Mary Wollstonecraft on Motherhood and Political Participation: An Overlooked Insight into Women's Subordination

VALERIE WILLIAMS

Scholars consider Mary Wollstonecraft an early feminist political theorist for two reasons: (1) her explicit commitment to educational equality, and (2) her implicit suggestion that the private-sphere role of motherhood holds political import. My reading of Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman *uses Wollstonecraft's works and draws upon recent claims made by Sandrine Bergès in* The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft *to connect these points: educated women are better at performing motherly duties and, therefore, of greater benefit to society. Although many scholars have read Wollstonecraft's arguments for educational equality as a starting point for greater equality, Bergès does not. In this article, I further Bergès's claims and argue that Wollstonecraft's project is limited and likely to reinforce inequality between the sexes. Specifically, I show that Wollstonecraft's educational reforms incentivize women to become nothing more than highly educated housewives. In the process of fulfilling their social and political duty to instill public spirit and private virtue in future citizens, women are re-entrenched in domestic affairs instead of being freed for public pursuits. This realization, I contend, should cause us to be wary of panaceas for women's subordination that rest on increasing their education.*

> Women are every where in this deplorable state; for, in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison. Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind, but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour. (Wollstonecraft 1995, 116)

Hypatia vol. 34, no. 4 (Fall 2019) © by Hypatia, Inc.

Until the 1990s, scholars discussed Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) primarily in terms of her positive contributions to minimizing women's social and political subordination, and more specifically, for her statements regarding educational equality and financial independence as tools in this fight.[1] In particular, Wollstonecraft's educational reform is taken as expressing an alternative to a strict sex-based division of labor, which places women in a subordinate role in the private sphere and men in a dominant role in the public sphere.[2] Only very recently has anyone begun to tease out some of the larger implications for women under Wollstonecraft's picture of educational reform. Among those at the forefront of this new discourse is Sandrine Bergès, who argues in "Wet-Nursing and Political Participation: The Republican Approaches to Motherhood of Mary Wollstonecraft and Sophie de Grouchy," that Wollstonecraft does not open up an opportunity for women to achieve gender equality (Bergès 2016, 217).

I concur with Bergès here and seek both to lay out the grounds upon which Wollstonecraft establishes her conception of motherhood and go on to show how this conception leads to conditions under which women are incentivized to subordinate themselves. While I acknowledge that Wollstonecraft thinks that not all women could, should, or would marry and that exceptional women[3] should have more opportunities available to them outside of the home, I argue for a reading in which Wollstonecraft's educational reform is primarily for the purpose of making most women[4] into better wives and mothers. Her educational reform, consequently, is not wholly focused on preparing women for public-sphere employment nor is it a particularly useful tool for moving toward social or political equality. Although this will benefit women to some degree and better their situation in the home, I show that Wollstonecraft's project is limited and, in fact, likely entails a sex-based division of labor that re-entrenches women's subordinate status in political life.

This article examines connections between Wollstonecraft's *educational* reform and the possibility of greater social equality and political participation for women, but it should be noted that this is only *one* way to ask whether Wollstonecraft's work is likely to lead to greater social and civic equality for women. Education, though vital to Wollstonecraft's work, is merely one facet of it. Her oeuvre is also concerned with the role that fundamental concepts, such as virtue, duty, and independence, play in garnering women greater social and civic equality.[5] Examining Wollstonecraft's works through these lenses may lead to different conclusions about the likelihood of her theories leading to social and civic equality. With that said, given the centrality of education to her thought, it is valuable for scholars to ask whether her educational reform is particularly helpful in overcoming women's social and civic subordination.

This article proceeds in five parts. Part I is a reconstruction of Wollstonecraft's argument for educational reform, which I take as the ground for her claims about motherhood. In part II, I offer an interpretation of Wollstonecraft that demonstrates her reliance on a sex-based division of labor. Here, I present an alternative (but perhaps still compatible) reading of the text from the one that Bergès gives for why Wollstonecraft is warranted in saying that men and women share in the same virtue but have different duties. In part III, I show how my reading demonstrates a

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

particular limitation in Wollstonecraft's logic, namely that because her theory likely results in a sex-based division of labor, what probably results in the formation of a class of women whose greatest ambition is to become highly educated housewives.[6] This portion of the article expands upon Bergès claims in chapter 11 of *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* and helps to spell out some of the more nuanced connections that Bergès leaves for readers to discern. In part IV, I address objections to my view. Finally, part V consists of a concluding discussion of the larger implications of my reading of Wollstonecraft and her shortcomings.

I. Wollstonecraft's Argument for Educational Reform

In this section, I reconstruct Wollstonecraft's argument for educational reform to show that it betters not only women's virtue but also the virtue of society. Grounding Wollstonecraft's argument for equality in women's education is a distinction between justifiable, "natural" distinctions of rank and unjustifiable, "unnatural" distinctions of rank.[7] She draws this distinction by saying that the Christian God gives human beings certain rights from birth, the most germane of which are humans' superior rationality, and relatedly, liberty (Wollstonecraft 1995, 12–13).[8]

Rationality and liberty are central to drawing this distinction for two reasons. (1) Rationality is, for Wollstonecraft, the God-given difference between humans and animals (Wollstonecraft 1995, 79). (2) The *free* exercise of one's reason leads to the cultivation of virtue. Taking these together, Wollstonecraft is advocating for a sort of meritocracy wherein individuals exercise their reason to become virtuous. These hard workers are subsequently rewarded with greater esteem. Unjust distinctions of rank, which include distinctions based on race, inheritance of property, and inheritance of titles, are distinctions *not* founded upon a superiority in virtue, talent, or merit (7–13, 23). Such distinctions are particularly pernicious because they act as impediments to individuals' rights to cultivate and exercise their reason, enjoy freedom, and gain independence.[9]

Sex, for Wollstonecraft, is an unjust way to rank individuals socially. Because women are men's companions, they must be the same kind of beings as men; hence, they must be rational (Wollstonecraft 1995, 48). If women are the same kinds of being[s] as men, then it follows on Wollstonecraft's scheme that virtue must be the same for women as for men, if not in degree, at least in kind. Consequently, Wollstonecraft argues that "their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim" (94–95).[10] The aim she seems to have in mind here is something like becoming a better human being.[11] Because their virtues are the same, women's subordination to men (particularly in marriage) is unjust (235).

Wollstonecraft observes that women's subordination is perpetuated by institutions that "systematize oppression" (Wollstonecraft 1994, 12). The tools used to oppress women are the "partial laws and customs of society" (5). Wollstonecraft notes that it is in the interest of men, who hold political and social power, to maintain the status quo. In particular, when women are kept away from education and productive means

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of employment, men end up with "slaves" or "play-thing[s]" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 93). Nancy Hirschmann helps to clarify what it means for women to live under systematized oppression: "Women's choices are constructed for them under conditions of systematic inequality, [consequently, women]... make all sorts of choices that are not just bad for themselves, but in themselves 'unfree.' That is, they are 'choices' that they have been conditioned to make by circumstances of oppression" (Hirschmann 2010, 271–78; see also Sapiro 1992, 124). During Wollstonecraft's time, for example, women could not choose to become doctors or attorneys.[12] Instead, often the best and only choice open to them for improving their social standing was marriage. In this respect, their choices were constrained and, as Wollstonecraft notes, markedly unfree.[13]

Chief among the tools used to perpetuate women's subordination is women's education.[14] Educational programs of the eighteenth century were focused on skills to help women in their roles within the domestic sphere: being good wives and mothers. These programs straightforwardly advocated sex-based divisions of labor. Wollstonecraft argues that conventional women's education, whether in or out of a school building, prevents women from becoming economically independent or intellectually equal to men and results in both a lack of freedom for women and a bevy of societal ills including an increase in the spread of vice (Wollstonecraft 1995, 87, 120–21).

