

# EXTENDED ESSAY

**Subject:** WSEE 4

**Title:** Gender Inequality in the Workplace in 1929 and 2016

**Research Question:** How Does the Literature of Woolf and Adichie Echo Societal Mores on Women's Access To and Functioning Within the Workplace in Britain in 1929 and 2016?

**Global Issue:** Gender inequality

**Local Example:** The UK

**Theme:** Gender inequality in education and the workplace

**IB Subjects:** English Literature and Geography

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## Introduction

It is only in the last hundred years that the concept of women's studies has come into being, let alone become a pertinent current issue. The word feminism was first used in English in the 1890s, during which time women were campaigning for equal political and legal rights in what is now known as the first wave of feminism.<sup>1</sup> In written works from different eras is evidence of varying forms of oppression faced by women at the time of that piece's publication. Statistics such as female employment rate from different years likewise reveal what the societal views of women may have been, in this case a high number would indicate higher equality. Therefore both English literature and Geography are relevant to this study.

"A Room of One's Own" is an essay by Virginia Woolf. Woolf was born in Kensington, London, in 1882. At the age of 30, she formed part of the Bloomsbury Group, dedicated to art, literature, politics and discussion. Woolf is well known for her novels "Mrs Dalloway" and "The Waves". "A Room of One's Own" was first published in 1929, it was expanded from talks at the two women's colleges at Cambridge about Women and Fiction.<sup>2</sup> Woolf gave these lectures at the same time that women gained the right to vote; a hard-won event which greatly influenced Woolf's writing. In the essay, Woolf speaks to the audience as herself but writes from the perspective of an unknown, fictional narrator who describes the events of the days leading up to the real lecture Woolf gave. The main premise of the text is: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write."

"We Should All Be Feminists" is an essay by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1977. After initially studying medicine and pharmacy for a year in Nigeria, she changed her mind and moved to the US where she studied political science, creative writing and more.<sup>3</sup> She is now a celebrated

<sup>1</sup> New World Encyclopedia, s.v. "feminism," last modified 5 April, 2017. Accessed July, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Biography.com Editors, "Virginia Woolf Biography.com," last modified July 20, 2017. Accessed July, 2017, <https://www.biography.com/people/virginia-woolf-9536773>

<sup>3</sup> Daria Tunca, "The Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Website," last modified 2016. Accessed January 2017, <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnabiblio.html>

author known for her short stories, nonfiction and novels, including “Purple Hibiscus” and “Americanah” which have each won many awards. Her essay “We Should All Be Feminists” was first presented as a TED talk in 2012. After its success it was published as a book in 2015. In the book she shared her experiences being an “African feminist”, as well as her views on gender stereotypes and sexuality. Her main premise is: “We must raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently.”

What links these two essays is that they were both widely known in their time. “A Room of One's Own” was published during a time of great change in Britain, particularly concerning women's rights. According to Woolf, between 10,000 and 11,000 copies were sold in Britain in the first five months;<sup>4</sup> astonishingly higher than her previous publication “Orlando”. “We Should All Be Feminists” is also widely popular; the writers' news magazine *Publishers Weekly* commented: “Another book moved by current events, 2015's “We Should All Be Feminists” [...] received a fair amount of mainstream coverage in the lead-up to the inauguration and the Women's March on Washington.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, every 16 year old in Sweden was to receive a copy of the book thanks to the Swedish Women's Lobby.<sup>6</sup> Even pop-culture has recognised the piece, with some phrases from the talk incorporated into Beyoncé song ‘Flawless’.

The resources used in this essay include the two main essays written by Woolf and Adichie, non-fiction books and academic papers about society and/or feminism in 1929 and 2016, articles about the authors or recent information for 2016, websites/online databases with information about the authors or statistics from 1929 and 2016.

