

The Analytical Reading Discourse of Liberal Feminism in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* through Black Women in Different Generations

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Abstract

The postmodern perspective of liberal feminism relates to women's empowerment. The aim of the study abbreviates liberal feminism in Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. She is a famous postmodern writer. The term liberal feminism explicates women's sufferings and their empowerment. This study considers four liberal thinkers. They are John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft, Martha Nussbaum and Susan Moller Okin. The present study focuses on the theory of liberal feminism. The four liberal feminism thinkers proposed four different liberal feminism aspects in different circumstances. Those ideas are explained in the methodology part. This part splits into four ideas according to liberal feminism thinkers. In this study, the authors have investigated liberal feminism and its aspects in the select text of Evaristo. The results of the study are evaluated with other studies under the postmodern tendency of liberal feminism.

Keywords: liberal feminism, generations, black women, postmodernism, empowerment

1. Introduction

Liberal feminism seems to be the most frequently accepted sociocultural and political theory among feminists, emphasising equitable freedoms and privileges for men and women, as well as the regulation of sexual distinctions. Liberal feminists defend the equality of sexualities and stress the significance of building social, familial, and sexual responsibilities in cultures that promote women's self-realization. They tend to promote a single set of androgynous qualities for both women and men by emphasizing the similarities between men and women rather than the typical differences between them, by emphasizing the nature and character differences between the sexes to the social structure of gender, and by emphasizing the maximum of the nature and character variances between the sexes to the social structure of gender. "Liberal feminism has rarely been expressed in pure form but has been interwoven with other, sometimes contradicting traditions and assumptions," wrote the eminent philosopher and theorist, Valerie Bryson. Nonetheless, it maintains a strong fundamental core of principles founded on the concept that women are rational beings who are permitted to full human rights and that they must be allowed to select their part in life and grow their filled possible in an equal live field with men" (Bryson, 1992). Bryson argued that women should be able to make their own decisions and achieve equal potential in all areas to men. While another well-known theorist, John Stuart Mill, explains liberal feminism as follows: "The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and is now one of the chief obstacles to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality that does not allow any power or privilege on one side or disability on the other" (Mill, 2017)." The melancholy thoughts of regretful outrage have sunk my spirits after examining the history page and monitoring the present world with keen solicitude "The same liberal feminism, according to Mary Wollstonecraft. When compelled to concede that either nature has established a considerable separation between man and man or that the world's civilization thus far has been rather partial, I've sighed." (Wollstonecraft, 1796). "One might sum all of this up by stating that all too frequently women are not recognized as ends in themselves, humans with a dignity that needs respect from laws and institutions," Martha C. Nussbaum writes about liberal feminism. Instead, they are seen as simply means to others' objectives — reproducers,

careers, sexual outlets, and agents of a family's overall well-being. This instrumental value is sometimes very positive and other times it is substantially negative" (Nussbaum, 2000). Mary Wollstonecraft, Martha C. Nussbaum, John Stuart Mill, and Susan Moller Okin are just a few of the renowned liberal feminists.

The purpose of this research is to look at how Bernardine Evaristo's work *Girl, Woman, Other* depicts black women of various eras and liberal feminism. The theoretical technique was employed to conduct this research. The remaining sections of the paper are divided into four groups. The sections are literature review, methodology, discussion, and conclusion. The definition of liberal feminism, as well as various research viewpoints, will discuss in the literature review section. The methodology section examines how liberal feminism publications have been analyzed. The findings of this study will compare to those of other studies in the discussion section. The final section, conclusion, summarizes the research and offers recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

Liberal feminism is a school of thought that emphasises women's ability to maintain their equality via their actions and choices. Liberal feminists argue that society is incorrect in thinking that women are innately less academically and physically capable than men and that women are prejudiced against during the academic, the arena, and the marketplace as a result.

