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## The Evolution of Feminist Literature in the 21st Century: A Critical Analysis of Postmodern Feminist Texts

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### ABSTRACT:

*The evolution of feminist literature in the twenty-first century reflects a significant shift toward postmodern and intersectional frameworks that challenge essentialist notions of gender, power, and well-being. This study critically examines contemporary postmodern feminist texts to explore how literary discourse reconfigures dominant understandings of female subjectivity, agency, and flourishing. Employing a feminist critical discourse analysis combined with thematic content analysis, the research analyzes a diverse corpus of postmodern feminist novels, short stories, and poetry. The findings reveal that these texts consistently disrupt patriarchal narratives by foregrounding relational, eudaimonic, and intersectional conceptions of well-being rather than purely hedonic or individualistic models. Narrative strategies such as historiographic metafiction, fragmentation, and multiperspectivity are shown to function as key tools for exposing power structures and amplifying marginalized voices. Moreover, the analysis highlights a sustained critique of neoliberal feminism, emphasizing collective resistance and structural transformation over individualized empowerment. By integrating literary theory with well-being scholarship, this study demonstrates how postmodern feminist literature operates as a critical cultural site for reimagining women's lived experiences and social possibilities. The research contributes to feminist literary criticism by offering empirical and theoretical insights into the evolving relationship between narrative form, intersectionality, and contemporary feminist thought.*

### Keywords:

*Postmodern Feminism, Feminist Literature, Intersectionality, Critical Discourse Analysis, Well-Being Narratives, Feminist Theory, Literary Revisionism*

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is observed that the post-twenty-first-century era has been characterized by a radical shift in the subject of feminist writing, which has become critical of the postmodern ideas that oppose the rigid interpretations of gender, power, and identity (Mishra et al., 2024). In comparison to the previous feminism waves that were frequently focused on general experience, the period has brought some shift to the more intricate exploration of intersectionality and breaking down the essentialist categories (Alshehri, 2025). This meta-cultural change is but one segment of a larger cultural transformation to disaggregated knowledge systems and is specifically manifested in the readiness to embrace various accounts, frequently of a localised experience and of lesser great ideas as compared to big ideas (Shija, 2015). Thus, the modern feminist discourse is more likely to examine how individual circumstances and cultural peculiarities affect the problems women face without a specific approach to human rights, and instead with more diverse vision of the liberation and anti-oppression (Rafea, 2022). In order to stimulate the dissemination of small, usually marginalized narratives in the bigger socio-political setting, this analyzing route frequently entails the examination of the assertiveness of power that suppresses voices in postmodernism (Sancheti, 2018). Such approach to analysis will enable us to comprehend the inseparability of the forms of stories and political and social environments as such method transcends the classical structuralist approaches and incorporates more thorough and pluralistic approaches (Smith, 2008). In particular, the postmodern feminist texts are more likely to apply the metafictional approach in the historiography to recover marginalised voices and criticise the canon of accepted historical narratives, with a particular focus on how reality and gender roles are made (Stephan, 2019). By introducing subjectivity of history and implications of dominant discourses, this methodology can usually invert the traditional concept of the past and give the opportunity to other, feminist, interpretations (Oppermann, 1999). In order to question the existing hierarchies and represent the historically marginalised female population, such writing is more likely to mix the historical and fictional narratives, which is an ironic reinterpretation of the past (Franzini and Laks, 2021). Revisionary fiction is also commonly employed by these authors to object to the subordinate and marginalized position of women in the canons through the introduction of gynocentric visions and telling the historical events through a feminine perspective (ElBably, 2022). This re-narration usually implies the subversive work with the forms of writing and the deconstruction of the language of patriarchy in order to present the experiences which had not yet entered the mass culture, yet (Mann and Huffman, 2005). In addition, the postmodern feminist revisionist writers also have a goal of changing the ancient stories and challenging the objectivity of the past through feminine intuition in rewriting the history of the mankind through the lens of the woman (ElBably, 2022). Along with the tendency to a more inclusive and representative interpretation of the past, this critical re-analysis of historical discourses is employed to indicate the bias that is inherent in the current knowledge systems. In order to show how literary representations are both a product and a partaking of historical culture, such a project routinely enjoys a New Historicism approach, in that the historicity of texts and the textuality of history (Liu and Huang, 2024). In addition to the need to challenge the patriarchal premises of the traditional historical narratives, such recontextualization gives the readers an opportunity to critically participate in the knowledge-making process (Papanikolasou, 2014). In order to prove that narratives influence how we view the historical events and social norms, one will have to utilize this prism of analysis in comprehending that the modern ways of reinterpreting classical mythology, i.e., have non-traditional interpretations that reveal the extent of ethnic, class, and gender biases in the original materials (AI-Harshan, 2021; Szmigiero, 2023). These re-tellings of the postmodern age are also aimed at formulating an alternative feminine discourse through challenging the already existing male centered canons and creating a gynocentric mythos (Raghav, 2025). The tendency frequently presupposes the shift in the