<sup>4</sup> The University of Alabama in Huntsville, “Frequently Asked Questions: A Room of One's Own,” last modified January 20, 1998. Accessed June, 2017, <http://www.uah.edu/woolf/roomreception.html>

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Juris, “Movers & Shakers,” *Publishers Weekly*, January 27, 2017. Accessed May, 2017, <https://www.publishersweekly.com>

<sup>6</sup> Alison Flood, “Every 16-year-old in Sweden to receive copy of We Should All Be Feminists,” *The Guardian*, December 4, 2015. Accessed June, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/04/every-16-year-old-in-sweden-to-receive-copy-of-we-should-all-be-feminists>

## Women and education

### Woolf

In “A Room of One’s Own”, much of the narrative Woolf uses throughout the book takes place in the fictional university of Oxbridge, inspired by the restricted lawns and paternal prestige of Oxford and Cambridge. This setting is not only fitting for Woolf’s main purpose of addressing female writers, but also due to the fact that an education was - and remains - a crucial first step to allow equal opportunity between men and women; with a solid foundation of education comes opportunities for employment. The narrator is about to walk into the library at Oxbridge, but instantly her way is barred by a “silvery, kindly gentleman”<sup>7</sup> who informs her that she is forbidden to enter the college unless accompanied by a Fellow of the College or has a letter of permission. She uses the word “kindly” sarcastically to contradict his condescending action of barring her entry to the college. It is clear that though this type of limitation was common for 1929, the narrator is angry at the rejection and vows “never will I ask for that hospitality again,”<sup>8</sup> implying that women were not in accordance with the patronising treatment they received.

Despite this inequality, there had been great development in Britain for several years prior. The government passed the Education Act of 1902 disbanding school boards in lieu of set local tax rates for all schools, which led to 1000 new secondary schools opening by 1914, including 349 for girls.<sup>9</sup> The Education Act of 1918 was also passed, raising the school leaving age to 14 from 10 for all students.<sup>10</sup> However, despite these legal changes, it took some time for public perceptions to evolve alongside. Octavia Wilberforce, a pioneering female

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, (Penguin Books, 1929), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 333.

<sup>10</sup> Spartacus Educational, “1918 Education Act,” last modified April, 2016. Accessed March, 2017, <http://spartacus-educational.com/ED1918.htm>



physician and friend of Virginia, wrote about the attitudes towards girls' education in her autobiography: "education for girls in England was not generally accepted as essential to their background. [...] The main object was [...] to gain a suitable husband, to produce large families and be accomplished in the art of managing servants."<sup>11</sup> The Sex Disqualification Act of 1919 made it easier for women to go to university and enter professions including the law, teaching and clerking, and allowed women to vote before the age of 30. However, the civil service was less than enthusiastic about the prospect of women being able to join higher ranks of the workforce, so numerous provisos were added to the Act allowing them to exclude women from certain areas.<sup>12</sup> Before October of 1920 at Oxford University, women were forbidden from becoming members or graduating. They had been able to attend lectures and take examinations to gain honours, but were not given degrees. Even after being allowed to join, female members were made to take separate "Examinations for Women."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, one of the salient points of Woolf's essay addresses the differences in educational experiences of men and women - as women were believed to be naturally inferior in academic standards.

The narrator returns home and discusses the founding of the women's college at Oxbridge with her friend Mary Seton, noting that it required "a long struggle" to raise the necessary funds and gain support from the government. She openly compares this to the generous support received by male colleges. Mary outlines how the women's college would have been set up in 1860, "rooms were hired. Committees met. Envelopes were addressed."<sup>14</sup> Woolf uses short sentences to emphasise the volume of steps which were necessary for the college to be opened, and to show the ruthless efficiency which was required for success. Then, Mary imitates those responsible for setting up the college: "Can't we find a pretty

<sup>11</sup> Spartacus Educational, "Women and Schooling," last modified February, 2015. Accessed March, 2017, <http://spartacus-educational.com/Wschool.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Women in the Law: Inspired and Inspiration, "The Sex (Disqualification) Removal Act 1919," last modified July, 2015. Accessed March, 2017, <https://womenandthelegalprofession.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/the-sex-disqualification-removal-act-1919/>

<sup>13</sup> Bodleian Libraries, "First Woman Graduate," last modified 2007. Accessed February, 2017, <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/oua/enquiries/first-woman-graduate>

<sup>14</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 23.

girl to sit in the front row?” She uses questions to be deliberately contentious and ironic, illustrating the chaotic and over-complicated manner in which the college was set up. This particular question about the pretty girl is similarly sardonic. It shows that women had to sacrifice their dignity and conform to the very expectations they were fighting against in order to get the change they wanted. Woolf links these obstacles to the narrator’s experiences that day. She reflects back on the Fellow who denied her access to the library, and earlier still when a Beadle informed her that women were not allowed on the grass. These incidents of restriction represent the intellectual challenges and prejudices women faced. The denial of access to amenities and education was largely responsible for the low rates of working women in 1929.

