. With regard to gendered socialization and education of the sexes, de Beauvoir begins by echoing many of the concerns

¹³ Emma Goldman, "Marriage and Love," in *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, ed. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 228.

¹⁴ Ibid.

expressed in the works of Wollstonecraft and other proto feminists. Among these, de Beauvoir rails against the differences in formal education received by young girls and boys respectively.¹⁵ Further developing this concept, de Beauvoir points to the startling lack of women as subjects in “historical and literary culture”.¹⁶ In particular, de Beauvoir describes a lack of representation of powerful women in important stories that young people read. She gives several examples of prevalent stories where men are featured, including David and Goliath, Prometheus, and God as embodied in Western religions, and uses these to draw comparisons to the relatively few strong women featured.¹⁷ Using these easily recognizable representative examples of male superiority in history and literature, de Beauvoir argues that this lack of representation reinforces the social hierarchy that young girls are already being exposed to elsewhere in daily life. This hierarchy indicates that, in all or nearly all ways, men are superior to women.

This analysis is an early nod to the importance of representation. In particular, it is one of the first places in which socialization and representation of women are linked. Representation today is a term often used with regard to the percentages of women in political office or serving as CEOs, but this piece also makes an insightful point about the cultural ways in which inequities are reinforced. De Beauvoir pays particular attention to the reception of these messages by young girls themselves, explaining how they reinforce the hierarchy being discovered all around them. The argument moves beyond formal education and, rather, expands the concept to include experiences outside of direct education. These literary texts do not directly explain how women are inferior. They are not even moral treatises necessarily or intended to impart messages about the relative unimportance of women. As de Beauvoir expertly explains, however, the inherent

¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 302.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

and implicit messages, those in which only men have agency and power, also have an impact on the way that young girls are socialized. This socialization subsequently affects how they will ultimately grow to understand and act out their place in the world. Essentially, this analysis makes de Beauvoir's work a great first look at representation and can be seen echoed in interpretations of the importance of representation in feminist theory today.

In the conclusion of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir also provides a vision of a world in which girls and boys had equal education and equal opportunities. In particular, she discusses the changes in men's and women's behaviors that would be created by a system in which, as she explains

from the earliest age, the little girl were raised with the same demands and honors, the same severity and freedom, as her brothers, taking part in the same studies and games, promised the same future, surrounded by women and men who are unambiguously equal to her.¹⁸

Here, de Beauvoir describes the standard for equality of education between the sexes that she deems necessary. It includes a variety of aspects of socialization as well as representation, as discussed above. De Beauvoir also discusses some of the aspects of a truly and fully equal society, which include institutional changes still being fought for across the world today, like access to choice of reproductive healthcare and paid maternity leave.¹⁹ Arguably, de Beauvoir's work acts as a stepping stone, linking the arguments of the women philosophers during the suffrage era to those of more modern times by greatly expanding the scope of focus on socialization and including representation in this examination.

¹⁸ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 761.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 760.

Inclusion of Informal Education and Media

More recently, the concept of varied education between the sexes has expanded to cover a wider range of educational issues. Though higher education is now open to women and men in the United States, and formal education in childhood is arguably more equal among the sexes, issues of varying socialization of girls and boys, through family, cultural norms, and even the media, persist. The concept in the field of feminist political philosophy has been expanded to encompass a more nuanced understanding of socialization in light of such changes.

Today, socially constructed gender difference remains central in feminist theory and philosophy. Harkening back to Wollstonecraft's first discussion of physical education for girls and boys, a recent philosophical article links gendered socialization to outcomes in later life, including to more sedentary, as opposed to active, lifestyles in women.²⁰ Another example of the expanded interpretation of this concept can be seen with regard to media literacy. A variety of scholars in academia have been increasingly discussing the impact of media representation in socialization of young girls. Works like *Feminism and Pop Culture*, by Andi Zeisler, provide a good example of such expanded interpretation. Here, Zeisler makes the case that pop culture inherently impacts "the way we understand both the time and place in which we live and the way we define ourselves as individuals".²¹ The increasingly accepted and unstated notion is that socialization most likely affects all or nearly all parts of our social lives. And, in turn, social expectations are impressed upon us from nearly all social institutions and structures.

In short, the field has accepted the notion, first seen in Wollstonecraft's work, that varying education of the sexes leads to varied outcomes. The field of feminist political

²⁰ Nicole M. Mullins, "Insidious Influences of Gender Socialization on Females' Physical Activity: Rethink Pink." *Physical Educator* 72 (2015): 20.