With regard to the loss of freedom, Wollstonecraft argues that women's conventional education renders them unable to secure virtue or become independent. To give themselves a better chance at an advantageous marriage and subsequent self-improvement, women *must* pay great attention to their appearance, since pretty women are more desired by men and, consequently, have more opportunities for good marriages. Their education, Wollstonecraft argues, shapes itself to the purpose of beautification, and women subsequently become heavily invested in their appearance (Wollstonecraft 1995, 115). The impractical becomes common practice for women. They learn that it is to their benefit to obey others and relinquish their freedom for a life of dependency.[15]

The societal ills caused by an education in dependency are many and varied. In general, Wollstonecraft believes that inequality is harmful to society ("Among unequals there can be no society" [Wollstonecraft 1995, 39]). Unjust inequalities are problematic for two reasons: (1) they impede friendship, which is at least helpful and at most crucial to forging the social ties necessary for stable political life, and (2) they reinforce social, economic, and political gaps between the unequal parties, which fosters an environment likely to produce animosity among members of society. However, women's subordination carries with it a third problem that Wollstonecraft recognizes: (3) it makes them less fit to be wives and mothers, and therefore impedes the passing on of an education necessary to foster public spirit. She makes this explicit when she says things like, "Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue, or it will resemble the factitious sentiment which makes women careful to preserve their reputation and men their honour" (229).

If we take seriously Wollstonecraft's assertions regarding the importance of motherhood and the relationship between the cultivation of private virtue and public

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

virtue, then it is indeed problematic for the whole of society when women lack adequate education (229).[16] An education promoting coquetry and falsity—the sort of education that one needs in order to acquire a husband in eighteenth-century England—actually *inhibits* women's ability to then do their duty as good mothers because it promotes selfishness and ignorance incompatible with the duties of motherhood (288). Good mothers need sense to help their children form their minds and temperaments such that the children become productive members of society, and they need to be selfless to devote themselves wholly to bettering other beings (243).[17]

To remedy these problems, Wollstonecraft proposes that women be educated *alongside* men. By this, she means that women should learn the same kinds of things as men (presumably a school-based curriculum) and that women ought to "endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men" (110). Although she does not go into detail regarding the specifics of this new education, she does explicitly say that women should have the opportunity to study anatomy, medicine, morality, and political history (274). The ramifications of this education, though, are contentious among Wollstonecraft scholars.

II. Politicizing Women's Domestic Roles Does Not Erase All Distinction between the Public and Private Spheres

Bergès begins her consideration of Wollstonecraft by cautioning against viewing Wollstonecraft's claims that women have a duty to mother as a reason to think that Wollstonecraft thought men and women had different virtues. On Bergès's view, Wollstonecraft is not saying that women are necessarily better fit to care for children; rather, she maintains that Wollstonecraft was "commenting on the situation of her contemporaries rather than trying to define womanhood in general" (Bergès 2016, 203–04). Although I concur with Bergès on the point that Wollstonecraft is not suggesting that men and women have different virtues, and though the text she presents shows that some women might not have a duty to be mothers, there is another way to read the text. Specifically, I will argue that men and women can share in the same kind of virtue but express it in different ways.

In order to show this alternative reading, I first demonstrate that even though Wollstonecraft can be understood as saying that women's role in the private sphere is partially a political role, this does not necessarily mean that the spheres lack all distinction; consequently, there is still room for a sex-based division of labor, and we see this when we look at Wollstonecraft's statements about duty. An alternative to Virginia Sapiro's popular interpretation, in which Wollstonecraft has collapsed the spheres, is to understand Wollstonecraft as suggesting that although men and women can and should move between the spheres, there are some duties that preclude the participation of one sex or the other.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Motherhood Is a Political Role

First, let us consider the evidence that demonstrates that women's caretaking role as mothers is partially a political role. Wollstonecraft presents educated mothers as benefiting the commonwealth in three ways: (1) by modeling patriotism for their children; (2) by demonstrating a love of humanity that subsequently reinforces the lasting bonds of camaraderie necessary for civil society; and (3) by inculcating children with "public spirit," which Wollstonecraft specifically discusses as a political activity that happens in the home.

With regard to modeling patriotic behavior for children, Wollstonecraft says that if "children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 68). Here we see that mothers *must* be well-educated to be patriots if their children are to become patriots. Consequently, here Wollstonecraft has placed responsibility for patriotism squarely in the hands of mothers.

Next, I maintain that Wollstonecraft associates women with the cultivation of their children's virtue more generally. Despite often addressing "parents," she frequently writes somewhat ambiguously when talking about the impact mothers and fathers have upon children (Wollstonecraft 1995, ch. 11). Presumably, mothers and fathers are both supposed to assist with child-rearing, on her picture; however, when she talks about the ways in which children can be raised wrongly—by not allowing their reason to develop, neglecting them, and so on—she finds fault with mothers for ruining their children (247–48). The upshot is this: although she calls on men to fulfill the "duties of husbands and fathers," it seems as if fathers' actions have far fewer consequences for children than mothers' actions, in Wollstonecraft's view.[18] We can then infer that women—in her view—have a correspondingly large impact on children's upbringing more generally. Hence, in chapter 11 when she talks about the importance of the family for fostering in children a love of humanity (an aid to forming lasting bonds within civil society), this is something women would be largely responsible for.

Relatedly, Wollstonecraft explicitly says that home life is the foundation for the cultivation of "public spirit." She says, "Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue" (229). "Public spirit" here seems to act as a sort of catch-all term for caring about one's fellow subjects and citizens, caring about the fate of one's nation or society, and an active engagement in caring about civil and political life. Here Wollstonecraft clearly founds public spirit in the private virtues, or the virtues women are responsible for inculcating and overseeing in their own homes, as has already been established above. If we take seriously the idea that more virtuous societies are better than less virtuous ones, then what Wollstonecraft is saying is that women in their roles as wives and mothers are responsible for making society *better*, which suggests, then, that mothers' private-sphere roles are—in an important sense—political and

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

not merely private because of the way in which mothers are responsible for educating their children such that their private virtue results in a more virtuous society. However, the fact that motherhood or domestic duties are political does not, as I argue below, change Wollstonecraft's reliance on a sex-based division of labor and the limitations that come with such divisions.

The Role of Duty in Establishing a Sex-Based Division of Labor

From the suggestions that mothers and fathers have duties in the private sphere and that women should be *permitted* to pursue goals outside of the private sphere, it does not follow that men and women share all of the same duties in precisely the same ways. Revisiting the texts reveals that Wollstonecraft insisted that most women should remain—if not entirely—at least primarily engaged in domestic pursuits. This reading highlights a tension in Wollstonecraft's work: education is supposed to somehow help minimize unjust distinctions based in sex differences, and yet Wollstonecraft has a conception of duty that maintains the status quo with regard to the sex-based division of labor that keeps large numbers of women at home. I examine the implications of this tension in part IV.