## Adichie

Contrary to “A Room of One’s Own”, in Adichie’s “We Should All Be Feminists” references to schooling don’t focus on an inequality of access to education - in an MEDC like England girls and boys receive the same education. According to the WEF, women and men in Britain have equal literacy rates of 99% and equal enrolment in primary education of 100%. Surprisingly, 1% more women than men are enrolled in secondary education, and 15% more women are enrolled in tertiary education than men.<sup>15</sup> This is unique to the 21st century and already shows a significant change in issues compared to those Woolf addresses in the 1920s. Instead, Adichie’s essay looks at a more nuanced problem; the inequality of status within the classroom between boys and girls, for example, the fields of study that which are decidedly male-dominated.

Inequality in education is introduced with a story from Adichie’s childhood. In her primary school, students who did well in tests were allowed to become class monitor.<sup>16</sup> Nine-year-old Adichie was eager to have this power and received top

<sup>15</sup> World Economic Forum, “Global Gender Gap Report 2016,” last modified 2016. Accessed June, 2017 <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/>

<sup>16</sup> A position where you could write down the names of “noise-makers” each day, and carry a cane (but not use it)

marks on the test. Still, the teacher gave the position to the highest scoring boy in the class, “She had forgotten to make that clear earlier; she assumed it was obvious.” Adichie uses this incident to illustrate her point that if something happens too regularly, it will become “normal”. She uses anaphora in the following paragraph, repeating the word “If” at the beginning of every sentence, “If we do this over and over again, it becomes normal”. The repetition creates rhythm which makes her point more memorable; it also gives an impression of possibility or choice to her statements; “If only boys are made class monitor, then [...] we will all think [...] that the class monitor has to be a boy”.<sup>17</sup> She states it's inevitable that we only associate power with boys, if only boys get the position of power. However “if” is hopeful too - it leaves space for change, it's not too late for another option. Finally, two sentences are similarly structured and thus directly comparable, showing how her anecdote of the class monitor links to the broader concept, “only seeing male CEOs will give the impression that only men can be CEOs”.

Adichie highlights intellectual inequality as one main reason for the continued divide between males and females in education. She identifies the origin of perceived male superiority from a thousand years ago: “physical strength was the most important attribute for survival; [the strongest were] more likely to lead.”<sup>18</sup> So since men are generally physically stronger than women, it was only natural that men were the leaders back when civilisations were first emerging. Adichie then goes on to explain that as we evolved as a species, “The person more qualified to lead is not the physically stronger person.” but the most intelligent person. She uses italics on “not” to mark it as the most important word in her statement, stressing the indisputability of her point that physical strength no longer has any bearing on leadership. In her subsequent anaphora: “the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, the more creative...” she is creating a new definition for “leader” with convincing repetition and rhetoric. In spite of the translation of strength to intelligence as the most highly regarded attribute, Adichie ends the paragraph by saying that “our ideas of gender have not evolved very much.”

<sup>17</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, (Anchor Books, 2015), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, 17.



Though there is no biological difference between the intellectual capacities of men and women, by the time intelligence became valued, women were already thought of as the weaker sex and viewed as only good for housework, small tasks and the bearing and raising children.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, women were thought to be as intellectually inferior as they were physically. As previously discussed, it was only around the 1920s when Woolf was alive that real change was taking place to reverse the association of intellectual inferiority with females.

