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Women in Society

Throughout history, women have faced challenges such as lack of equal opportunity, sexism, racism, and instability. The short story, “The Women’s Swimming Pool,” written by Hanan Al-Shayk, tells the story of a young girl who works at a tobacco tent in a village in Lebanon and dreams of visiting the sea. Her parents recently passed and her only guardian is her grandmother. The essay, “A Room of One’s Own,” written by Virginia Woolf, reveals Woolf’s argument that a woman needs her own space literally and figuratively within the literature industry dominated by patriarchal traditions. These two authors use different styles of writing in order to portray their messages. Hanan Al-Shayk is Lebanese and she uses fiction so the readers are able to understand a woman’s role in the Middle East from the perspective of the protagonist. She uses repetition, water and color symbolism, epiphany as well as religion to further develop her message. However, British writer Virginia Woolf uses an extended essay to show her experiences as a writer and to convince her readers about her claim. She separated her essay into three chapters, each with its own point to build up her main claim. She uses well-known authors, philosophical arguments, and religion to support her opinion on women in the literature field. Despite the authors using two different narrative styles and publishing their work in different time periods, they both present their work in a feminist perspective and highlight the struggle women face in a world where men dominate.

The “Women’s Swimming Pool” was published in 1982 while “A Room of One’s Own” was published in 1929. Even with the gap years between the two works, there still needs to be progress in how women stand in society. While Al-Shayk focuses on the female liberties in an Islamic region in Lebanon, Woolf focuses on the male dominated literature field instead. Although the 19th century for both literature works experienced liberation movements for women, the distinction between two is apparent in the culture and issues they focus on. According to “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Lebanon,” written by William Robert Avis, Lebanese women did obtain some rights by 1990, but they still “continue to face discrimination at numerous levels, keeping gender equality an elusive objective” (6). The root of discrimination and restriction towards Lebanese women come from the “laws and regulations, socio-cultural values... and rise of social conservatism” of society (Avis 5). Islamic regions do tend to value conservatism as they do not approve of women showing off skin- which is why they have to cover their whole bodies. Social conservatism favors the concept of traditional power structure and values of society. As a result, Lebanese women are at the bottom of the hierarchy while Lebanese men are placed at the top. There was a wave of feminism in Lebanon in the early 19th century as Western ideas became more accepted, especially in overpopulated cities. However, Al-Shayk identifies that most women in rural villages struggle with obtaining their rights since most of their parents deem “the removal of restrictions on women’s bodies as a Western scheme” instead (Moaddel 128). It does not imply that the veil should be completely removed in Islamic religion but rather understand that women have the freedom to do what they want. It was only appropriate that Al-Shayk’s narrator wanted to wear a bathing suit since she would be going in the water; and yet she was still restricted to do so. Similarly, the article, “Female Bestsellers: A Cross-national Study of Gender Inequality and the Popular-highbrow

Culture Divide in Fiction Book Production, 1960-2000”, written by Marc Verboord, states that “if a particular social group is not represented sufficiently, they lack influence which is then likely to negatively affect their chances of success” (397). This shows the disadvantages women have in the literature field as it is mainly dominated by recognized male writers. While Lebanese women are restricted by religion and social spaces, English women are restricted by field of work and the types of work spaces. The more they lack representation, the less “influence” they will have which makes it hard for women to convince society to provide space and opportunities for them in order to succeed in their careers. Also in the late 19th century, the first wave of feminist movement in Britain occurred advocating for women’s civil rights. Woolf identifies the fact that being denied rights on the sole basis of being a woman is an infringement on the freedom of the female mind. Al-Shayk’s narrator similarly wanted to exercise her rights implicitly by still visiting the beach despite her grandmother’s initial disapproval. These two authors share a similar interest in focusing on feminist issues but it is very different in terms of culture and issues they focus on. Women in the workplace from the UK bring in a new perspective that is different from the common male-dominated perspective in novels and young Lebanese women should be able to make their own decisions for themselves.