emphasis on the heroic activities towards the personal life, where the heroes that did not matter previously are put in the center of the focus (Szmigiero, 2023). This method directly reflects on the role of reflexivity in the research as it helps to recognize the effect of the positionality of the authors and their systems of interpretation on the interpretation and representation of these corrected stories (Farkic et al., 2025; Szmigiero, 2023). This social and subjective aspect of knowledge is emphasized by this interpretive and contextual view and also emphasizes the fact that there are many diverse perceptions and experiences of people and situations (Adelson et al., 2003; Iloranta and Komppula, 2021). Besides, understanding of wellbeing is construed, so, in particular, it is noted that in the context of different populations, knowledge is realised under the impact of certain social and cultural circumstances and is co-produced as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the population under study (Farkic et al., 2025; Munoz et al., 2025). Beyond the universalisation of views, such a focus on different contexts is also essential in the study on the concept of well-being, because it is extremely important to comprehend what is put in a person under such situation (Nafees et al., 2024). This progressive opinion is consistent with the theory of well-being that considers a relationship with nature to be one of the elements that make the life of an individual more complete regardless of what he or she is fond of (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). However, the above objective list theory has been largely criticised as having a possibility of overlooking culturally relativistic and subjective concept of what defines a good life (Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although these criticisms are justified, followers believe that when selecting such general classes of goods that in this or that country are presented in a new form but still meeting the overall well-being, even an objective list of such goods can be created, which will also consider a particular degree of cultural diversity (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). This view tends to agree with the fact that, even though the needs of human beings may have certain differences in the ways they manifest themselves, the needs of human beings can always be identical (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). This combination of a universal need and cultural specific representation forms a powerful structure of analyzing the feminist literature that redefines the well-being rather than the traditionally patriarchal presumptions. Indicatively, individualistic ideas of happiness are challenged in some feminist texts by the focus on the relational well-being, which is a concept that is comprised of the realization of the need to be intertwined with others and interdependent with others to thrive humanly (Farkic et al., 2025). This reconsideration aligns with the phenomenological understanding of well-being, emphasized on the experience of living and existential involvement rather than the use of objective or hedonistic measures as outcome (Baklien et al., 2024). This methodology would render it aware of how the perception of satisfaction and gratification is established based on the complex interactions of personal experiences and social systems in general (Colla and Kurtz, 2024). Additionally, adopting the historical and cultural influences into assessing their own happiness and the degree of life satisfaction, the postmodern feminist literature tends to be applied in order to derive the complexity of subjective well-being (Adedeji et al., 2023; Smith and Diekmann, 2017). Instead of focusing on the contextual and, in many cases, community-related accounts of the experiences of well-being of women in particular socio-cultural setting, they typically castigate the idea of an array of universally applicable and objective circumstances of happiness (Holst, 2022). This mild spectrum advances qualitative approaches that reveal the diversity of human narratives and how they are internalized into the society institutions and reveal how only quantitative indicators of well-being fail (Lambert et al., 2020). Women tend to be more satisfied with their lives despite having worse mental health outcomes, and it implies that a complex interplay of both internal and external factors exists. This expanded paradigm of analysis is especially relevant in the analysis of the well-being gap of genders evident (Kaiser et al., 2025). Such a discrepancy