The Institute of Physics carried out research in 2011 which found that in 46% of English schools, 0 female students chose to study A-level physics.<sup>20</sup> This happened despite the fact that there was no difference in the academic achievements of boys and girls in GCSE physics. Similarly, according to director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, at the UCL Institute of Education in London, “girls from single-sex schools were more likely to take male-dominated subjects such as maths and science at school.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, they ended up earning slightly higher wages than girls from mixed schools. Although girls have access to the same education as boys, they are generally viewed as less scientifically minded. This view consequently restricts their choices in education, and propagates male-dominated fields such as physics or mathematics - in 2015, only 12.8% of the UK STEM workforce were women.<sup>22</sup> These more nuanced disparities between the sexes were identified by Adichie in her essay, however they are generally absent from Woolf’s, because in 1929 the lack of equal opportunity was the primary concern of feminists.

<sup>19</sup> Mavis E. Mate, *Trade and Economic Developments, 1450-1550*, (Boydell Press, 2006), 2-7.

<sup>20</sup> Institute of Physics, “It’s Different for Girls,” last modified March, 2012. Accessed January 2017, [https://www.iop.org/education/teacher/support/girls\\_physics/file\\_58199.pdf](https://www.iop.org/education/teacher/support/girls_physics/file_58199.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Sean Coughlan, “Girls ‘get better GCSE results in all-girl schools’,” *BBC News*, January 28, 2016. Accessed November, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/education-35419284>

<sup>22</sup> George Arnett, “How well are women represented in UK science?,” *The Guardian*, June 13, 2015. Accessed November, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2015/jun/13/how-well-are-women-represented-in-uk-science>

## Women at work

### Woolf

“A Room of One’s Own” handles the issue of inequality for women at work, the overarching question of the essay being: “Why are women poor?” Woolf stated that money was absolutely essential for women to be emancipated. During the First World War (just before Woolf’s essay was written) huge numbers of men were forced to leave their homes in Britain to fight. This meant that the women left at home had to take over jobs from their husbands, fathers and brothers. They became police officers, factory workers, farmers and more. The number of women in the workforce rose from 23.6% of the working age population to 46.7% in just four years.<sup>23</sup> This situation was crucial in proving women’s worth and competence in later debates, however, in 1929 it did not shift the popular opinion that women would be less productive than men. When soldiers returned to reclaim their jobs, many women were either fired or paid lower wages (this led to some of the earliest demands for equal pay). At the beginning of the thirties, there were only 2810 women doctors and 195 women lawyers.<sup>24</sup>

To illustrate the issue of how women were perceived at work, Woolf told the story of Shakespeare’s sister Judith, a fictional character invented by the narrator with a talent equal to that of her brother. She never received the same education as her brother, and had to teach herself, “on the sly”<sup>25</sup> implying that her reading would be frowned upon, and had to be kept a secret. Her parents loved her, she was “the apple of her father’s eye”. Woolf uses this famous saying as if paraphrasing Judith’s father, showing his affection for her and indicating that it was the force of her own gift alone that drove her to leave. After being rejected from theatres and falling pregnant, Judith kills herself. Woolf attributes this to, “the heat and violence

<sup>23</sup> S. Anitha and R. Pearson, “Women’s work in WW1,” *Striking Women. Lincoln: University of Lincoln*, last modified 2013. Accessed December, 2016, <http://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/world-war-i-1914-1918>

<sup>24</sup> Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain*, (Macmillan, 1992), 94.

<sup>25</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 55.

of a poet's heart when tangled in a woman's body". Her heart is personified, almost like a wild animal. Her body is described separately, as a cage that her heart got "tangled" up in. This separation of her heart and body shows that gender has no bearing on poetic talent, and Judith's heart could equally have been caught in a man's body, ultimately illustrating that Judith was a poet before she was a woman. The stark difference between the stories of Judith and William is such that it's almost unbelievable, but it is logical and proves an important point: it is impossible for there to have been a woman with Shakespeare's success during his time, the views of society constrict genius when it doesn't come from an acceptable source.