Women are profoundly motivated to achieve their ambitions because of their need to fight gender stereotypes that depict them as inferior to men in a patriarchal society. While there is a lack of female representation in the literature field because of the patriarchal system of society in the UK, Lebanese women face social limitations due to Islamic traditions. The beginning of “A Room of One’s Own” starts off with Woolf’s thesis and writes about what led to her inspiration to write the essay. Chapter one reveals the different living spaces for women and men in the University of Oxbridge. The narrator claims that a woman needs her own room but suggests it is

“insignificant (...) the sort of fish a good fisherman puts back into the water (...) and one day worth cooking” to portray how men in society are far more superior than women, deeming them as worthless (1087). Trying to force society to take notice of women is “insignificant” because women know how they are depicted by men. Woolf compares women to mere animals such as fish to degrade a woman's status and emphasizes that women are basically at the same level of a fish or even lower. The next day, the narrator tries to go to the library in a men's college but quickly gets denied entry without her letter of introduction. Woolf uses this scenario to metaphorically display the inequalities women face in society. The narrator explains that her entry got denied “in protection of their turf... [thus] they had sent my little fish in hiding” (1087). This displays how despite the unfair treatment women deal with in society, they are powerless to even go against the social hierarchy. The men use their power and domination to prevent women from thinking that they could stand at the same level as men. The word “turf” is significant because it projects the idea that in a patriarchal society, men dominate in every territory. It is a domain where women are not easily welcomed. This is where Woolf's thesis comes in where she explicitly states women need “space”-- meaning a place in society where both women and men can flourish equally. Verboord explains that gender inequality widens in “fields or genres where more status is at stake for individual agents” which causes men to be more competitive and want to “edge women” out of the field (395). Men assume that the women will try to take over their fields or jobs so they are constantly on guard. Thus, there are evidently more published books by men rather than women in the literature field. It would be hard for a woman to gain success in literature because of this territory where men are valued more. On the other hand, in “The Women's Swimming Pool”, Al-Shayk introduces the protagonist and the repetition of dreaming. The beginning of “The Women's Swimming Pool” introduces the

narrator working in a shabby tobacco field with her grandmother. While the narrator takes a break in the fields, she says, "I went back to my dreams, to the sea" to illustrate her longing to get away from her village (1385). It seems the narrators' main interest is visiting the beach that her friend had mentioned and she wants to experience the city life in Beirut. The repetition of dreams is used to display how women long for freedom and start to question their Islamic moral codes as it prevents them from achieving their desires. The article, "Religion and Women: Islamic Modernism versus Fundamentalism," written by Mansoor Moaddel, helps further the understanding of Islamic women and the history of the traditions. In terms of Islamic fundamentalism, women are instructed to "cover their bodies from head to toe with the exception of the face and the hands, barred from performing certain social functions, given an inferior status to men, and preached to accept polygamy as a legit Islamic institution" (106). Since she grew up in a very traditional household, the narrator in the story has never gone out of her comfort zone to dress in a swimsuit before and this act will be seen as clearly disobeying the Islamic code. This connects to the territory or domain that Woolf mentions in her essay. In this case, the unwanted territory would be visiting the city, where the sea is located and where the Islamic religion is not heavily enforced on individuals. The narrator in Al-Shayk's story is not necessarily intruding on that territory but rather, questions if a woman who grew up in a traditional Islamic village should enter that turf by her own will. Also, the narrator had to swear "by her mother's grave" and "for women" because her dream is significant to the point that there's a consequence if she is seen by a man dressed in a swimsuit (1386). It is basically a sin if a woman was seen in a swimsuit by a man because she was not fully covered up. There are many consequences that await a woman if she disobeys the rules and one of them includes one's parents not being able to go to heaven when they pass away (1386). In the beginning of the story

however, the narrator did not feel a sense of pressure or duty because she is so focused on her dream. She constantly states her “thirst for the sea” which also could be depicted as women craving for freedom and rebelling against the Islamic codes (1385). The repetition of desires and aspirations of a woman in Al-Shayk’s work is similar to Woolf’s thesis where a woman yearns to have her own room in society. Both works introduce the idea of women having ambitions and that there are certain restrictions that do not enable them to pursue those desires.