Mary Wollstonecraft was an English author and ardent supporter of women's educational and social equality. She advocated for political change, such as the radical restructuring of national educational systems, to improve women's status. She came to the conclusion that such transformation would be beneficial to everyone in society. Wollstonecraft is well remembered for her article *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), wherein she argues that women are not intrinsically inferior to men, but only appear to be because of a lack of knowledge. She believes that men and women should be recognised as rational beings, and she envisages a society centered on logic. Since 2007, she has been a visiting professor at the Rebro Centre for Gender Excellence. Bryson has written a lot about feminist thought and politics. Her most recent book argues for an inclusive type of socialist feminism that prioritizes women with various disadvantages and recognizes the social, economic, and human value of women's traditionally unpaid care and domestic labor (Pandeewari, Hariharasudan & Kot, 2021). *Feminist Political Theory* offers a comprehensive history of Western feminist thinking as well as a clear explanation of current issues. It provides an accessible and thought-provoking overview of complex theories as they relate to 'real-world' topics, including sexual violence, political representation, and family life (Evaristo, 2019).

John Stuart Mill was an English philosopher and political economist. One of the most influential intellectual figures of the nineteenth century was John Stuart Mill. He made contributions to a variety of subjects, including economics, epistemology, logic, and psychology. His utilitarian approach and liberal theory, on the other hand, have lasted the longest. He was indeed the largest source of sociological theory, political science, and social economics and one of classical liberalism's most important philosophers. He was dubbed "the most influential English-speaking philosopher of the nineteenth century" because he saw liberty as justifying individual liberty in the face of unrestricted state and social control. It is necessary to discuss Mill's own intellectual history in order to comprehend his philosophical contribution (Pandeewari, Hariharasudan & Nawaz, 2021). He aimed to unite the finest of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking with newly developing nineteenth-century Romantic and historical-philosophical currents in this way. The famous works of Mill are *System of Logic* (1843), *On Liberty* (1859), *Utilitarianism* (1861). According to Susan J. Hekman, the most important aspect of Mill's work from a historical standpoint is its combining the two primary characteristics of the 20th century: fairness and alteration. Mill's effort exemplifies pardon remained at the heart of nineteenth-century progressive liberal feminism: the case for women's equality and, as a result, their inclusion as equals in the social and political domains. From a twentieth-century viewpoint, we might argue that this approach must exclude an argument for women's separate 'nature' if it is to be coherent. This, however, is an attempt to impose twentieth-century ideas and definitions on Mill's conversation. Perhaps a more accurate conclusion is that nineteenth-century generous liberals create no conflict in claiming that women are equal and different at the same time. We might want to divide these debates today because they reflect two opposing feminism camps in the twentieth century. However, it does not follow that we necessity laid this limit scheduled Mill; what Mill has shown us is that in the liberal progressivism that he advocated, equality and difference were not mutually exclusive. Rather than using Mill's 'mistakes' to criticise his position, we should explore the twentieth-century divide between equality and difference. We could be perplexed as to why we find these notions diametrically opposed while 19th-century liberalism, on which 20th-century feminism is built, deemed them compatible. (Mill, 2008). Bernardine Evaristo, through the character Gracie in her work *Girl, Woman, Other*, shares a similar viewpoint That is, she wanted to change all things plus the long-standing public library storeroom

overcrowded through earliest books; Joseph said no, they were significant activities and accounts, he'd category it out a single day, and he put a catch on it; he believed the roll-top counter and sat at it once a workweek to do the books, satisfied when in-goings topped out-goings, strong-minded to keep the farmhouse in income, with an eye on growing into neighbouring parks darks (Evaristo, 2019).

Susan Moller Okin was a well-known political theorist whose work encompassed political philosophy as well as gender, family, and cultural issues. Okin maintained that liberalism, when properly defined as an ideology against social hierarchies and in favor of individual liberty and equality, provides the instruments for condemning the large and systematic inequities between men and women. A feminist belief shaped her thinking that ideas of justice must apply equally to men and women, and she was passionate about demonstrating how many previous and current political theories failed to do so. She worked to rehabilitate political doctrines, particularly liberal egalitarianism, to accept gender equality and improve the situation of women and families in a world marked by vast gender disparities. Okin's publications look at how liberal political thought needs to be altered in order for women to achieve equal positions. Much of Okin's subsequent work deals with global justice concerns, particularly those addressing women's rights. Before moving on to global justice concerns, Okin states the major contributions of liberal political philosophy.