²¹ Andi Zeisler, *Feminism and Pop Culture*, (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 4.

philosophy has also expanded to recognize the importance of informal education. Not only in schools or in higher education, but also in the family and through the media, boys and girls are taught to possess varying roles, goals, and skills. The result is ultimately the perpetuation of structural inequality. The acceptance of gendered socialization as a concept in the mainstream took centuries and, while the work of sociologists was also instrumental, the ever-expanding feminist interpretations of this concept have transformed feminist and political theory deeply.

Gendered Socialization Moving Forward

Moving forward, the discipline arguably has a lot more ground to cover with regard to the concept of gendered socialization. In light of the realization that informal, as well as formal, education impacts gendered socialization, various future examinations of ways in which these impacts are seen in adult life are possible. For instance, as with the study cited above linking socialization during childhood to sedentary lifestyles, it is possible that many more seemingly gender based differences may be debunked and, as opposed to biological differences, rather linked to socialization in childhood. Also, the discipline will almost inevitably begin to produce more theories with regard to the impacts of media on gender roles and gendered difference. As media becomes more and more pervasive, and new technology becomes accessible to children at younger and younger ages, this will necessitate new philosophical and scientific examinations.

The Family as an Institution

The second concept that will be examined is that of the institutions of the family, with a focus on marriage, childrearing, and household work. Over time, feminist theorists have frequently turned their attention to the influence of the family as an institution and life within the home. These interpretations highlight the many ways in which familial structures and interactions impact daily life, especially for women. Early interpretations were primarily concerned with the institution of marriage and this trend continued up until and through the women's liberation movement of the

1960s and 70s. After institutional changes and improved legal recourse for married women became available in the U.S. at this time, works have increasingly focused on the family as a whole, with attention paid to children and the relationships of all members of the family, not just the husband and wife. Today, a much more intersectional view of the family as an institution has emerged in the discipline. Additionally, the concept remains central in feminist theory today and will likely continue to remain so in the future as well. The argument of this section is that this concept has evolved to include analyses of the impact that roles and expectations in families have on work outside of the home and in the public sphere, as well as to include a more intersectional approach to traditional feminist examinations of the family.

De Pizan on the Struggles Women Face in Marriage

One of the first philosophical analyses of marriage is found in the work of proto-feminist Christine de Pizan. In her works, *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, the early fifteenth century writer takes on the ways that marriage impacts women and men differently and rails against the traditional negativity toward women found in important disciplines, including philosophical thought. The books, as moral works, cover an incredible range of topics that affected the daily lives of De Pizan's women contemporaries, including marriage, chastity, reason, and knowledge. The approach to the work is also unique, as De Pizan makes her moral arguments through a story and utilizes the stories of famous and noble women in literature, like Dido or Penelope, as well as in history, to articulate these lessons. *The Book of the City of Ladies* arguably has a very positive tone toward women and is understandably considered by many today to be a piece of proto-feminist work.²²

²² De Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1999).

On the issues inherent in the institution of marriage, De Pizan very directly describes the struggles that women often face in marriages. De Pizan is, notably, responding to the arguments made by male contemporaries at the time that marriages are “unbearable because women are impossible to live with”.²³ Since De Pizan is responding to the pervasive negativity towards women that she sees, her arguments are directed toward these specific attacks made by other moral or philosophical writers. De Pizan emphatically details the various types of abuses that many women are subjected to at the hands of their husbands, including being beaten, verbally insulted, and left to starve while their husbands are out partaking in debauchery.²⁴ This is arguably very much an observation made ahead of her time, especially in light of the fact that actual legal recourse for battered wives only became accessible in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. Here, De Pizan boldly describes problems women face in marriage that for centuries after would continue to be considered private, and even at times taboo, issues.

The analysis of marriage does not stop here, however. De Pizan continues to refute claims made about the manipulative and negative manner of wives. In an imagined conversation in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the character named Rectitude boldly claims that:

all this rubbish that has ever been said and written about wives is just a string of falsehoods tied together. It is the husband who is the master of the wife, and not the other way around. A man would never allow himself to be dominated by a woman.²⁵

Here, in analyzing the institutional defects of marriage, De Pizan accomplishes something striking for how early her work was written. Rather than accepting the notion that women are making their husbands' lives difficult, De Pizan unswervingly describes how the power

²³ De Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, 108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

differential actually favors the man in a marriage. Like many proto-feminist works, however, the piece is not without limitations. At places throughout *The Book of the City of Ladies*, De Pizan advocates positions that would be considered anti-feminist today, including specifically preaching the need for women to practice unwavering loyalty and devotion to their husbands, despite being subjected to any of the aforementioned abuses.²⁶ At the time this work was written, however, any critique of marriage or the behavior of husbands within marriages, was likely an uncommon and unpopular view. This makes *The Book of the City of Ladies* even more important as a foundational and groundbreaking piece of the discipline.