Society deprives women from certain opportunities that allow them to flourish and acquire more freedom because of traditional values. In chapter two of “A Room of One’s Own,” Woolf analyzes the difference between men and women in the field of the creative arts. The location changes from Oxbridge to London where the narrator reviews the questions raised during her lecture the other day. Such questions included “why did men drink wine and women drink water?” and “have you any notion that many books are written about women...[and] how many are written by men?” to provoke the audience about the unequal socioeconomic hierarchy that exists. Back in the 1800s, wine drinking was seen as a luxury drink for the elites only. Since men were seen as higher class than women, they would drink wine while women were only given mere water that was seen as fit to their social status. The tone in these questions sound judgemental because it projects the idea that men write about women’s experience, yet these men can’t fully understand what women go through since society is so fixated on men only. An actual perspective from a woman would be completely different and more authentic than a man’s perspective on women; and yet, many of these books are published by men. Also, most of the books written by men labeled women as “inferior animals” and “useful but alien in nature” (1084). Woolf lists out the reasons of justifications of why women are looked down upon. She states, “small brain size of, Shakespeare’s opinion of, Mr. Oscar Browning’s opinion of...

Napoleon thought of them as incapable” to show how most of these opinions of women are by men and society was quick to accept these biased ideas (1100). Notice how all these “opinions” of women are solely from men who have been given the opportunities to pursue their career in literature because they are the superior gender. A woman’s opinion is never mentioned once and clearly this would raise the question of how reliable these opinions truly are. Unlike men, women were not given a chance to higher education because for the most part, the opinions of well respected men such as Shakespeare and Napoleon labeled them as “incapable.” From “Gender, Ethnicity, and Feminism: An Intersectional Analysis of the Lived Experiences Feminist Academic Women in the UK Higher Education,” Sang makes a point that working men were able to attend “educational lectures at the Mechanics Institute in London” because they were given the opportunity to (198). It was not until the Victorian era where women’s frustration with poor education grew and by 1830, they were able to attend these lectures but it was only limited (Sang 200). However, women who did go to school still ended up learning about how they should stay within the home to do household management. Society included excuses such as women having “small brains” or smaller bodies as mere justifications to label them as inferior towards men. Their logic is based on bogus scientific information that does not actually prove a woman’s worth. However, people seem to accept these facts easily because it was claimed by elite men. The only reason why women are “useful” is because they are expected to perform trivial tasks in the household such as cleaning, cooking, child rearing, etc. Women in the UK are expected to work at home; but, there are few women who are expected to work outside in the field as well. Usually agricultural tasks are given to men in the West but since Lebanon has a different cultural aspect on agriculture, Lebanese women are given a responsibility to work as well. For example, Al-Shayk’s narrator who is Lebanese is seen only working in the tobacco