demands a serious analysis of the engagement of cultural norms, social pressures, and other coping strategies in this paradoxical process, even above blunt definitions of well-being (Nafees et al., 2024). This intricate procedure reveals the inability of only hedonic signs of well-being, which put emphasis on the pleasure and the lack of pain, to represent the experience of women in the real world in a proper way (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). Rather, a holistic study of the well-being of the female needs to be informed by appreciation of eudaimonic well-being that involves self-fulfilment and good engagement in life. This is especially acute in the context of the identified discrepancy in the affective and the evaluative well being of women (Kaiser et al., 2025; Konstantopoulou et al., 2024; Yoon et al., 2014). The difference is concentrated on the significance of investigating factors of the human experience related to authenticity, meaningfulness, excellence, personal development, and maturation, rather than the existence and lack of pleasure (Medeiros et al., 2023). This view concurs with the fact that even though women may experience a greater evaluative well-being, the reality that women experience more pain, negative affect, and mental health problems is a paradox that can be only elucidated with the aid of hedonic measures (Kaiser et al., 2025). A eudaimonic paradigm can thus present a more elaborate means of exploring the complex well-being of women not just the happiness as reported but also the meaning and purpose (Yoon et al., 2014). The other paradox of the well-being is that the well-being of women has not increased proportionally to the well-being of men despite the increase in their social and economic status in the past 50 years (Kaiser et al., 2025). The analysis of the particular stressors and systemic variables, which affect women disproportionately, yet are not always indicated by the usual economic measures, requires further analysis due to the complexity of the interaction between social progress and the degree of stagnant well-being (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2024; Didymus et al., 2020). The gendered differences in mental health and the well-being in general have been found to be contributed by a host of factors, which include the cultural factors, the biological factors, and subjective perceptions of the well-being scales. This disparity shows that there is a need to analyze the factors further on the economic indicators basis (Kaiser et al., 2025). Further research on the differences in expectations between men and women and possible biology can be used to explain such permanent inequalities in health outcomes (Kaiser et al., 2025).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper will critically examine a number of postmodern feminist texts, and the prime point of interest will be how they challenge the conventional idea of well-being (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024). The given strategy will enable examining the rhetorical tools and narrative means used by these books to challenge the patriarchal norms and provide other ideas of how flourishing works (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2024). The thematic patterns of autonomy, relationality, and self-actualization will be revealed in the context of these pieces of literature in particular because they are no longer understood in hedonistic or individualistic aspects of well-being (Ferrari, 2022; Iwaarden and Nawijn, 2021). Besides, as women do not share the same experiences, the paper will focus on how these texts can be applied in reference to the notions of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being and how they could broaden or redefine the existing paradigms (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). The paper shall also explore the impact of gender inequality in an institution and socioeconomic inequality on women and how they can attain self-realization and be happy and the association between subjective well-being and objective life condition as discussed in these stories. Queer-feminist approaches just make these ideas even more complicated since they reveal a wide range of experiences of women who do not traditionally fit the general social norms of happiness (Karolus and Betyarini, 2022). Getting further than mere classifications to the issues of female subjectivity, it will also entail a close textual analysis to determine recurring themes, symbolic depictions, and discourse systems to articulate subtle ideas of well-being (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2021).

Besides, in the analysis, the contribution of these texts to the existing academic discourse of the gender gap in well-being will be taken into account, specifically, how the paradox of greater levels of life satisfaction and adverse mental health outcomes in women is resolved (Kaiser et al., 2025). Through this, the feminist critical discourse analysis will offer a sound apparatus of experiencing the interaction of gender, power, and ideology to generate well being stories in postmodern feminist novels (Khalaf, 2023; Lazar, 2007). The corpus in the study will be based on the broad selection of the postmodern feminist works that were selected because of their critical interest in the conventional notions of gender, power, and subjective experience. In order to give a more accurate reflection of the modern feminist thinking along with the way it interacts with the questions of well-being in diverse cultural contexts, this list will incorporate the works, which fall under different subgenres and under different geographical locations. To find and classify the many views regarding well-being that are offered in a systematic manner, two-step content and topic analysis will be implemented on selected readings (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). A thematic analysis will be adopted during the second stage so as to create general trends and theoretical constructs that are created based on these textual representations. The first one will be executed by a thorough content analysis which will entail thorough direct references listing in terms of well being, happiness and prosperity, and indirect references (Zhang et al., 2024). This will be a two-step process enabling the creation of an insidious understanding of how the postmodern feminist authors sabotage the traditional well-being paradigms and introduce new paradigms based on the feminist theory and lived experiences that will indicate the complexity of interactions between structural and individual agency in defining the outcome of well-being. This critical sense is required to make the sense of the complex discursive formations of well being that permeate such texts, particularly insofar as the question of collective and individual prosperity into the existence of the sociopolitical environments. In particular, a feminist critical discourse analysis is a powerful approach to the analysis of the ways in which ideology and power have been engrained into the language structures to reinforce gendered social structures and shape the understanding of well-being (Flouli & Athanasiades, 2024; Lazar, 2007). Such a method cuts across the superficial level of interpretation as it aims at comprehending how language formations and representation of the terms are indicative of a more profound force that goes on in the discourse of well being (Lazar, 2007; Ohito and Nyachae, 2018). Critical analysis of explicit and implicit narratives, combination of content and thematic analysis, and a critical discourse framework allows reaching this systematic process and creating a comprehensive and subtle perspective on how and why the postmodern feminist texts are challenging and re-defining the existing paradigms of well being (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024). The selection of texts will be based on the fact that they perceptible interact with the intersectionality, which is cognizant of the fact that entangled systems of oppression and power, including systems based on gender, racism, classes, sexual orientation, and disability, greatly affect the well-being.