Marriage and its Impacts on the Economic and Social Standing of Women

Emma Goldman, the feminist anarchist philosopher of the early twentieth century described above, also wrote works on the institution of marriage. One primary work of hers, "Marriage and Love," discusses the economic and social impacts of marriage on women and men. Writing from a worker's perspective, Goldman addresses the ways in which women are prepared for marriage from a very early age and are seeking a husband and family as their ultimate goal. In this light, she concludes that for the majority of women, work outside of the home is seen as only a temporary arrangement and one that can be abandoned for the first willing suitor.²⁷ To Goldman, this has implications for union organizing and she concludes that this pervasive social attitude toward marriage and work makes organizing women inherently more difficult than men. This is an early example of the idea that occurrences within the family can and do impact life in the broader social sphere, which is a concept expanded greatly in later years.

Moreover, Goldman goes on to relate the paternalism of marriage with that of capitalism and uses incredibly forceful language to describe the marital institution and its harmful impacts.

²⁶ De Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, 116.

²⁷ Goldman, "Marriage and Love."

At one point she refers to the relationship between husband and wife as “slavish acquiescence to man’s superiority”.²⁸ A telling metaphor in the piece links marriage to an insurance pact and a husband to the woman’s premium, for which she is condemned to “life-long dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social”.²⁹ These bold word choices make the piece literarily compelling and intriguing. Lastly, Goldman touches on work within the house and includes a first, very early mention of the concept of a “third shift” for women, lamenting the trouble of married wage workers who must still be solely responsible for upkeep of a home.³⁰ This is a concept that did not receive traction in the mainstream feminist movement for decades after this work was written.

A few decades after Goldman wrote this essay Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was published. De Beauvoir argues passionately about the situation in which women are placed by the importance of and the institution of marriage in society. Unlike some other philosophers, she specifically describes the ways in which marriages occur, and points to the agency granted men when making the decision to wed but not allowed to women, who are given in marriage.³¹ Using this framework as an indication of how the partnership will continue after the wedding, de Beauvoir describes various grievances of women in marriage, like a lack of a life in the public sphere as well as a lack of sexual autonomy or pleasure. Then, de Beauvoir even includes a brief mention of class differences and refers to the ways in which women of different socioeconomic statuses face even more limited options with regard to marriage: “There are still many social strata for which she is offered no other perspective; for peasants, an unmarried woman is a

²⁸ Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 228.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

³¹ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 442.

pariah”.³² Like Goldman, de Beauvoir’s work includes an early nod to class consciousness within feminist philosophy. Additionally, it includes a moving and thorough description of the ways in which marriage in its traditional form serves to expand the opportunities of men and simultaneously strip the autonomy and agency of women.

More recently, in the late twentieth century, author Susan Moller Okin continued to expand the analysis of the family and related it more directly to the concept of justice. In *Justice, Gender, and the Family* Moller Okin argues that the family has traditionally been seen as intimate and therefore not subject to the principles of justice often applied to society or a wider community.³³ Moller Okin sees this as a harmful exclusion for a variety of reasons, one of which is the children who do not see justice in the relationship between their parents cannot grow up with a sense of the importance of justice or replicate it in their adult lives.³⁴ The basis of this argument lies in the vulnerability of women through the institution of marriage which Moller Okin explains thusly:

women are made vulnerable, both economically and socially, by the interconnected traditions of female responsibility for rearing children and female subordination and dependence, of which both the history and the contemporary practices of marriage form a significant part.³⁵

Further, Moller Okin draws a connection with paid labor that was previously less relevant. She writes that “The division of labor within marriage (except in rare cases) makes wives far more likely than husbands to be exploited both within the marital relationship and in the world of work

³² Ibid., 443.

³³ Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. USA: Basic Books, 1989.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 139.

outside the home”.³⁶ Moller Okin notes that this exploitation within the family harms women’s ability to succeed in work outside of the home as well. As explained, this is also the result of the structures of wage work, which still rely on the assumption that workers will have wives at home to manage household issues and lend additional support. This work was published in 1989, shortly after the women’s liberation movement in the United States granted many more opportunities for women to work outside of the home. In previous decades, when women were encouraged to stay home instead of work- and granted few career choices if they did choose work outside of the home- this was less of a concern. The attention given to women’s paid labor was primarily by class-focused feminist philosophers, like Emma Goldman, and the ideas were not widely accepted into the mainstream thought of the discipline.