field and that is the only task ever mentioned she had to do in the story. As Verboord explains, “the portrayal of women in cultural media products often tend to be highly traditional and stereotypical” and that “popular culture has the strongest emancipatory effect in fields” (404). While Woolf’s narrator could not leave the house sphere, Al-Shayk’s narrator was allowed to leave that sphere because not only is she poor, but she is expected to help her family as well. The traditional concepts that have labeled women as weak started many centuries ago and the influence of popular culture heavily impacts the widening gender gap between men and women in modern society. The gender gap is slowly increasing in terms of “income, commercial success, and the artistic prestige of fiction books” which is evident in Woolf’s claim (397). Men receive more income than women because of the difference in wages. In the business sector, men have higher wages than women because they typically have a higher position. These positions are male-dominated and women can not obtain such positions. According to “Glass ceiling issues in the UK Library Profession”, written by Elizabeth Jones, this represents the invisible barrier in society called the “glass ceiling” where women or minorities are prevented from reaching the highest position (104). There is no law that prevents women from rising up the social hierarchy but since it is a male-dominated territory, a woman has never achieved an advancement in profession. Woolf describes a man’s “innate superiority” as a “pathetic device of human imagination” to illustrate that there is no concrete proof of why a man is deemed superior compared to women; it is simply an illusion that feeds a man’s greed. The narrator also points out that since women were labeled as weak, they were protected by meaningless actions or jobs in society. Most women were not able to do activities like men because of that “protection”; but once removed, women would be able to prove that they can perform like men do or even surpass them (Woolf 1107). More importantly, it is not that women are incapable of performing tasks

that men can do well, it is because they were never given a chance from the beginning. The glass ceiling and the opinions of historical figures mentioned above show how these concepts created by men restrict women from achieving their goals in their careers. Thus, more women are eager to prove their strength because they want to break that barrier.

Likewise, the motivation for women striving to lessen that gap is evident by the water and color symbolism in “The Women’s Swimming Pool”. The color green comes up throughout the short story to symbolize the new life and change in society the main character yearns for. The day she decided to go visit the sea, she could smell the “green odor” while she waited for the “green bus” (Al-Shayk 1385). However, the color green could also symbolize how the narrator is greedy. She does not necessarily think about how her grandmother feels and how her actions could consequently affect her deceased parents. In the grandmothers’ perspective she could be seen as greedy for not understanding the issue of her actions. However, it is understandable why the narrator is greedy for her desires because her freedom has been stripped off from the moment she was born as a girl. According to Avis, Lebanese parents “give boys entitlement over their sisters from early childhood” which shows how men were taught from a very young age that they were more privileged than women in a Lebanese society” (Avis 6). When men were asked what an ideal woman is, they answered ““being a good housewife, sacrificing, obedient, and maintaining the reputation of the husband”” (6). Thus, Lebanese women were expected to sacrifice their rights of freedom and be obedient towards men because of how society taught their men from a very young age. The parents are also forms of agents that taught their boys to feel a sense of authority over women which makes them conclude that women can accept their superiority easily. Also, the symbolism of the ocean water represents the rebirth-like, cleansing experience the main character wants to experience; and that is to be able to do what she desires without any

consequences. If the narrator goes to the ocean wearing a bathing suit and completely disregards the Islamic code, that would symbolize her rebirth as a new woman. Since this act is seen as a rebellion against the Islamic codes, once the narrator cleanses herself, it could be possible she would no longer follow the Islamic rules since she has gained a new sense of freedom. The water could also symbolize the narrator's purification from her immoral deed of wanting to swim in a bathing suit. Due to this, her grandmother even called the narrator's friend a "devil" for bringing up the idea of visiting the ocean. Although the grandmother came along with the main character since she is her only guardian, the grandmother seemed like she did not trust her granddaughter at all in the first place. The strict rules placed on Lebanese women were not only harmful to the women but "it also harmed the entire society, for it promoted narrow-mindedness and mistrust even within the same family" (117). The strict laws in Lebanon can not be changed so easily since there is a huge absence of women in the decision-making positions. This struggle can be seen in Woolf's narrator as well because not many female novelists have gained recognition from society and thus there is less representation. The patriarchal structure of Lebanese society does not allow a woman's perspective in any laws including those that relate to their body. The laws are purely enforced by "traditional values... that value a man's perspective" rather than a woman's (Avis 14). These two works both face a wall of "protection" where women have the disadvantage. In Al-Shayk's narrator's case, her protection comes from the religious values of a Lebanese society that the grandmother is trying to preserve. It is a protection that assures her and her parent's safety; thus she cannot simply break down that wall. If she were to break her limitations though, the narrator would gain her freedom. Similarly, for the narrator in "A Room of One's Own," her protection comes from the biased views of men that supposedly "protects" women; but in reality, it only restricts them from achieving more in society. Traditional values

are passed down to generations and it acts as an environmental agent that influences how individuals perceive others.

