

Female Identity in Feminist Criticism and the Influence of the Freudian Theory

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Abstract

After Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published, the stir had stricken society considerably in the eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft describes that a married woman is like a bird in a cage. Married women should dress pretty and try to please their masters—their husbands. The truth, women all know, is that husbands' pseudomorphic protections are selfish. Women are bound to a limited space which is so-called home. Women are secondary to men; their self-identities are constructed from men. Men's orders or discourses make women lost opinions and personalities. Mary Eagleton, in the introduction to her Critical Reader, *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1991; 2nd edn 1995), draws attention to “a suspicion of theory . . . throughout feminism” because of its tendency to reinforce the hierarchical binary opposition between an “impersonal”, “disinterested”, “objective”, “public”, “male” *theory*, and a “personal”, “subjective”, “private”, “female” *experience*. The bias tends to indicate that men are rational and women are emotional. However, in the era of Wollstonecraft, women's education was quite unequal to men. She highly advocates an equal education is a key to redeem women's “emotionalism”. All persons should have same opportunities to develop their rationalities, moralities, and further—personalities.

Keywords: *identity, Freudian theory, patriarchy.*

After Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published, the stir had stricken society considerably in the eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft describes that a married woman is like a bird in a cage. Married women should dress pretty and try to please their masters—their husbands. The truth, women all know, is that husbands' pseudomorphic protections are selfish. Women are bound to a limited space which is so-called home. Women are secondary to men; their self-identities are constructed from men. Men's orders or discourses make women lost opinions and personalities. Mary Eagleton, in the introduction to her Critical Reader, *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1991; 2nd edn 1995), draws attention to “a suspicion of theory . . . throughout feminism” because of its tendency to reinforce the hierarchical binary opposition between an “impersonal”, “disinterested”, “objective”, “public”, “male” *theory*, and a “personal”, “subjective”, “private”, “female” *experience*. The bias tends to indicate that men are rational and women are emotional. However, in the era of Wollstonecraft, women's education was quite unequal to men. She highly advocates an equal education is a key to redeem women's “emotionalism”. All persons should have same opportunities to develop their rationalities, moralities, and further—personalities.

A woman's identity, comparing to a man, is founded by biology. Between the body that is still subject to the fragmentation of the drives and its image in the mirror there is a fundamental disparity, a discrepancy which means that, via his image, the child relates to himself as if to another (Lacan, 1977, p. 307). In childhood, a girl learns her sex through seeing the biological difference from a boy. Based on Sigmund Freud's theory in the development of femininity, hence, she knows herself lacking of "something" which makes her a woman. First mentioned by Freud in "On the sexual theories of children" (1908), penis envy was allied to his theory of the little girl's castration complex in "On narcissism" (1914). Freud later argued that this discovery of castration complex – or anatomical lack – forces the little girl into the Oedipus complex and desire for the paternal penis. (Wright, p. 304) In this manner, the penis becomes a benchmark for a woman to evaluate her sex identity. The penis becomes more superior to the ovary, moreover, dominates over females. Lacan sees male sexuality as preserve, a fetishization of women who becomes a "symptom" for men – of Otherness, the outside, the unconscious. Women, by contrast, identify with a logic of the particular by not undergoing an identificatory confusion with a phallic signifier, the signifier for difference itself. (Wright, p. 206) Although basically Sigmund Freud thinks a male is more ascendant than a female, his researches are still advantageous and reveals the mystery in female psychology which people formerly do hardly understand.

Luce Irigaray criticizes Freud in summarized three points. First, psychoanalysis is unaware of the historical and philosophical determinants of its own discourse. Secondly, psychoanalysis is itself governed by unconscious fantasies which it has not been able to analyze. Thirdly, it is patriarchal: it reflects a social order which does not acknowledge what it owes to the mother. (Wright, p. 178) I agree with Irigaray's three critiques. First, if I examine the history of Victoria period, I will find other influential factors in influencing female identity. Some women has been educated, but still cannot realize "what else can I do except domestic affairs?" or "what else can I do for men except fawning on them?" It is because the real thing which controls their ideologies is the society, not the theory what Freud suggests us. Relative relations between male and female are given from the society or education. Before the mirror stage, I believe the concept of patriarchy and the dominance of phallus are already incepted in women's mind. Secondly, unconscious consciousness sometimes cannot be group under the psychoanalysis. The production of unconscious consciousness is based on numerous influential factors which psychoanalysis cannot fully cover. Thirdly, patriarchal system is suggested by Freud. Freud describes the father's intervention into the mother-child relation as "the Oedipus complex." The father regulates the child's demands and its access to the mother by prohibiting access to her. The boy perceives his father as a potential castrator, a rival for the mother's affections and attentions. He constructs the father's prohibition as castration threats, and these eventually lead him to renounce his desire of the mother because of his fear of the organ's loss. The renunciation is only temporary; he gives up the mother in exchange for the promise (a "pact" between father and son) of deferred satisfaction with a woman of his own. This pact, in other words, founds patriarchy anew for each generation. (Grosz, p. 68) That is—why Irigaray mentions: "it is patriarchal at the first place. Mitchell (1974) argued that psychoanalysis provides an invaluable description of the mechanisms by which patriarchy perpetuates itself, but also that the law of the father in unconscious structures is the precondition of human society itself.