Martha Nussbaum is an English philosopher, theoretician, and legal expert whose work spans greek and roman philosophy, legal philosophy, morality, aesthetics, philosophically feminism, political theory, and educational philosophy. Also, for her artistic contributions to modern discussions on human rights, social and international justice, economic development, political feminism and women's rights, LGBTQ rights, economic injustice, diversity, the significance of liberal arts or humanities education, and animal rights. *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997), *Sex and Social Justice* (1998), are notable works of Nussbaum.

Wendy Donner stated that Empathy for others is the foundation of moral development, and it is from this two commonly held feminist notions an emphasis on feelings and sympathetic bonds to others arise. Altruistic feelings are inherent in human nature. These feelings of sympathy, which must be cultivated, underpin both generalised moral impulses and social feelings or sociality. Mill's refusal to elevate one over the other substantially impacts both his self-development theory and his egalitarian liberalism. Mill's refusal to prioritise one over the other has a significant impact on his egalitarian liberalism and self-development philosophy. The process begins with the development of our general human capacities throughout early socialisation, and as we grow older, we take control of this process as individuals and continue it as a self-development process. In this period, we focus on developing higher-order capacities such as individuality, autonomy, and sociality. Sociality and cooperation are given equal weight to autonomy and individuality in these talents, which are also holistically balanced. Mill is adamant on the position of freedom and individuality in foremost a decent lifetime. His worldview is feminism-friendly due to his ideals of individuality and autonomy, as well as his balance of various facets of self-development (Donner, 1993).

With its emphasis on rational thought, perfectibilism, residency, and education, enlightenment feminism was undeniably consistent with traditional utilitarian theory, which got to share the enlightened being's womanist focus on the rational – the par excellence functionalist in the Bentham-James Mill mould being the extensively rational, analytic man. Mill, for one, broke out from the mould. Mill's ultimate departure from his father's and Bentham's classical utilitarianism can be summarised as follows: his enlightenment-feminism modified utilitarianism emphasised the individual's potential for self-development and the need for an educated public, and by embracing women in this vision, it evolved into liberal feminism. Because he retained the traditional utilitarian view of the individual as shaped by the environment, Mill positioned such focus on demonstrating that a woman's climate was significantly distinct from a person's and that social conditioning and education provided adequate explanations for any evident differences between women and men. 'Experience cannot possibly have decided between two courses, so long as there has only been the experience of one,' he claimed, arguing that the status quo was not inevitable' (Mill, 2008).

Kristina Rolin stated that Schiebinger's perspective is a smart compromise between liberal and difference feminism. She contends that gender equality policies must be guided by studies of gender in science's culture and content in order to be effective: "What we need is a strong working relationship between scholars active in producing gender critiques of research and those doing science," she says. However, feminists should avoid "feminist scientific" ideas that exalt sympathetic, non-dominating, green, or people-friendly science, she claims. Feminism can provide science with techniques for gender analysis that can be used to improve science. Integrating a heightened understanding of gender into the fundamental training of young scientists along with their daily practises Schiebinger shows that

applying gender analysis methodologies to the research of female scientists leads to a better comprehension as to why the enough that "pipe model" of gender parity legislation is inadequate. According to the pipeline model, more girls and women entering the schooling end of the pipeline would lead to more women becoming scientists and academics. In this paradigm, women's low participation in science is viewed as the result of a self-selection process rather than discrimination. "The pipeline model, which is based on the liberal assumption that women (and minorities) should assimilate to current scientific practises, does not provide insight into how the structure of institutions or current scientific practises must change before women can comfortably join the ranks of scientists," says the report (Rolin 2004).