As women continue to learn in society, there comes a point where they go through an epiphany and realize that either they should fight for their rights or just let the situation be. While in Woolf's work, the epiphany motivates the narrator to move forwards and continue to fight for space in the literature field; the epiphany in Al-Shayk's work actually makes the narrator accept her position as a Lebanese woman who cannot escape her tradition. A society influenced by modern times would hold less traditional values compared to a society that still relies on tradition as a way of life. In chapter three of "A Room of One's Own," it focuses on the history of men and women, specifically the Elizabethan Age which further helps the narrator come to her realization. After the narrator's research at the British Library, she decides to look into the lives of women during the Elizabethan era where only men achieved literary accomplishments. She particularly focuses on Judith Shakespeare who had the same ambitions as her brother, William Shakespeare; but her parents denied her dreams because of her identity as a woman. Woolf uses a sarcastic tone throughout this chapter without belittling the male authors as a way to show the meaningless "protection" society gave women. When Judith told her parents her aspirations to become a writer, they "told her to mend the stockings and not moon about with books" instead (1111). This illustrates how agents of society force their expectations of each gender upon the younger generations without second thoughts. In this case, her parents did not consider Judith's dream to be valid because she was a woman and a woman was expected to do housework like "mending the stockings". Similarly, the narrator in "The Women's Swimming Pool" also is expected to help out in the tobacco field with her grandmother. Woolf's narrator also adds another example where a woman announced that she wanted to do theater as her profession but

the “men laughed in her face” (1111). Clearly, women were not seen as capable enough to be in the entertainment or literature industry as they did not get the same privileges as men. Women were forced to believe such ideas by parents and institutions because it was “tradition”. A smart woman must have existed during Shakespeare’s time but no one would believe her potential; yet alone “allow women to pursue the arts”. In the 19th century, “women were not encouraged as an artist” (1116). This leads to the narrator’s epiphany where she states, “I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me” to highlight that women must rely on each other rather than to rely on men to create social change (1106). Finally, Woolf’s narrator demands a “room of her own” to signify a woman’s independence and be in her own territory; a territory that a man does not own and must not interfere with (1114). Not only will this allow women to be free, it will also give them a safe space to express themselves and not have to feel the pressure of competing with men. Towards the very end of the story, the narrator questions Shakespeare’s state of mind when he wrote his greatest works. Since a man like Shakespeare was allowed to write freely and wrote the most famous books, a woman must have this space of personal freedom as well in order to write their greatest works.

On the contrary, in “The Women’s Swimming Pool,” the narrator could not join forces with other women like Woolf’s narrator because everyone in her village is faithful to the Islamic code, which caused her to submit to her grandmother’s wishes later on. This illustrates that women learn to value their worth but could either choose to prove it to the men who do not see their potential in the industry or quietly submit to tradition. She also experiences an epiphany on the difference between her rural village and the urban city in Beirut. Once the narrator and her grandmother arrived in Beirut, they quickly noticed the different atmosphere and culture in the city. Most of the women did not have a cover on and technology seemed so advanced (1388).

