

The Judgment Continues: Eighteenth Century Stereotypes and The Modern Woman

Early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft directly confronted the female stereotypes of the eighteenth century in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Over 50 years later, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wrote an epic poem, *Aurora Leigh*, about a female artist who must decide between marriage and her profession. Both Wollstonecraft and Browning believed that women should not value marriage over career and encouraged women to focus on intellect, not outer beauty, and to pursue the more rigorous studies left for men, including science and mathematics. After tracing the arguments of both authors, this co-authored paper uses current educational and social research to argue that while less obvious, eighteenth century stereotypes continue to affect women today. Educational research demonstrates that young children become aware of gender roles and expectations from an early age, a problem that can affect their future prospects. Despite Wollstonecraft's and Browning's defiance of social norms, these gender biases continue. For example, the focus in women's magazines on external beauty reflects continuation of the social pressure to marry. In the professional world, the 77 cent wage gap, the glass ceiling, and the lack of women in the STEM fields demonstrate that equality has not yet been achieved. While today's causes are different from Wollstonecraft's and Browning's, feminists are still working to end lingering eighteenth century stereotypes.

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