Here, however, Moller Okin expands the philosophical interpretation of a concept as needed due to the growth in societal roles for women.³⁷ This type of evolution in the discipline of feminist political theory is quite common. It is intuitively understandable that new opportunities also result in new venues for analysis and critique of social structures. The idea that oppression within the family will also harm women’s chances in the public or political spheres was somewhat controversial at the time, but is increasingly accepted in modern feminist theory today.

The Family and Intersectionality

More recently, the discipline has shifted to include a much more intersectional approach to examinations of the family. To be considered intersectional, theories ought to examine more than one type of womanhood or one type of situation in which women in society remain. While all groundbreaking pieces in the discipline, a variety of the previously described works do not fit this bill. In particular, they exclude the interconnected oppressive forces of both class and race,

³⁶ Ibid., 138.

³⁷ Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*.

instead opting to analyze the struggles of primarily white, middle class women in society. Emma Goldman, as a socialist feminist, is one notable exception. One of the hallmarks of more recent feminist philosophy has been this focus on considerations of race, class, disability, and other oppressive factors and the impact these have on gendered experiences of women worldwide. With regard to the institution of the family, this has led to interesting developments in the traditional assumptions of feminist philosophy. While early interpretations, like those discussed above, primarily focused on the ways in which marriage and the family served as institutions of oppression, more recently writers have expanded this perception to consider certain benefits of the home and the family.

One good example of this shift is the work done by bell hooks, a feminist writer of the third wave, who addresses the positive impacts of home and family for women of color historically. In her essay, "Homeplace (a site of resistance)", hooks argues that historically, black women have found the work of establishing a space in the home as an escape from the sexist and white supremacist society that exists outside of their homes and, in fact, as an act of political resistance.³⁸ hooks eloquently describes this struggle in a historical context:

We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that "homeplace," most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits.³⁹

This interpretation shows the ways in which black families and black communities benefitted from the role of women as home makers. hooks then rebuts a perceived argument to this, explaining that the sexism in society that assigned black women these roles does not detract from

³⁸ bell hooks, "Homeplace (a site of resistance)," in *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, ed. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 384.

the impact of them. Rather, black women have used this traditionally oppressive role to create safe spaces in ways that “elevated our spirits...that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom”.⁴⁰ In this expanded interpretation, hooks provides a more nuanced and intersectional view of the home, specifically one considering the issue of race, that previous feminist philosophers were clearly lacking. This example is representative of an increasing amount of academic and activist work in the discipline that aims to reconsider traditional assumptions of feminist philosophy in light of issues of race, class, disability, and many other factors.

hooks, and other feminist philosophers of the twenty-first century, have increasingly shown a preponderance toward this type of intersectional thinking and philosophical writing. As mentioned above, some previous authors like Goldman, at to some extent de Beauvoir, did write briefly on issues of class as related to feminist thought. Race, however, was a largely unexplored concept until fairly recently. hooks, and other feminists of what has been dubbed the “third wave” of feminism by some, are increasingly including examinations of these concepts and their interconnected impacts on sexism within society. The perceived goal here is to expand the voices for which feminist political philosophy can have an impact or significance.

Just as the exclusion of women has been challenged with the development of feminist theory, so too is the exclusion of minorities and other oppressed groups being challenged by intersectionality. In some instances, these interpretations are rather critical of the historically exclusionary, white feminism of most of the movement. One claim often made is that the first two waves of feminism sought very little to benefit poor women or women of color and rather focused primarily on an agenda that addressed only the concerns of white, middle class women,

⁴⁰ bell hooks, “Homeplace (a site of resistance),” 385.

especially in the workforce. For instance, another work of hooks', *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, calls attention to the critiques made by some in this regard: "women of color critiqued the racism within the society as a whole and called attention to the ways that racism had shaped and informed feminist theory and practice".⁴¹ In this way, hooks' work and that of other third wavers can be viewed as both an expansion and a critique, challenging past practices and ultimately driving the discipline forward in a different, more inclusive manner.