## **RESULTS**

This part displays the results of the research in accordance with the analysis of postmodern feminist literature in the frames of the critical discourse analysis and thematic content analysis. The results suggest that repeating patterns can be found in the approaches to the work of feminist literature to attack the patriarchal texts and redefine the concept of well-being, as well as the use of intersectional perspectives. Table 1 summarises the analysis of the texts analysed in terms of the genres and Table 2 lists the key feminist theoretical approaches that were identified. Table 4 identifies the notable points of well-being tension that are highlighted across the corpus, whereas Table 3 illustrates the widespread storytelling devices. Despite the fact that they are given in Table 8 to Table 10 where they serve as the thematic frequency score, Table 5 to Table 7 present comparison of autonomy, relationality, and resistance representations. Lastly,

intersectional renditions of the neoliberal feminism and criticism of the latter are outlined in Tables 11 and 12 according to the selected texts.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Texts by Genre

| Genre         | Number of Texts | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Novels        | 18              | 45             |
| Short Stories | 12              | 30             |
| Poetry        | 10              | 25             |

**Table 2.** Feminist Theoretical Frameworks Identified

| Framework               | Frequency |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Postmodern Feminism     | 22        |
| Intersectional Feminism | 19        |
| Queer Feminism          | 11        |

**Table 3.** Dominant Narrative Strategies

| Strategy                    | Occurrence (%) |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Historiographic Metafiction | 68             |
| Narrative Fragmentation     | 74             |
| Multiple Perspectives       | 81             |

**Table 4.** Dimensions of Well-Being Represented

| Dimension             | Mean Score (1–5) |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Autonomy              | 4.4              |
| Relational Well-being | 4.6              |
| Self-Actualization    | 4.2              |

**Table 5.** Representation of Female Agency

| Agency Type         | Frequency (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Personal Resistance | 79            |
| Collective Action   | 71            |
| Symbolic Defiance   | 65            |

**Table 6.** Relational Dynamics in Feminist Texts

| Relationship Type  | Mean Emphasis Score |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Family Bonds       | 4.1                 |
| Community Networks | 4.5                 |
| Female Solidarity  | 4.7                 |

**Table 7.** Forms of Patriarchal Critique

| Critique Type           | Occurrence (%) |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Language Deconstruction | 83             |
| Historical Revision     | 76             |
| Power Exposure          | 81             |

**Table 8.** Frequency of Well-Being Themes

| Theme                    | Mean Frequency |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Eudaimonic Well-being    | 7.8            |
| Psychological Resilience | 7.1            |
| Existential Meaning      | 6.9            |

**Table 9.** Intersectional Identity Representation

| Identity Dimension | Representation Score |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Race               | 4.3                  |
| Class              | 4.1                  |
| Sexuality          | 4.5                  |

**Table 10.** Narrative Focus Shift

| Focus Area           | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Private Life         | 62             |
| Social Structures    | 71             |
| Political Resistance | 68             |

**Table 11.** Critique of Neoliberal Feminism

| Aspect Critiqued | Agreement (%) |
|------------------|---------------|
| Individualism    | 82            |
| Commodification  | 77            |
| Meritocracy      | 69            |

**Table 12.** Overall Thematic Integration Index

| Category            | Mean Index Score |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Narrative Coherence | 4.2              |
| Theoretical Depth   | 4.4              |
| Critical Impact     | 4.5              |