Wollstonecraft, in my reading, is committed to the claim that educational reform *cannot* and *will not* remove women's political and social duties to bear and raise children (only true giftedness will do this, as I note below), and these duties, I argue, should be interpreted as being importantly different from men's duties as husbands and fathers. To show this, my argument proceeds as follows: first, I analyze the two types of duties Wollstonecraft lays out for women; next, I show that Wollstonecraft considers motherly duties unique; then I argue that women's duties to themselves as human beings can be fulfilled by being mothers; finally, I conclude that a central motivation for Wollstonecraft's educational reform is to persuade women to remain in the home with reasoned arguments instead of appeals to sensibility or a forced submission based in men's authority over women. This is, I assert, generally an improvement to women's home lives; however, it does serve to re-entrench many women in domestic duties.

Wollstonecraft discusses two kinds of duties: duties to oneself as a human being[19] and natural or civil duties. She most clearly distinguishes these two from each other both in kind and rank when she says, "The being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and, speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 235). From this, we can see that the duty of primary importance is the duty to "themselves as rational creatures," meaning the duty to cultivate themselves as virtuous human beings through the exercise of their reason. Duties of citizens are secondary, and they involve a whole host of roles (the most germane of which are fatherhood and motherhood) that contribute to the development of good citizenry and a stable commonwealth.

Although the duties of fatherhood and motherhood both involve raising and educating children, significant textual evidence suggests that Wollstonecraft sees the duties of men and women as entailing different requirements. For example, she notes on two separate occasions that men and women have "respective duties," and she even discusses the life of husbands and wives who have separate duties as "the happiest as well as the most respectable situation in the world" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 231, 232). Although she nowhere delineates the entirety of what those respective duties might be, she does note a few differences in their duties. Chief among those different duties are bearing and nursing children, what Wollstonecraft calls "the first duty of a mother" (228). These are duties that do not go away under other historical contexts, such as our own. Although contemporary society has made it such that women do not have to nurse their children, Wollstonecraft despises the use of wet-nurses who performed this function during her own time, and science has yet to contrive that women do not have to give birth to continue the species.[20] That bearing and nursing children is "the first duty of a mother," is strong language. It indicates that failing in this duty should carry drastic consequences. Specifically, "The wife, in the present state of things, who is faithful to her husband, and neither suckles nor educates her children, scarcely deserves the name of a wife, and has no right to that of a citizen. But take away natural rights, and duties become null" (236).

With regard to fathers, Wollstonecraft says relatively little, but what she says is troubling. Specifically, fathers have the unique right to "inflict the punishment [of children when they disobey their parents or other authority figures]; he must be the judge in all disputes" (244). Many scholars ignore this comment altogether or dismiss it as an outlier in Wollstonecraft's theory as an attempt to pander to the interests of her male readership. Even if it is an outlier, it is—at most—an indication that Wollstonecraft thought men and women had some duties peculiar to their sexes; or—at least—a set of statements that does not minimize the duties she says are peculiar to women.

Given that Wollstonecraft presents women's duties in a hierarchical relationship, first to themselves as rational beings and second to their roles as mothers, we might be inclined to think that Wollstonecraft has given women an out with regard to maternal duties. If their first responsibility is to cultivate their own virtue and if motherhood encumbers that process, then women might have good reason not to become mothers. At times throughout her oeuvre, Wollstonecraft seems to allude to this construal, particularly when she talks about women having employment (which I address below). Recall that Wollstonecraft does not think that all women could, should, or would marry and that these women should still have more opportunities in life, opportunities that look much like men's. However, overwhelming evidence in the text suggests that Wollstonecraft thought that one could fulfill both the duties of motherhood and the duties of humanity at the same time, that the two can be mutually supportive. She suggests this in two ways: (1) reason helps women to recognize the importance of and to better execute the duties of motherhood, and (2) the duties of motherhood can help to deepen women's virtue.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

On several occasions, Wollstonecraft explicitly argues that reason, the core requirement to fulfill one's duty to oneself, is necessary to being a good mother. For example, "reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly," "nor will women ever fulfil the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens," "by thus narrowing their minds they are rendered unfit to fulfil the peculiar duties [motherhood] which nature has assigned them," and education in the exercise of reason is "the only way to make them properly attentive to their domestic duties" (140, 260, 265). On this point, Wollstonecraft can scarcely be misunderstood.

But I contend Wollstonecraft is not just attempting to help women of her time make the best of a bad situation in which they could have fulfillment only in the home. Rather, a central motivation for and result of Wollstonecraft's educational reform is that *most* women should remain largely in the home engaging in domestic pursuits. The advancement her position makes with regard to others' of her time is that she uses *reason* to ground women's importance in the home instead of appeals to sensibility or an assertion about women being weaker by nature.

Key to this point is a recognition that Wollstonecraft was opposed to previous accounts of women's role and education wherein women were *forcibly confined* to domestic pursuits. A particular passage that often goes unremarked in current accounts of Wollstonecraft's duty looks suspiciously like a promissory note for what Wollstonecraft ends up doing. She says, "If indeed this [the private sphere] be their destination, arguments may be drawn from reason: and thus augustly supported, the more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty—comprehending it—for unless they comprehend it, unless their morals be fixed on the same immutable principle as those of man, no authority can make them discharge it in a virtuous manner" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 69). Wollstonecraft is saying here that if it is the case that women ought to be engaged in domestic pursuits, then we should be able to construct an argument that demonstrates how greater understanding will show women the reasons they ought to discharge their domestic duties. This is exactly what Wollstonecraft herself shows.

First, it bears noting that maternal duties apply only to women who have children; however, *most* women ought to have children, in Wollstonecraft's larger scheme. I make this assertion for two reasons: (1) Wollstonecraft suggests that relatively few people—men or women—should have to forgo family life, and (2) most women, if sufficiently educated, will *want* to fulfill maternal duties because of the importance of those duties to civil society.

To address the first reason, Wollstonecraft cites Francis Bacon's claim that men who do great works often have no children. In reply, she says, "I say the same of women" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 139–40). This is evidence that at least some women, on Wollstonecraft's picture, should have opportunities to be successful without recourse to the duties of the private sphere. However, in Wollstonecraft's subsequent sentences, she says, "But, the welfare of society is not built on extraordinary exertions; and were it more reasonably organized, there would be still less need of great abilities, or heroic virtues" (139–40). Here, I take her to mean that if society were

better organized, we would have less need for men and women to forgo family life for the sake of intellectual pursuits, and that people would live happier and more peaceable lives. This interpretation has the added benefit of working in concert with her assertion that a happy family life wherein all parties fulfill the "respective duties of their station" live in "the happiest and most respectable situation in the world" (232). There are, however, objections to this interpretation, which I address below. What I interpret this passage to mean, then, is that Wollstonecraft hopes that most people can enjoy a happy family life built on a foundation of mutual respect and the attempt to cultivate virtue.