This is because during the 19th century in Islamic countries, “the Islamic belief system came under direct criticism from diverse groups on... social issues, including the status of women” (Moaddel 111). Thus, these ideas have been passed down in populated cities such as Beirut and were slowly accepted as the city advanced further. However, most of the outskirt villages that heavily believe in Islamic tradition rejected these ideas and saw it as a “British and Western scheme” instead. By the time the narrator almost reaches the sea, she spots her grandmother on her knees on the street; to signify it is time for a prayer. She claims that her grandmother is “destroying what lay in my bag and blocking the road between me and the sea” (1389). She also notices the locals passing by while staring at her grandmother. This led to her epiphany, realizing that women who come from the Southern villages live in different worlds compared to the people who live in big cities such as Beirut. The contrast between the city and rural “put weight” on the girls’ hand. This “weight” is significant because it pushes the narrator to make a decision: to follow the Islamic tradition by praying with her grandmother, or to completely disregard the customs and head to the sea. Through her epiphany, the narrator understands that they are different and traditional compared to the people in Beirut. They never felt welcomed in Beirut because of the different customs and they felt like “outsiders” from the moment they entered (1388). Thus, the difference between rural and urban life significantly impacts the narrator’s outlook in life. After watching her grandmother pray, the narrator could not leave her grandmother alone; and at the same time, she could not disregard her own Islamic tradition. While Lebanese women who live in rural villages yearn to be free as the women in Beirut, it is simply not easy since the countryside tends to lean towards traditional views. This can be seen in Woolf’s work as well since the narrator lives in a very urbanized country where the new generation of women outwardly speaks of women’s liberation through literature.

The biggest difference between the two narrators is the levels of their education. This difference in education significantly impacts the way both the narrators respond to their rights as women. While the narrator in the “A Room of One’s Own” attends a college university and learns history through books, the narrator in “The Women’s Swimming Pool” only works at a tobacco field with no educational experience ever mentioned. The reason why Al-Shayk’s narrator submits to the Islamic traditions in Lebanon after her epiphany is because she is not aware of her own rights as a woman. If she were more educated in the history and origin of the social hierarchy in Lebanon, she would be able to outwardly speak of her opinions without worrying about the consequences her grandmother tells her. Since she has only grown in the field with her traditional family, she only knows of her tradition as the correct way of living. Clearly, Woolf’s narrator is well educated which is why she is motivated to prove to her audience that her thesis is significant and must be considered in a male-dominated society. As she becomes more curious, the narrator learns further about the history of how women came to be labeled as inferior by society. This factor itself gives her more influence than the narrator in “The Women’s Swimming Pool”. Al-Shayk hints at how significant the narrator’s desire is because of how Lebanese women are eager to be given more freedom without violating the Islamic code during this time period. Since women had to cover most of their bodies, “women did not get fresh air or sunshine, and as a result their health was affected” (117). The narrator worked in a tobacco field and she had to wear this veil while working. This desire for freedom is not explicitly stated in the work but it is implied as the narrator wants to freely wear a bathing suit and swim in the ocean, which is considered a sin in her religion. Al-Shayk is not implying that the religion should completely remove the veil for women but rather, women should not be restricted to do such unharmed activities in which the veil needs to be taken off purely for comfort. On the other

hand, the narrator in “A Room of One’s Own” explicitly states her desire mainly from her thesis. Despite the fact that “women first dominated the profession of novelists (...) men were able to gain key positions and subsequent recognition in this initially ‘empty field’” which is significant because even when there were more women in the fiction world, it was still deemed as an “empty” field until more men began to start writing fiction. Thus, the supposedly empty field of novelists suddenly became dominated by men because of their advantage and influence as the dominant gender in society. This truly emphasizes how women could not get the “recognition” they deserve because society prejudices them. Men were trying to protect their “turf” but it is ironic because the literature field was originally dominated by women. Woolf’s narrator can outrightly speak about her rights since she knows the liberty rights of women while Al-Shayk’s narrator does not outwardly question her religion.