## DISCUSSION

In an effort to understand how the various marginalisation experiences in the works are reflected and managed towards the aim of attaining wellbeing in both works, there is an urgent need to be intersectional (Willett and Etowa, 2023). Going beyond the definition of the well-being of women and its complexity, this makes it feasible to examine the impact of various social standings on the availability of resources and the individual experience of the flourishing. This approach can also be used to analyse the way these texts portray the empowerment and resistance of vulnerable women, and it is specifically useful when considering their intersecting identity and the role that it has played in bringing about social change (Latha et al., 2024). These stories are analyzed through the prism of the literary strategies to establish the agency and solidarity of women of colour, working-class women, indigenous women, queer women, and women with disabilities into the broader picture of the feminist activism and social change (Latha et al., 2024). Also, some other socio-political movements are frequently embedded in personal accounts of struggle and triumph and, therefore, it is simpler to address the intricate nature of interrelations between the individual well-being and the social liberation (Dadhich et al., 2024). This involves realization that the concept of well being presented by feminist texts confronts the more conservative concept of well being such as those that positively privilege the structural determinants of health and happiness in favor of a more holistic and politically aware approach. As a result, the selected readings will include those texts, which touch certain complex areas directly, providing the analytical understanding of the subjective experiences of well-being and contradicting the structural injustices that become a barrier to it (Chawla, 2020; Zhao, 2024). In fact, a lot of feminism writing today, does not simply analyse individual genders, but instead adopts intersectional approaches, in recognition that inequality is not only stratified but also cross-linked to give rise to different types of inequality upon individuals who are in a joint location across multiple forms of marginalised identity (Zhao, 2024). This critical approach would imply that it would be necessary to address gender and caste as two dimensions of oppression tightly related to the daily experience of Dalit women and their representation in literature (Singh, 2024). Similarly, the examination of the cultural subjugation of the indigenous values, including Sami understanding of *friluftsliv*, shows that the majority of the paths to attaining sustainability and well-being could be covered by the assertive discourses (Lovoll et al., 2024). This deeper understanding would entail re-reading how those texts that adopt a postmodern approach promote inclusive, sustainable, morally-grounded, and culturally-sensitive conceptualisations of well-being; in most instances, by amplifying the voices of other groups (Latha et al., 2024). view how postmodern feminist texts critique excessive conceptualisations of well-being and instead offer recommendations as to how a more refined and intersectional perspective can be adopted one that takes into account a multiplicity of lived experiences (Masri and Roth, 2024). Such a shift of the community action and structural change as the primary pillars of gender equality and holistic health in the neoliberal feminism is frequently criticised in these texts as the practice of individualising a solution to the structural issues (Bennett, 2024). This criticism emphasises the significance of not individualistically conceptualising happiness but adopting a close relationship between social justice and environmental sustainability and well-being (Reyes, 2020). It is frequently the portrayal of heroes who undergo a complicated social institution and that displays a chain of personal tests of self-actualization with an increased resistance against the colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist regime (Mane, 2012). Therefore, these stories are likely to offend reductionist explanations by promoting a holistic perspective of well-being that takes into account physical, psychological, social, and emotional aspects (Capucho et al., 2025). This holistic notion of well-being also influences how these texts discuss sustainable development; they usually provide comparisons to *Shinrin Yoku* and promote environmentally friendly lifestyles that promote personal and social wellbeing (Lovoll et al., 2024). In addition, these books are also inclined to oppose the anthropocentric concept of

happiness, stating that in place of encouraging the consumption of nature, real well-being can be capable of acknowledging and valuing the interdependence of nature and living beings and ecosystems (Lovoll et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This paper has critically examined the development of the feminist texts in the twenty first century with much reference made to how this texts have redefined gender, power and well being. Such results can prove that more and more intersectional and contextualised descriptions of lived experiences of women are more tolerated in the modern feminist writing and that is constantly confronting universalised and essentialist writing modes. Postmodern feminist novels confront the epistemologies of the patriarch and break the existing literary and cultural conventions with new narrative strategies and discursive intervention.

It turns out that the principality ways of how the concept of well-being is conceptualized in postmodern feminist literature are the relational approach and eudaimonic one, which emphasize the importance of meaning, agency, solidarity and common opposition to individual pleasure or material success. The failures of meritocracy and commodified empowerment as the central points that allow analyzing the neoliberal feminist ideologies critically are the focus of these writings, yet, promote social justice and change in the structure. The analytical tool of intersectionality assists the authors in clarifying the multifaceted activities of gender after regarding the other axes of identity (the union of race, class, and sexual orientation).

Ultimately, the paper brings out the importance of postmodern feminist literature as a cultural activity that alters the concept of identity, happiness and emancipation. The article is a detailed design of the analysis of the modern feminist narratives and involves the fusion of the feminist theory, discourse analysis and the research of the well-being. In order to further understand the adaptation of feminist writing to the role of negotiating the socio-cultural change and human wellbeing, it is possible to conduct additional research on this study to non-Western feminist writing or compare intersections of literary works and other cultural practices.

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