With regard to my second point, that Wollstonecraft's education program is designed to get women to see the value of performing their duties, Wollstonecraft mentions on several occasions that women must have an education that helps them to understand their peculiar domestic duties. When this happens, they will see not only how those domestic duties contribute to the public good but also how they are an expression of women's virtue. The idea is that this will make women *want* to discharge their duties admirably. She demonstrates this with rhetorical questions such as, "And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good?," and in discussions of the relationship between domestic duties and "the general good" (68, 281–82). As we already know, the good Wollstonecraft has in mind here are things like the preparation of future citizens that occurs as a direct result of child-rearing. When we take a step back and look at Wollstonecraft's bigger picture, we see that what she is doing is providing reasons why women might want to take seriously their roles as mothers.

For Wollstonecraft, it is also critical that mothers themselves take on the duties of motherhood (particularly breastfeeding) and not simply use money or status to ensure that someone else performs those acts for their children. She says, "In the superiour ranks of life, every duty is done by deputies, as if duties could ever be waived" (238). Although she discusses this in the context of problematic social-class distinctions, the core of the idea helps to explain why Wollstonecraft takes seriously the idea that women who fail in their maternal duties by employing wet-nurses ought not to be considered citizens (236). In short, women must perform these duties if they have children, otherwise the duty goes unfulfilled, and the woman who originally saw the importance of domestic duties has completely missed her mark in the attempt to fulfill them. Taken altogether, then, we end up with a picture of Wollstonecraft where her educational program is designed to help women see the value of discharging their duties, and—more specifically—how their human and gender-specific duties can be exercised in concert. What this leaves us with is a theory that smuggles in a sex-based division of labor and justifies that division with recourse to the cultivation of reason.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

III. The Limitations of Wollstonecraft's Project

Although Wollstonecraft's arguments regarding the political importance of women's domestic roles seem laudable, I want to push further Bergès's claim that Wollstonecraft's conception of motherhood does not grant women social equality. I argue that political and social *inequality* for women likely follow from Wollstonecraft's account because she still permits and, in fact, likely encourages a sex-based division of labor. Wollstonecraft's problem is not that she holds some false beliefs about women that, if removed, would actually help her position to deliver women from their subordination; rather, I am arguing that the kinds of views Wollstonecraft holds about women, their conditions, and the improvements she believes can be made to those conditions are limited in various ways by her intuitions and assertions regarding women's primary function in society. Education might help women to be less subordinated within their own homes, but it is not enough to change much about their social and political subordination more generally, particularly because this education is undertaken largely for the sake of children and husbands.

How a Sex-Based Division of Labor Limits the Efficacy of Equal Education

One of the consequences that follows from having sex-based duties, in Wollstonecraft's picture, is that women's education is unlikely to be used for women's advancement outside of the home. Instead, the implication is that her theory results in what I have termed "the problem of the highly educated housewife." I characterize Wollstonecraft as giving two main reasons for women to *actually* engage in employment in the public sphere: (1) to prevent catastrophe in the event that a woman is left without financial support, or (2) in the case that a woman exhibits talent in a given profession. For *most* women, however, only *training* for employment (and perhaps employment prior to marriage) is desirable. Such training not only ensures women's independence in the face of adversity but, more important, prepares women to be better companions to their husbands and to bear and raise virtuous citizens.

In the eighteenth century, concerns about who would care for widows and unwed women abounded. Wollstonecraft's educational reform can be read as an attempt to protect these women from certain financial ruin that was likely to occur to real women of her time. This is yet another way in which Wollstonecraft thinks that not all women should marry. The uneducated widow "either falls an easy prey to some mean fortune-hunter, who defrauds her children of their parental inheritance, and renders her miserable; or becomes the victim of discontent and blind indulgence" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 121). These women lacked sufficient understanding to educate their children, and so they fail to fulfill the duties of their station. However, with a Wollstonecraftian education, they are assured that *if* their husbands die or *if* they fail to secure a husband, they are still able to support themselves (thus not becoming a charity case), secure themselves against vice, and—most important—fulfill their motherly duties in the event that they have children. But Wollstonecraft's education

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

here is useful only to women who do not have alternative means for financial support.

Second, Wollstonecraft's theory has room for some women to avoid the duties of motherhood altogether. As discussed in the previous section, women who are exceptional—like the exceptional men Francis Bacon discussed—may not be required to bear and raise children. However, it seems unlikely that *all* women or even a majority of women could avoid the duties of motherhood for the practical reason that the commonwealth needs to sustain itself. Too few mothers and the commonwealth eventually suffers from population decline. Consequently, this exception should apply to few women in Wollstonecraft's picture.

The motivation behind her educational reform seems, then, to be aimed less at getting most women into the workforce, and more about producing better mothers.[21] For example, Wollstonecraft asserts, "[t]o be a good mother—a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands" (243). The suggestion is that women will be more useful to society if they have a different sort of education because they will raise children to be better, more obedient citizens (231).

If we take seriously the ideas presented in part II, that Wollstonecraft does think women have some special duties and that an equal education will (1) make them understand better why those duties need to be fulfilled for the common good and (2) make them better at fulfilling those goals, then we are left with a picture in which women are likely to use their education to become better housewives. Women's education is, in large part, *for the sake of men and children*. Although this might make women more industrious and fulfilled in their caretaking roles, Wollstonecraft's theory ends up *encouraging* women of reason to remain in the home, as the well-educated woman will exercise her reason and understand the value of her specific duties.

This is all surprising in light of Wollstonecraft's disdain for systematic inequality. She saw herself as striking out against systematically oppressive educational systems that based women's education on the assumption that women had inferior rationality, were predisposed to sensibility, and, consequently, that the threat of women needed to be curtailed by forcing them to remain at home in childlike states. In particular, Wollstonecraft notes that "the important task of education [will not] ever be properly begun till the person of a woman is no longer preferred to her mind" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 290). She suggests here that there is a problem with society when people value women for what their bodies can do instead of what their minds can achieve.

She has, in some degree, succeeded in presenting a theory that values women for their minds, but the end result is the same, in many respects, with those she criticizes: women are still valued most for their contributions in the home. Granted, they are valued for how well they use their reason in their capacities as mothers, on Wollstonecraft's picture, whereas they are valued primarily for their coquetry and falsity, on others' pictures. But she has not given subsequent generations *sufficient* tools to move women closer to greater social and political equality. The greatest obstacle to women's ability to become full members in political life is not just their lack of education or ability to exercise reason, but also attitudes and practices that suggest

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

women's primary use in society is as wives and mothers, bearing and raising the next generation of subjects and citizens. Without a change in attitudes and practices, women are likely to suffer from the "highly educated housewife problem" wherein women's value is still associated with fulfillment of their private-sphere duties. And this is precisely what happens in Wollstonecraft's account.

Why a Loss of Freedom and Continued Lack of Equality Likely Follow

What is entailed by Wollstonecraft's account is a picture in which women are still valued as mothers above all else for society to properly function and, consequently, women encounter a loss of freedom and persistent lack of equality. This is where my position moves even past what Bergès claims in chapter 11 of *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Despite saying that women should not "be confined to merely domestic pursuits" so long as a central aim of education remains making women into better partners in marriage and mothers, many advancements they make outside of the home are still expected to be used chiefly in the domestic sphere (Wollstonecraft 1995, 270, 231).