On the other hand, liberal feminist philosophy is founded on the fundamental values of democracy, equal citizenry, autonomy, and universal rights. (Tong, 2009). Ideology centred on the ideals of fairness, fairness, and equal opportunity supports individual rights (Maynard, 1995). Liberal feminism is founded on the premise that there are no basic biological distinctions between men and women. As a result, females should have equitable learning, social, economic, and legal rights. (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016). Liberal feminism's conceptual foundation is the belief that "gender differences are not based on biology, and so women and men are not all that different" (Lorber, 1997, p. 9). Women and men have the same civil rights. As a result, society should treat them equally, and their similarity necessitates equal treatment under the law (Lorber, 1997; Khattak, 2011).

3. Methodology

Mary Wollstonecraft is a well-known theorist who stated that feminism is a way of life "Women are taught from an early age, and by their mothers' example, that a little knowledge of human weakness, aptly referred to as cunning, the softness of temper, outward obedience, and scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety are all desirable qualities. It will secure their safety from man; and if they are attractive, everything else will be unnecessary for at least the next twenty years of their life" (Wollstonecraft, 1792). This is Wollstonecraft's fundamental argument for why women are subordinate to men: every part of their upbringing is directed toward making them weak, docile, and dependent on men from the moment they are born. Similarly, each theorist's view of feminism is unique and diverse. Mary Wollstonecraft, Martha C. Nussbaum, and John Stuart Mill are important feminist theorists. According to Mary Wollstonecraft, women have been trained to just desire to be beautiful to attract males. They enjoy their own fragility and lack of physical strength. They get into squabbles with other females. They have no other interests or commitments because they are confined to the private sphere. They are unable to utilize reason or completely perfect their souls since they are in this dependent state. Mothers develop and sculpt their daughters' personalities, which become even more ossified when they attend boarding schools. In their youth, they are lured to guys of poor reputation because they admire valiant individuals and wish to enjoy their thoughts and feelings. All of this is related to their upbringing; they rarely have a method to break free from the instructional structure. Similarly, in her novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, Benardine Evaristo's character Amma expresses the same sentiment: "She didn't tell them she'd taken her father for granted and carried her blinkered, self-righteous perspective of him from childhood through his death, when in fact he'd done nothing wrong except fail to live up to her feminist expectations of him" (Evaristo 2019).

In the first paragraph of *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill states the central argument: "The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one hand, nor disability on the other" (Mill, 1984:261). Mill's critique of women's social standing is based on his examination of the societal injustices that keep women out of public and civic life, politics, and decision-making (Priyadharshini, Mohan, Hariharasudan, & Sangeetha, 2021). He emphasizes that social injustice is one of the most significant impediments to human progress and moral improvement. Similarly, in her novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, Benardine Evaristo expresses a similar viewpoint through the character of Bummi, who has become a businesswoman. That was her initial deal, and she addressed inconspicuously missing when he extracted a cover of money from his shirt pocket, less-interest finance to be rewarded in two years it could have occupied double as extended to excluding a sector of it on her income (Evaristo, 2019).

Feminist philosophy, according to Martha C. Nussbaum, has frequently been critical of universal normative methods. It is possible to describe a framework for feminist philosophical practise that is both firmly humanist, dedicated to passing norms of justice, inclusivity, and privileges, and delicate to local peculiarity, plus numerous ways wherein situations shape not only choices but also values and preferences. International feminism is neither imperialist nor oblivious to difference, and a particular kind of universalism, defined in terms of total human possibilities and

development, provides us with the optimal framework for comprehending difference. Women are nurturers and givers of love. The traditional duty of women in almost all societies is to raise children and care for the home, spouse, and family. These positions have been linked to a number of significant moral characteristics, including selfless care, responsiveness to others' needs, and a willingness to put others' wants ahead of one's own. They have also been linked to a number of distinct moral qualities, including the ability to identify others' specific situations and wants, as well as the ability to think creatively about how to address those needs. Any effective universalist feminism must include these virtues and skills. Feminists have long criticised male universalist theories for allegedly ignoring these important values, arguing that universal approaches based on liberal ideas of dignity and equality simply cannot accommodate them. In the novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo has created a similar image through the character of Penelope. Penelope resolved to go to college, could like to marry a man who venerated her, wish to become an educator, and consume offspring in order to seal the wide, throbbing abyss private her, the sensation of existence unmoored, unloved, and done by no one. Penelope had zeroed in on Giles, the eighteen-year-old rugger head of the school, and what a fastening he was, with his Heathcliff appearances and competition swagger that cleared weaker lads away (Evaristo, 2019)

