

Exploring the Social Role of Contemporary Women from the Perspective of the Lack of Historical Female Characters

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Abstract: Historically, women have been underrepresented in literature, the arts, and historical records, and their achievements and roles have often been marginalized or ignored. This phenomenon has led to an intriguing paradox: despite the fact that contemporary women have demonstrated strong abilities and potential in various fields, they are still usually considered to be in a “disadvantaged” position compared to men. This paper aims to explore the complex reasons behind the paradox of women’s underrepresentation in history. To this end, it will review the lack of women’s image in history, analyze the impact of social, cultural, and institutional factors on this lack of representation, and explore the gender issues that exist in contemporary society. The paper discusses in detail women's achievements in contemporary society, the embodiment of women’s power, and the struggle for women’s rights, demonstrating the strong capabilities and potential of contemporary women in many fields. The study concludes that the marginalization of women in historical narratives is a result of social structures, cultural norms, and institutional biases. Despite these challenges, contemporary women have made significant strides in various fields, suggesting that gender should not be a determining factor in assessing competence or potential. This paper argues for a greater awareness of gender equality and calls for a fairer and more inclusive reconstruction of historical narratives to ensure that the contributions of all genders are fairly recognized.

Keywords: Disappearing Women in History, Decline of Female Roles in Contemporary Society, Male Dominance and Female Submissiveness, Stereotype about Female

1. Introduction

History is often written by the victors, who tend to be predominantly male, and as a result, there is a significant gender imbalance in the representation of historical figures. Despite their critical role in influencing the course of history, women are frequently sidelined, with their experiences overlooked or overshadowed by those of their male peers. Historically, the study of history has been dominated by a patriarchal viewpoint, resulting in a gender bias in the preservation and representation of historical events. As a result, women's accomplishments and experiences have frequently been undervalued, overlooked, or distorted. This has resulted in a distortion of history and a reluctance to recognize women's broad and multifaceted contributions to society. This paper aims to correct historical omissions and give voice to the voiceless. By restoring the stories of women who have been

marginalized or forgotten, the paper can provide a more accurate and inclusive account of history. This work not only honors these women, but also enriches the understanding of the complex interplay between gender, power, and society throughout history. Through this research, it is possible to better understand the impact of history on contemporary images of women, and to reflect on and address the paradox of contemporary women being seen as the “disadvantaged.”

2. Lack of Female Images in History

This chapter examines the absence of the image of women in history from the perspectives of literature, art, and the historical record. At the same time, the chapter examines the impact of social, cultural, and institutional factors on the absence of the image of women, and the reflection and impact of this absence on the image of women in the modern era. Through these studies, the chapter hopes to reveal the multiple reasons for the absence of the image of women in history.

2.1. The Status of Women in Ancient History and Culture

In ancient societies, the status of women varied by region, culture, and historical period, with a general social structure that favored men over women. The following are specific examples from several different ancient civilizations that reflect the status of women, who were dependent on men in many ways due to differences in biological conditions and for many socio-historical reasons. In ancient Babylon, for example, the “Code of Hammurabi” established marriage as a transactional system based on a contract, usually signed by the husband and the wife’s father rather than by the wife herself, reflecting a view of women as commodities in marriage. And in ancient Greece, especially in Athens, women had little freedom. They could not own or control property, were excluded from the administration of society, and did not have the right to vote or be elected. The remarks of the philosopher Democritus reflected contemporary views of women as the weaker and inferior sex. In the Middle Ages, religious ideology and ecclesiastical influence led to the oppression of women to the point of persecution, and women were targeted in witch trials. In addition, research on the inclusion of women in textbooks found that there were also serious inequalities in the way women were included in texts and illustrations [1].

2.2. Reflection of Female Images in Religion, Literature, and Art

Religion, literature, and art, as the main components of social culture, have had a profound impact on the construction of female images. Many religious doctrines view women as subordinate to men, emphasizing their purity and obedience. In literary works, female images are often portrayed as innocent victims, prostitutes, or objects possessed by men. The female images in artistic works also tend to be objectified and gendered, emphasizing appearance, body, and even sexiness. In the Bible, Eve is depicted as the first female and is believed to have been created from Adam’s rib. This description is typically interpreted to indicate that women are subordinate to men and lack independence and power. And, dating back to the Tang Dynasty, Guanyin in Female Form was the one bodhisattva with the most influence and the closest relationship with women. The compassion of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, is a universal wish for all sentient beings, and it was widely practiced by the general public, particularly women who had long been discriminated against and oppressed by male power during the feudal era, with no control over their own destinies. It has been discovered that the core of religion followed or pursued by the public can also reflect the current state of women. However, Buddhism is still essentially a system created by men and dominated by male power structures [2].