I have in mind the famous passages where Wollstonecraft delineates potential professions for women (238–39). She suggests there that the purpose of these professions is so that "Women would not then marry for a support" and not for personal fulfillment (239). Although these positions may be useful for women of many and varied stations of life for supporting themselves, if we look more closely, we will notice that many of the professions she mentions here are professions that would have been directly useful in the home when taking care of husbands and children. In particular, she says that teaching women "the elements of anatomy and medicine" is beneficial not only for taking care of themselves but also "to make them rational nurses of their infants, parents, and husbands." The same goes with "the anatomy of the mind." It is beneficial for its ability to help women better befriend their husbands (274). The real trouble with women not having an education and not being able to support themselves lies in how women's dependency harms the state of marriage and motherhood, and, consequently, society.

When I say that a "loss of freedom" follows from Wollstonecraft's account, what I mean is that women are likely to lose liberty in a very real sense if they wish to be good mothers and good subjects, fulfilling their political duty. By "lose liberty," I mean that women are required to make their desires for personal success outside of the home subservient to their duty to raise future citizens and subjects, which means that they do not get to choose what they do with their lives (243). It is, therefore, a duty women cannot choose against because the consequences of failing to fulfill it are so ill-advised.

IV. Objections and Replies to the Limitations

What about Wollstonecraft's Calls for Women's Employment in the Public Sphere?

Passages in which Wollstonecraft calls for women's employment—for various classes and races, even—outside of the home may seem like counter-evidence to my interpretation. I propose two ways of handling these types of passages, depending upon what Wollstonecraft says in them.

First, some passages could be read as suggesting that women's economic independence is a prerequisite for their becoming good wives and mothers. I have in mind statements such as, "It is vain to expect virtue from women till they are, in some degree, independent of men" and "Whilst they are absolutely dependent on their husbands they will be cunning, mean, and selfish" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 230–31). However, I believe that she meant that women should be *prepared* to be economically independent, and in this respect, they will never be "*absolutely*" (my emphasis) dependent upon their husbands. This reading reflects that the situations Wollstonecraft was explicitly concerned with were those of widows who were left with no means to support themselves and unmarried women with no means of financial support. Wollstonecraft is silent on the issue of whether married women with working husbands should be required to work outside of the home.

Second, I contend that some passages should be treated more as outliers because they discuss the purpose of employment outside the home as being for exceptional women or women who lack the means to support themselves otherwise. With regard to the "exceptional women" concern, the exceptional women Wollstonecraft often had in mind were likely unmarried or, at the very least, childless. Employment outside of the home "might well mean not being able to take on family duties. She [Wollstonecraft] cited Francis Bacon's saying that men with wives and children were unlikely to be involved in great enterprises for good or evil, and that the greatest works have been done by single and childless men. 'I say the same of women,' Wollstonecraft wrote" (Sapiro 1992, 160). Given that Wollstonecraft was aware of the difficulties women with families would have faced, then it seems unlikely that she would have expected the majority of women to also hold a job. Instead, it is possible to interpret her as saying that exceptional women would work outside the home *because* they were exceptional. Other women, however, need only *to be able to* work outside of the home should they have no other alternative means of support.[22] Hence the passages pointing to exceptional woman are compatible with my reading of Wollstonecraft wherein the majority of women's most important job is to become mothers.

The poor are outliers in Wollstonecraft's conception of women's duties because of their exceptional financial circumstances. I take passages referencing working poor women generally as Wollstonecraft's way of acknowledging that some women—by virtue of their social class—*have* to seek employment. For example, Wollstonecraft

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

says, "With respect to virtue, to use the word in a comprehensive sense, I have seen most in low life. Many poor women maintain their children by the sweat of their brow, and keep together families that the vices of the fathers would have scattered abroad" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 154–55). At face value, this passage suggests that women who work are more virtuous than those who do not. However, when we look at the context in which these passages are written, we see both that the virtue in question here is a personal virtue that regards the character of a woman as most important and that the purpose of employment is *for the sake of husbands and children* and not for the social or political advancement of women.[23] It may be the case that these working poor women have a better personal conception of themselves on Wollstonecraft's view; they certainly are not subject to the same vices that their wealthier counterparts are. With that said, the purpose of their employment is still to keep children fed and presumably educated. Wollstonecraft here downplays women's contributions to society more broadly speaking through their work in favor of showing how that work benefits *families*.

Didn't Wollstonecraft Want More for Women?

There is some reason to believe that Wollstonecraft was actually advocating for more than a world in which women are highly educated housewives. The thought is that Wollstonecraft scaled back her claims and used rhetoric that appealed to the self-interest of men in order to achieve greater educational equality for women of many stations in life.[24] Perhaps the reason she focused so intently upon the ways in which education could help women to become better wives and mothers was to show how educated women could be useful to husbands and fathers, thus catering to her male readership. She does make some statements that indicate that she wanted much more for women. For example, "I cannot help lamenting that women of a superior cast have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence. I may excite laughter… for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 237). And she makes other statements that suggest she thought women could be both mothers and continue their education and work: "But, fulfilling the duties of a mother, a woman with a sound constitution, may still… assist to maintain her family, if necessary, or by reading and conversations with both sexes, indiscriminately, improve her mind" (290).

I concede that Wollstonecraft probably *did* want more for women than to become highly educated housewives, and she may very well have calculated her argument to appeal to men's self-interest. However, there are reasons to believe that even if we grant that Wollstonecraft was merely using rhetoric as a tool for greater social change, the role of women's duties in her account are likely problematic, and her picture is still severely limited. It is possible that she simply did not realize how limited it was.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

First, even if we grant these rhetorical claims, social and political power is not for all women, but only for exceptional women or women in exceptional circumstances.[25] In the previous section, I laid out the textual evidence for this claim, and it remains true no matter how much rhetoric she wraps it in. For example, consider her claims in the passage above regarding economic power for women. There, she says a mother "may still… assist to maintain her family, if necessary, or by reading and conversations… improve her mind." The call for women to work while rearing their children extends only as is "necessary" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 290). This indicates that only under exceptional circumstances in which the father could not provide sufficiently for the family could mothers make time to work.[26] The remainder of that same paragraph suggests that well-educated mothers could still *learn* while caring for their children by reading literature or works of science. This type of learning does not require mothers to simultaneously work outside of the home. In fact, when we look at the example Wollstonecraft gives us of the best life men and women can live together, it is of a woman whose whole day revolves around nursing her children. This woman allows herself "only the luxury of cleanliness" before greeting her husband who returns home for the day, presumably from work.[27] It is not such a far leap to say, then, that for Wollstonecraft, motherhood was supposed to be time-consuming. Historian Lawrence Stone supports this with his analysis of motherhood of the eighteenth century when he says that, for mothers, parenting "took up a good deal of their time" (Stone 1977, 286).