Susan Moller Okin claimed that just because women work more hours and earn more money does not mean they are more equal. We are frequently referred to as being in a postfeminist era. This claim is untrue, regardless of whether connotation is intended, due in part to the misplaced emphasis on women who have "made it." It is incorrect to say that feminism has been defeated, and it is also untrue to say that it is no longer needed since its goals have been achieved. Women will not be able to achieve equality in politics, the workplace, or any other arena unless there is fairness inside the family. She claims that feminism has damaged the family because of its opposition to conventional sex roles and that it "ends, like many modern movements seeking abstract justice, in abandoning nature and employing force to refashion human people to attain that justice" (Okin, 1989). She claims that if women refuse to be full-time mothers, men will refuse to be fathers at all because they will no longer be gaining enough from family life to have any commitment to it. Women must lure men into marriage and then pander to and care for their children's fathers in order to get their children's fathers to support them while they accomplish this. In the novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo expresses a similar sentiment through the character of Amma, who wishes for her daughter to be free, feminist, and powerful. As a result, Amma enrolls her in private progress sequences for offspring in order to stretch her sureness and self-expression to flourish in slightly location. This is a large error. Mum, it would be detrimental to my youthful growth if you shortened my actions at this serious step in my trip near attractive the independent-minded and completely self-expressed mature you imagine me to be, Yazz said at fourteen when she was headfirst to go to Interpretation Song Anniversary with her supports (Evaristo, 2019).

4. Discussion

According to Sajjadul Karim, race, class, and gender are entwined in *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola is forced to the edges of town and into marginality, both literally and metaphorically, by people infected with the self-hatred virus. The feminist movement, dubbed "women's liberation" in the late 1960s, had its origins in an understanding of this personal-political junction. Modern feminism arose from demonstrations against the exploitation and oppression of black people. Domestic abuse, rape, and incest were at the forefront of the black women's liberation movement in the 1970s, and *The Bluest Eye* covers these topics. While the logical reasons for black – indeed human – rights obviously implied a rethink of gender relations, women's participation in this movement was typically limited to traditional and subordinate tasks (Hariharasudan, 2020). In the 1960s, women began experiencing "awareness rising" in the same way that black Americans did; so many black people became aware of their exploitation and privileges, so did many women. Liberal feminists think that female subordination stems from a range of cultural and legal restrictions that prohibit women from accessing and participating in so public domain. They work to achieve gender equality through political and legal reform (Karim, 2020). In her novel *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo shares insight through the character of LaTisha; she dressed well to have a date with him. She prepared herself with a beautiful dress, heels and other ornaments. As deliberated, he picked her from her home instead of a Caribbean restaurant on the tall road (Evaristo, 2019).

Gender, ideology, and power are all tricky concepts. Furthermore, the patriarchal ideology framework and social practises such as "social identity, including sexuality, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, social class and position, and geographical place" attribute gender. Gender ideas are discursively formed, claimed, and denied in text and talk within a context. Depending on the circumstances of time and place, the hierarchical relationship results in the separation of responsibilities between men and women. Bernardine Evaristo consistently delivers supporting information in her novel *Girl, Woman, Other* through the character Megan, who textures herself detaching sheets of what has been forced completed the following month (Hariharasudan & Gnanamony, 2017). On account of getting to

the central of herself, she speculated whether she should have been born a male since she did not sense as a woman. Then she speculated whether it was the root of her problems. When she returned home after finishing the work, she could hear the intimate relationship noise from the neighbour's house, where she could feel herself. She could go to the extreme level self realizing at that moment. She has closed her ears to protect her feelings and emotions (Hariharasudan & Pandeewari, 2020). She wanted to determine her gender identity, whether male or female. Through the character Megan, the author has clearly shown how her character determines her gender identity and how she was strong on that. Finally, Megan trusted the internet is the solution for her to understand her feeling and emotions and know her gender. (Evaristo, 2019)