In most of the consistent literary works, women are depicted as colorful or hard-working, but the characters are relatively flat, labeled, and converged. Even in many traditional fairy tales, women

are often portrayed as damsels in distress, such as Cinderella or Snow White, waiting to be rescued by a prince. In classic novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, women are often portrayed as either virtuous and proper (like Jane Bennet) or witty and rebellious (like Elizabeth Bennet), but their characters are not fully developed beyond these traits. Even in contemporary literature, female characters are sometimes portrayed in stereotypical roles, such as the “manic pixie dream girl” trope, where women exist solely to inspire or uplift male characters without having complex personalities of their own [3].

With regard to the representation of women in art, it can be observed that in ancient times, the plump female figure was associated with a higher status in primitive societies, and the prevalence of strong births was also regarded as an indicator of women's well-being. The physical beauty of women at that time was judged by their exuberant fertility, and primitive people held a sense of fertility worship for “plump” women. As mankind entered the age of civilization and was subjected to the constraints of human civilization, the aesthetics of works of art tended to be more oriented to the primitive appearance of women than to exaggerated images. At this time, “plumpness” emphasized more on proportionality and health. However, during this period, the artists’ works were imbued with the flesh and blood of the times, and human desires and lusts were frequently reflected through the female body. This is the reflection of social factors in art [4]. These aesthetic standards reflected the ancient society's values towards women, reflecting their passive position in the social structure.

Though the concept of aesthetics has evolved over time, the image of women has remained largely unchanged. In ancient times, women were depicted as oppressed in folklore, while sculptures, paintings, and other artworks, despite their variations, continued to praise women's value in reproducing offspring. Even after the dissolution of social and cultural constraints in later periods, the portrayal of the female body continues to appeal to men.

2.3. Exclusion of Women from Decision-Making in Politics and Society

The exclusion of women from political and social decision-making is a pervasive problem worldwide, contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality. In many cultures, women have historically been marginalized in political processes, limiting their ability to shape policies and social norms. For example, women in many countries face significant barriers to accessing leadership positions in government, resulting in their underrepresentation in parliaments or congresses. This exclusion from decision-making not only hinders women’s empowerment, but also results in policies and laws that may not adequately address women’s needs and perspectives. And women’s participation in power in China is relatively low, both compared to men and to the rest of the world, and this is one of the main reasons why women's issues are so difficult to become a topic of public policy. In addition to politics, women are often marginalized in business, where they are underrepresented in executive and board positions. This lack of representation limits their influence on corporate strategies and cultures. In addition, societal expectations and stereotypes often relegate women to less influential and decision-making roles, reinforcing their exclusion from key decision-making processes. One notable example is the limited representation of women in peace negotiations and conflict resolution efforts. Research shows that peace agreements are more durable and inclusive when women are involved in their development and implementation. However, women remain underrepresented in such processes, hindering the prospects for sustainable peace in conflict-affected regions. Furthermore, based on the 2019 Finnish parliamentary candidate survey, the analysis shows that even in the context of higher gender equality in Finnish society and politics, clear gender patterns are emerging in election campaigns. Female candidates report campaigning more positively than male candidates, while male candidates are more likely to report campaigning negatively than female candidates. Therefore, women and men are still not playing on an equal footing in politics [5].

3. The Paradox of Male Dominance and Female Submissiveness

3.1. Inequality of Education and Career Opportunities

While women outpace men in higher education enrollment and graduation rates in the United States and most countries around the world, women are underrepresented in academic leadership roles, including chairs in higher education. Relevant research findings suggest that the demographic diversity of faculty and students, gender and diversity support structures, and the broader context in which institutions are embedded predict the likelihood of women advancing to the presidency. In particular, the existence of gender studies programs and a higher percentage of women in state legislatures increase the likelihood that an institution will have its first female president. At a time when higher education in the United States is facing increasing challenges, coupled with the greater opportunities presented by having a more diverse student and faculty, universities and colleges are increasingly recognizing the benefits of female leaders. But the reality is that women's opportunities are being squeezed and even the statistics show that they are not losing out to men in every way and they are not being seen or even remembered [6].