The time constraints on Wollstonecraftian mothers are severe enough (even if men help out in the home) that, at the very least, women are generally unable to devote themselves wholly or solely to social, scientific, or economic pursuits. What we see is women who are still incentivized to put their career interests on hold to raise children, and the only women who seem to be able to escape this political duty entirely are those who are exceptional enough that their contributions to economic or political life outweigh their crucial political duties to bear and raise children. Although there is a similar issue for men—only a few exceptional men can avoid having families—there is no expectation that only the few, select men will be able to hold down jobs for the remainder of their adult lives.[28]

Second, simply saying that Wollstonecraft was using rhetoric and wanted greater social and political power for women is not an easy answer to the limitations I present. Even within Wollstonecraft's own framework, it is unwise to discount motherhood as a political duty. The practical fact remains that without women acting at least as child-bearers, the commonwealth cannot maintain itself in the sense that it cannot produce a population of citizens. And for those who might suggest that women could go back to work in the so-called public sphere right after having children, and for those who place great importance on Wollstonecraft's call for men to take up greater domestic responsibilities, practical barriers are not so easily dismissed (at least not without recognizing that the entire social system in which Wollstonecraft was embedded needed an overhaul).[29] Men were responsible for working outside of the home. Children, though, need to be watched and cared for all day long. Mothers, then, end up spending far more time with their children than men

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

do, even on Wollstonecraft's picture. And for the women who did not, Wollstonecraft offers scathing critiques regarding their abandonment of duty, which scholars such as Sapiro have already noted.

Whether she *intended* to scale back her claims or not, I have offered a reading of Wollstonecraft that enables us to see that she has—perhaps inadvertently—included a sex-based division of labor that results in certain limitations of her project. In my reading, although Wollstonecraft sees women's domestic roles as having political import and although she wants greater independence for women through educational reform, her position likely further entrenches women in their domestic roles.

One issue that remains to be addressed is the extent to which Wollstonecraft's project is limited even outside of her historical context.[30] After all, Wollstonecraft frequently qualifies her remarks on mothers' duties with phrases such as "till society is very differently constituted" or "in the present state of things," which seem to indicate that changes to societal attitudes or technological advances could reduce or eliminate the burden placed on mothers when performing their duties (Wollstonecraft 1995, 250, 236). Like Bergès, I contend that Wollstonecraft's argument is limited even outside of her historical context.[31] Although a full consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to gesture toward some ways in which we might begin to address it so that we can see just how limiting Wollstonecraft's claims are.

I am willing to grant that many technological or societal changes are likely to lessen the burden placed on mothers fulfilling their duties. For example, imagine a world in which fathers had correspondingly more time to spend engaged in child-rearing and in which mothers and fathers could readily work from home. In this society, we can imagine mothers having *more* time to engage in academic, political, and economic pursuits outside of the home than during Wollstonecraft's time, while still fulfilling the duty to bear and educate children.[32] This would not erase women's duties to bear, nurse, or educate children, and as such, women will still have more familial responsibilities than men,[33] but it might lessen the inequality that results from the sex-based division of labor in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

We may wonder whether mothers are ever allowed to give up bearing, nursing, or educating children altogether and thus have essentially the same duties as fathers.[34] On these points, I am skeptical. Despite qualifying her claims with phrases such as "Til society is very differently constituted" or "in the present state of things," Wollstonecraft clearly and repeatedly faults women who pass off their duties to nurse or educate their children (Wollstonecraft 1995, 250, 236). If we take seriously her claim that consigning children to wet-nurses was one of the worst things a mother could do, then it seems likely that Wollstonecraft is sincerely and seriously committed to having mothers nurse and educate their own children (238).[35] Those who fail to do so, on her view, are actively shirking their civic duties.[36] In addition to losing out on opportunities to deepen their virtue through mothering or to inculcate in their children public-spiritedness and patriotism, such women have no right to expect any of the rewards befitting parents.[37] The indication here is that, by definition, Wollstonecraft takes bearing, nursing, and educating children to be necessary for mothers.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Insofar as technological or societal changes might enable women to avoid raising or nursing their children, it seems likely that many of the same criticisms Wollstonecraft has about wet-nurses could apply regardless of technological or societal changes.

This is where we start to see the scope of the limitations of Wollstonecraft's educational reform: education might get us scientists who find ways to make the burdens of child-bearing or child-rearing *more* equitable, but it cannot eliminate the duty to bear or care for children, and those duties—on Wollstonecraft's view—seem to fall disproportionately on women at their very foundations.[38]

V. The Need to Consider Who Benefits from Educational Reform

With Wollstonecraft, we see a thinker who hopes to open a road to greater political and social equality by elevating the political importance of women's roles as wives and mothers. She even goes so far as to assert that women should have equal education alongside men. However, in my interpretation, Wollstonecraft falls short of her own marks. She ends up with a picture wherein women—through their reformed education—likely recommit themselves to domestic duties in the name of reason. This conclusion has far-reaching effects. With regard to Wollstonecraft scholarship, it suggests that she perhaps did not offer tools as efficacious as later feminists ascribe to her as the "mother of feminism." In particular, the call for equal education so often associated with her was perhaps not as useful as she thought it was. It is only a necessary —but not sufficient—condition for minimizing women's social and political subordination.

Beyond the bounds of historical scholarship, these findings should suggest that feminists more generally ought to be wary of panaceas for women's subordination resting largely or entirely on women's education. Scholars should ask deeper, philosophical questions: for the sake of whom is this education working? Does this education reinforce sex-based divisions of labor? And in keeping with the issue of division of labor, I see my findings as being applicable to issues in philosophy of race and issues of class distinctions. It seems to be the case that whenever there are unjust divisions of labor, we need to be wary of the institutions that might be reinforcing them.

With all of this in mind, it is important to remember that Wollstonecraft was writing within a specific context, and given her context, she did offer a theory that stressed partnerships between men and women in marriage instead of a situation of straightforward subordination, and she did recognize the importance of equal education for preparing women to have gainful employment outside of the home across a wide variety of social classes. For this, she is to be praised. But let us not falsely attribute to her a blueprint for women's liberation movements. She laid some of the groundwork, but she also sowed some of the seeds of her own downfall.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Notes

I presented earlier versions of this article at the Society for Analytic Feminism's meeting at the 2018 Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association and at the Workshop on Gender and Philosophy at MIT. The insight of attendees at these meetings has helped to focus and streamline the arguments in this article. I am also grateful for comments on early drafts of this work from Susanne Sreedhar, Aaron Garrett, Charles Griswold, Virginia Sapiro, Stacey Goguen, and Kurt Blankschaen. Finally, I would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers at *Hypatia* for their insightful comments and thoughtful suggestions.

1. It bears noting that Wollstonecraft's claim that women's purported intellectual shortcomings were the result of poor education was not new, even in her own time. Mary Astell, Poulain de la Barre, Judith Drake, and Catharine Macaulay had all made this point previously.

2. *Private sphere* is not Wollstonecraft's term. Instead, she uses phrases such as "domestic concerns" and "private duties" to describe practices pertaining to the family and home life (child-bearing, child-rearing, and household management). The term *private sphere* is a tool of much later feminists to refer to the home, the personal, and the nonpolitical. I use it here because it is a single, consistent term that captures the institutions with which Wollstonecraft was concerned. Similarly, *public sphere* is a useful term that encompasses the economic and political happenings that Wollstonecraft discusses as being out of the reach of women.