Despite this fact, both the narrators are connected through a woman’s desires and dreams. Al-Shayk’s narrator wants a balance between her religion and her desires and Woolf’s narrator wants a balanced society as well that includes women in the literature field. The prominent factor as to why women are viewed as inferior while men are viewed as superior is through religious beliefs implemented by past ancestors. Traditional concepts but as we progress as a society, new ideas and more freedom should be accepted. In the past, men dominated every field- from sports, business, higher education, etc. However, more women are able to attend school and receive an education. Women were only restricted which does not justify that they were never capable in the beginning. In Lebanon, religious courts administer these laws “with little or no government oversight” (Avis 14). These laws discriminate against women “across the religious spectrum and don’t guarantee their basic rights” as citizens (14). According to Islamic religion, women must “submit to men as they are deemed as the inferior gender” (Moaddel 126). Similarly, Woolf

briefly mentions the religious importance of chastity in a woman's life. Chastity is the practice of refraining from any sexual intercourse or any activities that is considered immoral in religion. In Lebanon, it is inevitable that there would be discriminatory laws against women since the government does not oversee any of the rules at all. Since the parents and grandmother of Al-Shayk's narrator have lived through these laws, even with the current progression of Beirut, the rural villages seem to still hold those traditional values. It is not only because it is their religion but also the fact that the parents and grandmother are used to those laws; and thus, they don't see the means of trying to change moral views. While religion is highly regarded in Lebanon, religion was not heavily implemented to all individuals in the West. In Woolf's case, religion and chastity were not necessarily a law in society but rather an expectation for women to follow absolutely. The narrator explains that cutting free from this expected virtue of chastity from a woman "demands courage" because they already have so many expectations from society that revolve around domesticity (1113). Thus, a woman born during the Elizabethan era who is gifted in poetry would have lived unhappily. As a result, society would clearly implement such expectations that are influenced by the ideas of religion to both narrators since that is the kind of principles society has lived with. Due to the immense pressure from society and not to mention men already looked down on them, women struggle to maintain a stable state of mind as they try to achieve their dreams. Woolf's narrator claims that "whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed" because of the unfair treatment women constantly experience (1117). Women were able to try participating in the literature field but their mental health would slowly deteriorate as they constantly receive harsh judgements by society. Also, the narrator makes a point that religion is a significant factor that can deny a woman's freedom to express herself. She explains that women in playwright would have "nervous stress and dilemma which might well

have killed her " to emphasize how women were willing to risk their health just to be part of the literature field and gain validation. Despite modernists like Mumtaz Ali who argue that "physical strength can not be considered a criterion for establishing the superiority of men over women", the guardians of Al-Shayk's narrator would have chosen to ignore such liberal ideas that surfaced in the nineteenth century since they are truly faithful to their Islamic religion. It is similar in Woolf's narrator as well because society accepted such a criteria easily as well. However, it gives more women a purpose to pursue their desires in defiance of these social expectations.

Despite the different literary elements in "The Women's Swimming Pool" and "A Room of One's Own," both works highlight that even if they are deemed as inferior compared to men, women have dreams that they want to pursue and a mere assumption should not stop them. While Al-shayk focuses on restriction on women influenced by religious beliefs, Woolf focuses on women's oppression in the literary field influenced by the ideals of domesticity. Through repetition, symbolism, and epiphany, Al-Shayk argues that Islamic customs are too strict on women and it infringes their rights of freedom of expression. The narrator in "The Women's Swimming Pool" visited the ocean in Beirut with her grandmother; but she carried a heavy burden and risk of her disobeying the Islamic code. Her immense desire to visit the ocean and to freely take off her veil hints at women's liberation since women were strictly instructed to cover their bodies. As for Woolf, she writes an extended essay that includes three chapters to show the narrator's journey in understanding how women were given the inferior status in society. Woolf claims that women must be given the opportunity to have their own space in a field dominated by men because potential should not be based on gender. The narrator's claim that a woman must have her own room began when she was denied entry to her University's Library, illustrating that women are given no right to stand in the same field as men who are deemed as superior. There is

no accurate evidence or reason as to why women are inferior in society. It is only a concept established in a patriarchal society to uphold their opinions. However, through Al-Shayk's and Woolf's works, women should not be discouraged. Women have the ability and potential to succeed like men which is why instead of restraining their rights, women should be given the opportunity to prove themselves.

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