3.2. Imbalance in Family Roles and Burdens

In traditional family beliefs, women are often seen as the main bearers and caregivers in family life. They bear heavy household chores and childcare responsibilities, which limit their career development and personal achievement. At the same time, men's roles and responsibilities in the family do not have the same demands and pressures, which leads to an imbalance in family roles and burdens.

The modern woman's role structure is comprised of three primary roles: family, social, and professional. As society has evolved, the professional role has emerged as a significant social role for women, in addition to the traditional family role. However, the dual demands of society and family have placed women in a state of role contradiction, resulting in considerable mental pressure and psychological confusion. This has had a profound impact on the healthy development of women's bodies and minds.

The societal expectations placed upon women are a complex interplay of gender-specific requirements. These expectations encompass a strong sense of enterprise, including traits such as hard work, competitiveness, perseverance, and independence. Additionally, they encompass feminine traits, such as dependence, flexibility, and easy-goingness, which are deeply rooted in traditional culture. In a male-dominated traditional value system, a man is considered successful as long as he achieves success in his career, such as promotion in position, winning awards for his work, inventions, professional advancement, and making a fortune. Women, on the other hand, are subject to a double standard, which limits their success to being equally successful at work and at home. This traditional prejudice is unfair, irrational, and difficult to overcome. It subjects working women to secular public opinion and their own psychological pressure in a permanent conflict between the two roles.

3.3. Self-Imposed Factors that are Difficult to Overcome

3.3.1. Low Self-Perception due to Social Environment

Insinuating that women are inferior to men and should be the weaker sex, the conventional cultural environment has historically existed even if there is no discernible difference between men and women in terms of IQ, skill, success rate, etc. Because of ingrained societal conceptions, women have long developed an unconsciousness and a belief that there is a difference between men and women in terms of intelligence and productivity. As a result, women have unintentionally or intentionally

created a relationship at work characterized by subordination, reliance, and tolerance for men's opinions. Some women hold the persistent belief that "men are naturally stronger than women" and that they are not able to achieve to the same level as men. Women's self-perception and self-image contribute to their comparatively easy job failure and hinder their professional advancement.

3.3.2. Poor Sense of Competition

Some women perceive the "desire for power" and competition as a male-dominated domain. Others demonstrate an aptitude for understanding themselves when presented with challenges and opportunities for growth. Some aspire to self-reliance and self-improvement in their ideas and behaviors, yet are unable to act to compete for the necessary human capital reserves. Consequently, their time value is not being utilized to its full potential. Some women espouse the values of self-reliance and self-improvement, yet their actions betray a failure to accumulate the human capital necessary for competitiveness. In addition, while some women were talented and ambitious during their academic careers, they subsequently adopted a more relaxed approach to their careers once they had children. This was influenced by the perception that "mothers shine through the glory of their children, and wives are honored by their husbands." In some cases, although their ambition remains unchanged, they are willing to relinquish their careers in order to prioritize their families, husbands, and children when conflicts arise between their families and careers, or between their own careers and those of their husbands [7].

4. Conclusion

In summary, historically, women have been significantly underrepresented in literature, art, and the historical record. Their achievements and roles have often been marginalized or ignored. This phenomenon has led to an interesting paradox: despite the fact that contemporary women have demonstrated great ability and potential in various fields, they are still often considered to be in an "disadvantaged" position compared to men. The impact of this historical and cultural tradition has perpetuated the perception of women as a disadvantaged group in the social structure. However, as societies evolve, it is important to recognize that gender should not be the determining factor in assessing ability or potential. This paper emphasizes the influence of history on the image of contemporary women and calls on all sectors of society to work together to eliminate gender inequality and create a more equal social environment. Nevertheless, it is possible that the data collection and analysis may not be exhaustive, that gender is a concept that is difficult to define, and that people are constantly evolving. Consequently, further in-depth research is required in the future.

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