3. See the first section of part IV for more detail on who counts as an exceptional woman, in Wollstonecraft's picture.

4. A word of note to readers before proceeding: in both *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft has in mind white, middle- and upper-class women. It would not be quite right to suggest, then, that Wollstonecraft had politicized motherhood qua motherhood, but rather only some types of motherhood. There has been some debate about whether Wollstonecraft's primary audience consisted of middle-class women or men, but the consensus is that the audience is middle-class at the very least. For more on this debate, see Smith 1992.

5. For example, Alan Coffee uses the lens of independence in "Freedom as Independence: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Grand Blessing of Life" to argue that the internal logic of independence as both a personal and political ideal means that women *actually must be* independent mentally, financially, socially, and politically (Coffee 2014, especially 913–15). This will be in sharp contrast to what I argue in the first section of part IV, when I say that Wollstonecraft can be interpreted as suggesting that most women merely need to be *prepared* to be independent. Although a full response to Coffee is beyond the scope of this article, I do want to point out one possible line of reply: perhaps Wollstonecraft did not realize that her argument for educational reform undermined her deeper commitment to women's independence. If this is the case, then it may be that even arguments that suggest Wollstonecraft *desired* women to actually have economic independence (and not merely to be capable of it) may be compatible with the claim that her theory undermines this very desire. Much work of course, remains to be done in order to fully parse out what Wollstonecraft desired from what she argued (908–24).

6. This parallels Bernard Mandeville's argument in "An Essay on Charity, and Charity Schools." There he argues that poor children educated in charity schools in the arts of reading, writing, arithmetic, and Latin (among other fields) are being educated to perform works that—because of their station—they will never actually be fit to pursue (Mandeville 1988). Although Mandeville and I come to different conclusions (Mandeville argues that these students should simply not receive this type of education, whereas I suggest that women ought to be allowed access both to an education on par with that of men and to pursue employment that would make use of that education, and that this is—in fact—the crux of the problem with Wollstonecraft's program.) See also Ferguson 1992.

7. I will use the terms *unjustified* and *unnatural* interchangeably, following Wollstonecraft's own usage in her works. She seems to have the same referents for both terms in mind.

8. By "rationality" Wollstonecraft means "the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth."

9. The role of "independence" in Wollstonecraft's works has been addressed by many scholars. It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a discussion of Wollstonecraft's conception of independence, but those interested in the term may wish to familiarize themselves with, among others, Brace 2000; Phillips 2000; Coffee 2014; and Halldenius 2016.

10. Wollstonecraft does indeed grant women's inferiority—at least in part. She is willing to concede that "from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue… but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 139).

11. She is not saying that all individuals should be doing precisely the same kinds of things to better themselves. She does want to concede differences in talent or fit. For example, someone who is mathematically inclined may cultivate their reason through the study of math, whereas someone who is artistically inclined may cultivate their reason through artistic endeavors.

12. Women had earned university degrees in Italy and Sweden prior to Wollstonecraft's time, but societal norms in England prevented women from achieving the same distinction until the late 1800s.

13. Wollstonecraft does discuss women in lower socioeconomic classes and of different races, most notably, in *Maria: Or, the Wrongs of Woman* (Wollstonecraft 1994). In *Maria*, Wollstonecraft's characterization of Jemima suggests that women of lower classes could be saved from prostitution by better education. However, as scholars of the *Vindications* have noted, "the schooling she proposes for working-class women falls well short of that required to practise medicine or business" in eighteenth-century England. The issues of race and class in Wollstonecraft are rich enough to warrant a separate space (Ferguson 1999, 427–50). For more on Wollstonecraft and race, see Ferguson 1992; Juengel 2000. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between women and class rank in the *Vindications*, see Mellor 1994; Ferguson 1999, 432; and Wilcox 2009.

14. "Education," for Wollstonecraft, is not confined to the classroom. As Sapiro explains, "the use of the term 'education' is not the current restricted notion of instruction, particularly in schools, but the broader sense more common in her day, more like our current conception of 'child-raising' or 'socialization.' The unfortunate result of this

common misinterpretation is that Wollstonecraft is often posed as offering 'only' education (meaning formal schooling) as the solution to women's problems" (Sapiro 1992, 27–28).

15. In this, Wollstonecraft was far ahead of her time, suggesting that in reducing women's utility to their ability to find a mate and reproduce, women have been made to believe that they have no other opportunities for self-advancement.

16. For example, she calls motherhood an "indispensable duty" that is "the peculiar destination of woman" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 288).

17. Barbara Taylor supports this reading when she notes that mothers will "tolerate no social injustice" (Taylor 2003, 235).

18. Although these specific duties go undefined, it seems likely that they would entail some degree of action in the home (Wollstonecraft 1995, 275). See Sapiro 1992, 114; Stetson 1996.

19. Wollstonecraft is inconsistent in her terminology, but she often refers to these as "duties of man" (Wollstonecraft 1795, 79) or "moral duties of life" (123).

20. Bergès's claim that Wollstonecraft thought women's duties were at least partially socially constructed is still compatible with what I have written here. It may be the case that Wollstonecraft thought women—under different circumstances—would not need to spend *so* much time raising children. What matters is that some of the duties she ascribes to women cannot be passed off to others (Bergès 2016, 203–05).

21. Even when women lose their husbands and work to make a living, Wollstonecraft notes that another major benefit of their education is that they can educate their children even without their husbands' help.

22. See note 5 above. Coffee would argue against this conclusion on the basis of his examination of the internal logic of independence. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to fully address Coffee on this point, it bears noting once more that using a different lens to analyze whether Wollstonecraft's project can lead toward greater social and civic equality may lead to conclusions different from the ones I have drawn from my analysis of education in her works.

23. Whatever else Wollstonecraft might mean by "virtue," here she indicates that she is using it in a very general, broad sense. I take Wollstonecraft to be talking about what kinds of character traits make women excellent. The paragraph preceding the one in which the quote appears sets up a juxtaposition between the woman who works to keep her family together with "false notions of female excellence" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 154). When Wollstonecraft talks about the working mother, I take her to be pointing to that woman's personal excellence in her ability to think of the welfare of others before her own and to work hard for their sake and not her own. It is, in short, a kind of selflessness that may also require further typically Christian virtues such as thriftiness, humility, and diligence.

24. There has been debate about whether Wollstonecraft's primary audience consisted of middle-class women or men. For more on this debate, see Vlasopolos 1980; McCormack 1984; Finke 1987; and Smith 1992.

25. For what it is worth, she also thought this was the case for men. (Hence, she drew upon Bacon's quote involving men.)

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

26. This is in line with Alice Clark's discussion of women of lower economic standing of the time period. Clark suggests that spinning, in particular, was well-suited to mothers who needed to earn extra money (Clark 1982, 63).

27. The whole passage reads, "I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station with, perhaps, merely a servant maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business. I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who returning weary home in the evening found smiling babes and a clean hearth. … I have thought that a couple of this description, equally necessary and independent of each other, because each fulfilled the respective duties of their station, possessed all that life could give" (Wollstonecraft 1995, 232–33).

28. It bears noting that many men in eighteenth-century England had terrible jobs. Nevertheless, the barriers to men's participation in public life through political office or attaining gainful employment outside of the home were far fewer than the barriers to women. The systematic barriers many men faced due to race or social class were at least not compounded by being a woman.