Liberal feminism has been one of the most visible and popular varieties of feminism, according to Mansur Fakh; for liberal feminists, establishing equality between the sexes is the ultimate goal. Liberal feminism is a school of thought that emphasises women's ability to maintain their equality through their actions and choices. Liberal feminism is based on the enlightenment beliefs that both men and women have unique characteristics (Fakh, 1996). Mama has worked all seven days in a week for her daughter. It was challenging work for a woman; moreover, generally, a woman may not go to such kind of labour work, but mama did. Labi found how mama's work and how she determined herself for life. Then Labi told mama not to carry woods in the field. She is not an idiot to carry those wood; instead, she can help operate the buzz. Mama was pleased that she had work because her daughter's single class is important rather than having a meal. Mama struggled a lot to bring up her daughter; that is why she wants her daughter to be educated so that if her daughter's future husband may not help her, she could manage her family alone with the support of education. (Evaristo, 2019)

The restricted emphasis of Rawls' theory, which excludes comprehensive doctrines from a debate in heterogeneous communities, provides little if any room for argument concerning culture in liberal democracies or other well-ordered, although hierarchical civilizations. It has little to say about societies like the one under debate, which have a popular constitutional commitment to abolishing hierarchy and a multiculturalism policy that helps to shelter hierarchical cultural practices from liberal egalitarian criticism. A new rebirth of liberal feminism offers a perspective that engages more critically with culture and certain expressions of diversity, taking liberal political theory in a completely different path than Rawlsian theory.

Michael Burke claimed that the Equal Opportunity Board's decision is based on the fact that the relevant portion of the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act³ enables for the following exception in competitive sporting activities: 'An individual could exclude people of one sex from participating in a competitive sporting activity in which competitors' strength, stamina, or physique is relevant.' What must be noticed about this exception, referred to as the anatomical outlier clause, is that it allows players either of sex to be excluded from contests versus individuals of the other sex based on their sex's average anatomical traits, rather than individual sporting achievement. Sporting engagement, as a form of symbolic communication, conveys strong and enduring notions about the natures and capacities of men and women, as well as the connection between the two sexes. The sporting world is an all-pervasive symbol of gendered hierarchy. The ideologies of sports performed exclusively by males or in sex-divided competitions offer symbolic support to women's oppression in sport and society. On the other hand, elite female athletes' participation in mixed-gender sports may challenge some of the ideologies that perpetuate women's oppression. (Burke, 2010) Through the character Gracie in her work *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo shares a similar viewpoint. That is, she wanted to finish all things. Also, the library locker was overcrowded with primaevial registers; Joseph said that those were imperative actions and histories he made in a single day. He made a catch on it; he believed the roll-top bureau and sat at it once a week to do the books, content when in-goings has outdone out-goings, planned to make the homestead in turnover, with an eye on intensifying into neighbouring grounds dusks Gracie (Hekman, 1992).

5. Conclusion

The aim of the study spotlights liberal feminism in Bernardine Evaristo's work *Girl, Woman, Other* through black women in different generations. This study employed the liberal feminism theories of Stuart Mill, Martha Nussbaum, Wollstonecraft and Susan Moller Okin. The introduction has clearly introduced liberal feminism and others' views on liberal feminism. In the literature review, many studies have been conducted related to liberal feminism in different novels. The methodology section has clearly examined various theorist views on liberal feminism and Bernardine Evaristo's similar ideas in Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. The findings of this study are compared to other studies in the discussion section. This study proves that liberal feminism is applicable in Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* through substantiation of liberal feminist and their theories.

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