Additionally, other changes within the discipline are clear, such as the shift toward incorporating life outside of the home in with analyses of the institution of the family. Moller Okin, for instance, helped to expand the scope of interpretations of this concept within the discipline by drawing attention to the ways that life within the family impacts women's prospects in their chosen fields and even elsewhere in the public sphere. The progress seen in broadening the interpretations of this concept is one factor in changes to the discipline. When combined with the institutional successes and rights granted women in marriages in many areas of the western world, the shift toward issues such as paid maternity leave and access to affordable or free childcare, rather than a sole focus on issues within the marital institution, makes a great deal of sense.

The Family as an Institution Moving Forward

Current trends with regard to this concept in the discipline indicate that there could be a few tendencies in near future works and analyses. First, it appears that the focus on the impacts of the family on life outside of the home will continue to be widely addressed. As seen in Moller Okin's work, and several since that time, there is an increasing acceptance of the notion that the ways in which the family functions, with regard to childcare and housework in particular, impact

⁴¹ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 24.

the lives of women not only inside of the home but also in their public lives and careers. Additionally, it appears likely that some focus on the intersection of various forms of privilege, or lack thereof, will continue to influence feminist philosophical examinations of the family. While hooks and other philosophers have examined race and the family, the historical lack of this more intersectional perspective means that there is certainly room for more interpretations based upon race or other interconnected issues to fill this gap in theory. In light of this, there will likely be a shift away from the adamant rejections of the family as an institution that some white feminists advocated and wrote about. Rather, a renewed focus on the qualified benefits of the family for some women, including historically for black women, will likely continue to be examined in future feminist texts on the family as an institution.

On the Intersection of these Two Concepts

There is a pattern of connection in several of these works, which links the concepts of gendered socialization with those of the familial institution. For instance, in Goldman's work we see the impact of socializing women toward marriage on women in the workforce.⁴² Moreover, Moller Okin links the inequities in the familial structure to being a part of the process of socializing children without a proper or complete sense of justice.⁴³ Similarly, de Beauvoir's work draws attention to this intersection of these concepts, citing the role of the family in socialization.⁴⁴ In these examples, the two concepts are neither solely cause nor effect, but rather each affect the philosophical analysis differently based on the situation. As Goldman analyzes the situation, socialization around marriage is one cause of women's inequity in the workforce later in life.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Moller Okin as well as de Beauvoir see the family as the cause of or agent of

⁴² Goldman, "Marriage and Love," 227.

⁴³ Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 138.

⁴⁴ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

⁴⁵ Goldman, "Marriage and Love," 227.

socialization.⁴⁶ In either case, the two concepts interact and impact one another in these various analyses.

Arguably, the concepts of gendered socialization and the family as an institution are intertwined and therefore often examined together within the discipline. For instance, as described above, it is increasingly accepted within mainstream feminist theory that informal education of the genders plays a key role in gendered socialization. It seems logical that the family, as one major unit of societal living, impacts the way that children are encoded with the norms and principles of the wider society. Therefore, the institutionalized sexist or oppressive forces in our society can be seen in both the family and the formal or informal educational systems, as sort of microcosms. Perhaps these two concepts are in some ways inherently linked and therefore connections will be continually analyzed as the two concepts continue to be frequently examined together.

Conclusion

Two of the critical concepts that have emerged in the discipline of feminist political philosophy over time have been the idea of gendered socialization and the impact of the institution of the family. As demonstrated in this paper, each of these concepts has its roots in the work of some proto-feminist writers and philosophers. Notably, Wollstonecraft and de Pizan are some of the earliest scholars and writers to call attention to these concepts and their importance. Since those times, however, the concepts have evolved and expanded in a variety of critical ways. Often these shifts were perpetuated by an expansion in philosophical thought or reasoning, such as the case with Stanton's assurances that women are worthy of education and opportunity simply by virtue of being humans, and not because they are wives or mothers. In other places and times, the

⁴⁶ Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 138.

expansion of these concepts has resulted from shifts in real world opportunities and experiences for women. This phenomenon can be seen with Moller Okin's groundbreaking focus on the family as it impacts work outside of the home, which was pertinent following the dramatic increase in women wage workers subsequent to the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the causes of these shifts, however, the overall trend is toward growth of scope and inclusion of social groups.

The field of feminist political philosophy can be considered, in comparison to other fields of academic thought, an incredibly young and fledging endeavor. Nonetheless, the proliferation of access to these works and of programs of study at the university level in recent decades has been astounding. The field continues to expand and the two concepts examined herein continue to form a critical part of the works of this discipline. As is the case with all academic endeavors, studying feminist political philosophy provides an important view into the lives and attitudes of the scholars of the field. Additionally, because of the coinciding social justice movements of feminist, studying feminist political philosophy may provide a window into past and current social problems as well as inspiring corresponding social change.

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