29. Some may point out that Wollstonecraft herself raised a child and supported herself through her scholarship. She calls herself the "first of a new genus" of women who could use their minds to support themselves. Surely, some might suggest, this is evidence that Wollstonecraft thought women could balance work and parenting. But let us not ignore her context. She struggled mightily, attempting suicide not once but twice. She suffered economic hardship and watched others do the same. She might have hoped that women could someday support themselves with the fruits of their mental labor, but hope and occasional personal anecdotes do not show that this could be the standard for all women.

30. The text says little on this issue, and it certainly does not provide enough information to make any definitive claims. Wollstonecraft did not speak at length about specific conditions under which women's obligations to bear and nurse children would lessen or cease.

31. Although Bergès focuses on whether motherly duties preclude women from full participation in republican life, much of her discussion helps to show why Wollstonecraft's duties are problematic even outside of her historical context. For more, see Bergès 2016.

32. Of course, for these to be really successful, there must be corresponding changes in attitude. Current society already has seen many of these changes. However, in the absence of societal changes in attitudes toward the family, when mothers drop out of the work force to raise children instead of sending them to day care (incentivized by the view that raising children is their duty and that to do so well requires mothers to be present at home), those mothers are often penalized for this choice. The years they spend away from their jobs set them back compared to their peers who have no children or who choose not to stay at home with their children. When we look at the text, Wollstonecraft simply does not ascribe this same duty to fathers. She suggests that fathers have some duty to educate their children as well, but the duty to stay home is women's. *All* the examples she gives in the text are about women who stay home with their small children. Fathers seem to enjoy spending time with those children, but their real responsibilities will come when the children are older: apprenticing them, finding them good schooling, and so on.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

33. Unless bearing and nursing children is something that women no longer have to do, this will be true. If women no longer needed to bear or nurse children, the very conceptions of "motherhood" and "fatherhood" would need to be reconsidered. It's not clear that Wollstonecraft provides sufficient discussion in her works to clarify what those new conceptions would be.

34. Some technological changes would seem to alter the very conception of motherhood, and if this conception is altered, then the duties may, too, be different from the duties discussed in Wollstonecraft's oeuvre. For example, in a world in which we have artificial wombs and excellent synthetic formula, mothers may no longer bear or nurse children. If biological evolution or technology made it so that women did not have a uniquely qualified role in bearing children, the concept of "woman" might change and, subsequently, "mother" as well. Whether Wollstonecraft would consider as their mother someone who cares for these children by educating them is an issue well beyond the scope of this article but that merits further exploration.

35. With that said, it is not as if Wollstonecraft—during her own time—thought that women were committed to an eighteen-year-minimum project in which they were responsible for all aspects of a child's education. She sets the age at which children should leave the home for day schools at five years old, a number that—as it turns out—is fairly close to contemporary requirements for compulsory attendance at primary schools. So, when we talk about mothers' duty to educate children in the home, we are talking primarily about children's education before they attend primary school.

36. Granted, for Wollstonecraft, part of the problem with wet-nurses comes as a direct result of women's poor education. Wollstonecraft's fear was that women who had wet-nurses engaged in card-playing, adultery, and other vicious activities instead of cultivating their own virtue. If these women had a Wollstonecraftian education, we might think that there would be no lack of opportunities to exercise their reason and thus cultivate their virtue. They could do so through other types of employment. However, the other two points (these women fail to inculcate in their children public-spiritedness and are consequently unable to reap the rewards of being a parent) do not disappear even with a proper education.

37. Wollstonecraft says, "Natural affection, as it is termed, I believe to be a very faint tie, affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy; and what sympathy does a mother exercise who sends her babe to a nurse, and only takes it from a nurse to send it to a school?. . . But a child, though a pledge of affection, will not enliven it [mutual sympathy between father and mother], if both father and mother be content to transfer the charge to hirelings; for they who do their duty by proxy should not murmur if they miss the reward of duty—parental affection produces filial duty." Among the rewards Wollstonecraft mentions are gratitude and care in old age (Wollstonecraft 1995, 244).

38. There may be other duties that disproportionately fall on men that roughly balance out this burden for women, but to hazard a guess on what those might be would be just that: *hazarding* a guess.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12486 Published online by Cambridge University Press

References

Bergès, Sandrine. 2016. Wet-nursing and political participation: The republican approaches to motherhood of Mary Wollstonecraft and Sophie de Grouchy. In *The social and political philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Sandrine Bergès and Alan Coffee. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brace, Laura. 2000. "Not empire, but equality": Mary Wollstonecraft, the marriage state, and the sexual contract. *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 (4): 433–55.

Clark, Alice. 1982. *Working life of women in the seventeenth century*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Coffee, Alan. 2014. Freedom as independence: Mary Wollstonecraft and the grand blessing of life. *Hypatia* 29 (4): 908–24.

Ferguson, Moira. 1992. Mary Wollstonecraft and the problematic of slavery. *Feminist Review* 42 (Autumn): 82–102.

Ferguson, Susan. 1999. The radical ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 32 (3): 427–50.

Finke, Laurie A. 1987. "A philosophic wanton": Language and authority in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of woman*. In *The philosopher as writer: The eighteenth century*, ed. Robert Ginsberg. Selinsgrove, Pa: Susquehanna University Press.

Halldenius, Lena. 2016. *Mary Wollstonecraft and feminist republicanism: Independence, rights, and the experience of unfreedom*. London: Routledge.

Hirschmann, Nancy J. 2010. Choosing betrayal. *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (1): 271–78.

Juengel, Scott. 2001. Countenancing history: Mary Wollstonecraft, Samuel Stanhope Smith, and Enlightenment racial science. *ELH* 68 (4): 897–927.

Mandeville, Bernard. 1988. An essay on charity, and charity-schools. In *The fable of the bees: Or, private vices, public benefits*, ed. F. B. Kaye. Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund.

McCormack, Kathleen. 1984. The sybil and the hyena: George Eliot's Wollstonecraftian feminism. *Dalhousie Review* 63 (4): 602–14.

Mellor, Anne K. 1994. Introduction. In *Maria: Or, the wrongs of Woman*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

Phillips, Anne. 2000. Feminism and republicanism: Is this a plausible alliance? *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 (2): 279–93.

Sapiro, Virginia. 1992. *A vindication of political virtue*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Smith, Amy Elizabeth. 1992. Roles for readers in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A vindication of the rights of woman*. *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 32 (3): 555–70.

Stetson, Dorothy Mc Bride. 1996. Women's rights and human rights: Intersection and conflict. In *Feminist interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Stone, Lawrence. 1977. *The family, sex and marriage in England 1500–1800*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Taylor, Barbara. 2003. *Mary Wollstonecraft and the feminist imagination*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Vlasopolos, Anca. 1980. Mary Wollstonecraft's mask of reason in a vindication of the rights of woman. *Dalhousie Review* 60 (3): 462–71.

Wilcox, Kirstin R. 2009. Vindicating paradoxes: Mary Wollstonecraft's "woman". *Studies in Romanticism* 48 (3): 447–67.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. 1994. *Maria: Or, the wrongs of woman*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. 1995. *A vindication of the rights of men with a vindication of the rights of woman and hints*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.