Woolf argues during her essay that women must have "a room of their own" if they want independence. This doesn't just mean a physical space to work in, but solitude and fiscal independence, something women had been denied for centuries. As previously mentioned, the Education Act of 1918 meant that women were better educated, and the Sex Disqualification Act of 1919 helped more women to go to university. Growing numbers of women gained employment, typically in the civil service industry, (though they were mainly at administrative levels whilst men continued to occupy more high-ranking posts). However, despite advancements, one issue was conspicuous to Woolf: 'The Marriage Bar' - the informal practice of firing a woman after she married, or refusing to hire a married women.<sup>26</sup> It was used by employers who saw that single women were more flexible, they argued that married women would have their husbands to support them so they didn't need to work. It also became conveniently cost effective since they would not have to pay these women a fixed salary. Hence many women were left to become housewives (as marriage was the only means to financial security).

The room Woolf describes is symbolic, representing free time, privacy and financial independence, all areas of gross disparity between women and men. When the campaign started for equal pay in 1920 many companies were openly

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<sup>26</sup> MBASKool, "Marriage Bar," last modified 2014. Accessed April 2017, <http://www.mbaskool.com/business-concepts/human-resources-hr-terms/16846-marriage-bar.html>



against it as they were afraid of losing money; even trade unions were against equal pay as they thought it would lower men's wages.<sup>27</sup> Woolf's essay didn't simply demonstrate how inequality was for female writers, but how difficult it was for any women who wanted independence

## Adichie

Adichie likewise identifies money as a source of inequality in the workplace, and the key to independence and emancipation for women. However, as with education, the problems faced by women in the workplace today are not the same as those faced by women in the inter-war period. There are 71 women to 82 men who are part of the labour force participation in the UK.<sup>28</sup> According to the Office for National Statistics, 70% of women aged from 16 to 64 were in work in 2016.<sup>29</sup> In terms of obstacles, there is no longer the same open denial of jobs to women because they are female. In the 1960s the practice of a Marriage bar was outlawed on the basis that it went against anti-discrimination laws. But despite changes in the law, The Equal Opportunity Commission research has found that around 100,000 women lose their jobs due to pregnancy each year.<sup>30</sup> Whilst Adichie doesn't go into much detail concerning complications faced by mothers, this does establish a problem faced by professional women today which can be difficult to define.

<sup>27</sup> S. Anitha and R. Pearson, "The inter-war years: 1918-1939," *Striking Women. Lincoln: University of Lincoln*, last modified 2013. Accessed December, 2016, [www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/inter-war-years-1918-1939](http://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/inter-war-years-1918-1939)

<sup>28</sup> World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2016," last modified 2016. Accessed June, 2017, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/>

<sup>29</sup> Office for National Statistics, "UK Labour Market - 2016," last modified February 2017. Accessed February 2016, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/feb2017>

<sup>30</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, "Pregnancy and maternity discrimination research findings," last modified June 29, 2017. Accessed August, 2017, <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/pregnancy-and-maternity-discrimination-research-findings>



In Britain, fewer than 1 in 10 executive directors in FTSE 100<sup>31</sup> companies are female, and only 5.5% of companies have female CEOs. Unfortunately, this is the second highest figure worldwide, with only Sweden surpassing with 7%.<sup>32</sup> Adichie quoted the late Kenyan Nobel peace laureate Wangari Maathai: “The higher you go, the fewer women there are.”<sup>33</sup> referring to the hierarchy in careers from employees to CEOs. Adichie believes that the reason for this inequality begins in childhood. The most salient point of her essay is that women’s lives are often lived in direct relation to men. The idea of girls inferiority is something which affects every aspect of a woman’s life, particularly her career. Adichie says that we teach girls to “shrink themselves,”<sup>34</sup> to be ambitious but not too much, to be “successful but not too successful”. This is all so that a man can be comparatively *more* successful. She identifies that we “link masculinity and money” so financial success must also be linked to men. Occupations which employ more women tend to have lower wages than others which employ more men. The three occupations which employ the largest percentage of women in the UK are:

Registered nurses - 92%  
Meeting and convention planners - 83.3%  
Primary and secondary school teachers - 81.9%<sup>35</sup>