In order to examine patriarchy power in texts, I choose Susan Glaspell's *A Jury of Her Peers* which can perfectly explain the foregoing terms I mention: *theory* and *experience*. Before county attorney decides to go upstairs, he pauses and looks around the kitchen. He asks the sheriff: "You are convinced there was nothing important here? Nothing that would—point to any motive?" The sheriff answers with a little laugh for the insignificance of kitchen things: "Nothing but kitchen things." Males in the story eager to find "a clue to the motive"—that is, find a specific evidence and proof for the death of Mr. Wright. It is like a scholar, wants a specific theoretical based testimony in order to stand his point. Yet, somehow males miss some information and puzzles from some places where they regards them as "insignificance." As for females, trifles become their biggest investment. From domestic affairs, a dish-towel, a bad stove, to a bird, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters find some unreliable evidences, but actually, can be trusted in some aspects or related to a motive or a clue for the murder and its purpose. This kind of situation which lack of logic but somehow correct is called "feminine intuition." Although this intuition may sometimes involve in subjective viewpoints, it still make some interpretations to untying things. In this manner, women's experiences become a footstone upon which they rely. There are some scorns for women while men think that women can and should only focus on trifles. For first example, when county attorney wipes his hands on the roller towel—whirled it for a cleaner place. He finds towels are all dirty and further complains about unqualified housekeeper. Mrs. Hale retorts county attorney: "Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands are not always as clean as they might be." Yet, county attorney laugh and response her: "Ah, loyal to your sex, I see." It seems like county attorney has divided the world into two groups—men and women. For second example, when men want to get the lay of things upstairs, county attorney talks to Mrs. Peters with an contempt: "Of course Mrs. Peters is one of us . . . No telling; you women might come upon a clue to the motive—and that is the thing we need." County attorney, a man, appears that like to manipulate a woman. He presumes that "Mrs. Peters is one of us", but it is his own and subjective thoughts. If he really takes Mrs. Peters as "one of them", then why he keeps telling everyone these kinds of things: "Well, can you beat the woman!", "you women like to . . ." Why county attorney slap his own face? I think it is because he not only wants to control women (and he thinks he can), but also wants to use them at the same time. Therefore, county attorney pacifies women in order to ensuring that they will not breach him. The sex bias is deeply rooted in *A Jury of Her Peers*. Men in *A Jury of Her Peers* think that they can handle all things well and perfect, but regards women as tools—if women can be used, then use them; if not, that is also under men's expectations. In this fiction, identity of women is relatively founded by men's order or opinion. The patriarchy gradually reveals, and women know it well. Hence, women choose to stay silence, and further, to secretly investigate the murder themselves. Although women then are under a huge patriarchal discrimination, they still present us a wit that cannot be seen in men's behavior; a total different mentally aspect.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) exposes how males like and want a woman to be. The patriarchy makes women stressful. The dilutedness makes women negative. Friedan lists lots of factors which cause those depressions, such as media, articles, and magazines. These mediums deliver plans which are inflexible and mechanical—women should be skinny and beautiful enough to describe as "a woman." Therefore, lots of commercial potential come, and sweep women's money away. Yet, women themselves get a wrong concept of their identity. Whatever society tells them are often wrong and unnecessary. If a woman blindly follows the rule

which is not fair at the very beginning, she would either never get satisfied or hurt herself badly. This kind of ideology is dangerous and inhuman. Friedan appeals to society that the stereotype toward women should be broken. The traditional concept of “outside male host in empress” needs to be overthrown. Women should break the stereotype which has also been rooted in them so that they can expand their potential and aspiration. However, Friedan does not consider about those lower or middle class women, who may not have rights or abilities enough to defend for themselves. The sex bias and education for women still cannot be solved while it comes to the class issue.

To sum up, a woman’s identity will differ from the class, the society, , the culture, and the education. In substance, the society and the massive culture mostly affect identity.

These rooted concepts in the society create a solid ideology that is so-called patriarchy. What makes patriarchy so powerful is due to the long commanding time by males. However, now we are in the twenty-one century, and people here starts paying more attention on female rights and educations. Although the prejudice on women might be lasing for some time, I think females are trying their best to demonstrate how powerful and competent they can be; and that is the same situation in Taiwan, in the political aspect and also academic filed.

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女性主義中之女性身份認同及精神分析學派對其之影響

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摘要

在 Mary Wollstonecraft 之鉅著《女權辯護：關於政治和道德問題的批評》出版後，帶給了十八世紀的當時社會很大的轟動。Wollstonecraft 描述已婚婦女如同籠中鳥，已婚婦女們應該要穿著華麗並且試著取悅她們的主人——也就是她們的丈夫們。其實已婚婦女們都知道一個真相：丈夫們所謂的「保護」其實對女性而言是自私的。已婚婦女們通常被困在一個稱作「家」的監牢裡，這意味著女性是次於男性的，她們的自我認同是由男性所建構的。在長期的服從之下，男性的命令與言談方式令女性失去了她們自己的意見及個性。Mary Eagleton 在《Feminist Literary Criticism》一書曾提到，此偏見分為兩等級：「男性像是公正的、客觀的、且公開的『理論』，而女性則像是個人的、主觀的、隱晦的『經驗』。」這樣的偏見意指了男性是理性的，而女性則通常為感性。但在 Wollstonecraft 的時代，女性的教育是完全不及男性的。於是 Wollstonecraft 大力地提倡教育的平等，以改善女性所傾向的「感性主義」。我認為所有的人類，不分男女，都應該擁有相同的機會去自由發展各自的理性、道德規範以及人格。

關鍵字：身份認同、精神分析學派、父權體制。