# How Influential Were Women In The Enlightenment?

The Enlightenment, an intellectual and cultural movement that swept through Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries that many people acknowledge, for having had a significant influence on political philosophy, science, and reason. While the historical account of the Enlightenment frequently emphasizes the contributions of male intellectuals like Voltaire, Locke, and Rousseau, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact that women had in forming the concepts and ideals of this revolutionary era. Through their writings, salons, and support of social and political reform, women in the Enlightenment made major contributions despite the prevalent societal conventions that restricted their participation in public debate.

Enlightened women contributed to the intellectual ferment of the era by engaging with the prominent ideas of the time. One such person is Mary Wollstonecraft, whose revolutionary book "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792) challenged the conventional wisdom that considered women to be only ornamental and submissive members of society. In addition to promoting women's emancipation and education, Wollstonecraft defended women's rights to reason and engage in public life. Her beliefs emphasized the Enlightenment's dedication to the ideals of equality and individual liberties and established the foundation for later feminist movements.

During the Enlightenment, even salons and casual get-togethers hosted by powerful women, became important hubs for intellectual interaction. Among individuals who encouraged philosophers, scientists, and artists to participate in conversations on reason, science, and societal challenges were Madame Geoffrin in France and Julie de Lespinasse's salon. These salons gave women a forum to actively engage in intellectual conversation, questioning conventional gender norms and promoting an atmosphere that encouraged the dissemination of Enlightenment concepts.

Enlightened women were not only confined to the realm of philosophy and literature; some also made significant contributions to science. Leading figures in their respective disciplines were the French mathematician and physicist Émilie du Châtelet and the Italian mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi. Du Châtelet, in particular, popularized and translated the works of Isaac Newton, opening up the scientific concepts of the Enlightenment to a much wider audience.

In addition to their intellectual accomplishments, women throughout the Enlightenment were instrumental in promoting social and political reform. The "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen" (1791), written by French playwright and political activist Olympe de Gouges, challenges the gender bias of the French Revolution's "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen." By articulating the necessity of gender equality, De Gouges' work, and Mary Wollstonecraft’s work along with many other works inspired many later feminist movements.

To summarize, women played a significant role in the Enlightenment of Europe, despite constantly being blocked by the boundaries of social conventions that restricted their visibility. Women had a significant impact on the Enlightenment's intellectual climate through their writings, salons, scientific discoveries, and support of social change. Their contributions, which are frequently ignored in conventional historical accounts, were essential in establishing the principles of equality, reason, and individual liberties that characterize this revolutionary era. Acknowledging the contributions made by women broadens our perspective on the Enlightenment and emphasizes the importance of their influence on the development of modern philosophy.

# Citations

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