In these three examples, none have a reputation for being particularly high-earning jobs, there is also a notion that each of them has a superior variant. For example, a nurse is typically associated with women, and some believe that a nurse is simply someone who couldn’t become a doctor (nurses earn around £43,000 annually, whereas doctors earn around £150,000<sup>36</sup>). This links back to the concept Adichie discovered in education of male-dominated fields. Women

<sup>31</sup> Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 index

<sup>32</sup> Julia Kollewe, “Less than 10% of executive directors at FTSE 100 companies are women,” *The Guardian*, December 29, 2015. Accessed August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/dec/29/women-in-uk-boardrooms-executive-directors-ftse-100-companies>

<sup>33</sup> Adichie, “*We Should All Be Feminists*,” 17.

<sup>34</sup> Adichie, “*We Should All Be Feminists*,” 27.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Lowen, “Top 10 Occupations That Employ the Largest Percentage of Women,” *Thought Co.*, June 16, 2016. Accessed August, 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/occupations-employ-largest-percent-women-3534390>

<sup>36</sup> Sheena Maireen Saavedra, “Doctors Vs. Nurses: What Are The Differences?,” *Nurseslabs*, November 4, 2015. Accessed May, 2017, <https://nurseslabs.com/doctors-vs-nurses-differences/>

now have the option to work and earn money, but female-dominated jobs tend to pay lower wages than male dominated jobs - and within those fields, women are less likely to work in the highest ranks, thus continuing the trend of male dominance in the workplace.

Adichie interprets that many men feel emasculated if a woman is deemed more important than them, especially at work. She says that for years women were interpreted as “a mirror” through which men can see themselves as bigger than they are, rather than an equal to be respected and valued. She gives an example of this in a story about a friend of hers who took over a managerial position from a man. The previous manager had been known as a “tough, go-getter”, and when the friend took over, she behaved almost exactly as he had before, enforcing deadlines with equal severity. However, employees complained about her style of managing, saying she was “aggressive and difficult to work with”.<sup>37</sup> Adichie phrases the description similarly to the description of the previous boss: “blunt and hard-charging” which echoes how the similar actions of the bosses were interpreted so differently by employees: no one noticed that she performed her job in the same way the previous boss had been praised for. This double-standard of forcefulness being viewed differently according to gender has prevented many women from feeling free to express themselves in the workplace, for fear of being seen as aggressive. This is a way in which the perception of women is a major barrier faced in the workplace. The fact that Adichie addressed this in her essay tells us that even in 2016, women were expected to focus on being liked rather than on doing their job.

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<sup>37</sup> Adichie, “*We Should All Be Feminists*,” 22.

## Conclusion

In terms of how the literature of Woolf and Adichie echoed societal mores on women in the workplace, Woolf used a fictional narrative to create various scenarios for her narrator, in which she depicted situations of inequality common during 1929, such as the narrator being banned from the Oxbridge library. This then allowed her to discuss the roots of different inequalities - such as the often negative descriptions of women in academic texts occurring because only men had written them. Adichie, on the other hand, used anecdotes to identify everyday instances of sexism in 2016, such as her friend receiving criticism in her new managerial position. She could then identify the causes of the inequality - such as women being taught to be liked above all else - and relate it to more subtle ideas, such as women shrinking themselves to fit into society.

The primary limitation in my research was discovering the changes in society, especially in 1929; I could easily find various laws that had been passed (eg. the Sex Disqualification Act), however, it is difficult to tell when the rest of society begins to agree with laws or to track the true societal beliefs of the time beyond the essays themselves. If I had been given the opportunity for further scope, I would have looked at women in politics. I found lots of information within each essay and about each year: The politics in both 1929 and 2016 had significant points to analyse: in 1929, women won the right to vote in the UK, and in 2016, there were only 29 women to every 71 men in parliament (WEF).

In their essays, Woolf and Adichie explained what intellectual freedom was and outlined the circumstances in which intellectual freedom could exist in their respective eras. For Woolf, intellectual freedom was described in the metaphor of “a room of one’s own”, representing free time, privacy and financial independence. For Adichie, intellectual freedom was the freedom to choose any field of study and to be true to oneself - acting without having to first consider what is expected of women.



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