

Original Paper

The Transfiguration of the Woman's Body: A Study of *Holy*

Bible and The Woman's Bible

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Abstract

This article employs the method of critical discourse analysis to study the changing portrayal of the woman's body. Our analysis shows the ways in which the woman's body is constructed as silent, instrumentalized, sinful, and unclean in Holy Bible under the dominance of male discourses. Then we examined how the woman's body is reconstructed as an independent and glorified entity in The Woman's Bible, along with the subversion of male discourses by feminist renditions thereof. The study has implications for women who are fighting for their bodily rights.

Keywords

Holy Bible (the Bible), The Woman's Bible, the woman's body, critical discourse analysis, transfiguration

1. Introduction

Recently, an online advertisement for cotton pads in China was widely criticized for objectifying women and victim-blaming. In the advertisement, a man stalked an attractive woman. When he caught up with the girl, she used her cotton pads to remove her makeup to appear with a funny-looking man's face, which disgusted and scared the stalker. The commercial triggered controversy online as many believed that it associated women's safety with their appearance, and objectified women. Such cases are common in our daily lives. While women become the victim, society tends to forgive the injurer easily when the injurer is male, and attributes the blame to women, saying, for example, that they wear too little clothing or it is too skimpy, or they stay out too late, or, as the commercial above says, they

are too beautiful. What makes people have such biased and lewd ideas about women?

To answer this question, we approached relevant literature to investigate how the woman's body has historically been depicted. In the literature, two books, *Holy Bible [Bible]* and *The Woman's Bible*, influence us the most on the recognition of women in the secular world. *The Woman's Bible* has claimed that it reinterpreted the materials relating to the woman in the *Bible* from the feminist perspective (Stanton, 1895). Therefore, we delve into the construction of the woman's body in the *Bible*, the pre-modern period, and its reconstruction in *The Woman's Bible*, the modern period.

2. Methodology

We adopt the method of critical discourse analysis to analyze the two books in a bid to find out how gender relationship is produced and reproduced thereof. Critical analysis is "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). This method provides the approach to researching the gender relationships between men and women as portrayed in the *Bible* and *The Woman's Bible*.

Our analysis is also guided by Foucault's theoretical insights into the connection between discourse and power. According to Foucault, power is conceptualized as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (Foucault, 1981, p. 92). Then how does power exercise itself on every human being and produce itself? The most important way is through discourses. This is because "[the] establishment and implementation of such relations of power [are] directly correlated with the production and circulation of true discourse" (Barry, 2002, p. 72). Therefore, discourse is of paramount importance to exercising power and the key to mastering power. Thus, men marginalize women by mastering the power of discourse in everyday life and the process of discourse creation. This Foucauldian-inspired critical discourse analysis enables us "to explore the ways in which wider social, historical, and cultural contexts" (Hallam et al., 2019, p. 330) shape the construction of the woman's body in the *Bible* and *The Woman's Bible*. Postmodern feminists often apply Foucault's concepts of discourse and power to analyze the social restrictions on women, creating a new perspective to revolt against the man's domination through discourses (Barry, 2002).

In Foucault's discourse-power system, another concept, the body, deserves consideration. This is because "[t]he ontology of the body has been an ongoing object of discussion within various contexts, in particular those concerning the corporeal and its relation to gender or culture" (Othman, 2015, p. 634). The operation of this power-discourse system is accomplished by the disciplined body because "the body approached not directly in its biological dimension, but as an object to be manipulated and controlled" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 17). Our analysis of the *Bible* shows that the woman's body is also an influential instrument for the man to discipline and control her.

The literature we researched in this paper includes the *Bible* and *The Woman's Bible*. The *Bible* is the

most influential work in western culture, which documents Hebrew and Christian history and culture, consisting of the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. In the premodern period, the revision, interpretation, and translation of the *Bible* were mainly completed by men (Campbell, 2010). In contrast to the *Bible*, *The Woman's Bible* is written by a group of feminists under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and to “revise only those texts and chapters directly referring to women, and those also in which women are made prominent by exclusion” (Stanton, 1895, p. 5). We conduct critical discourse analysis to examine (i) how the woman's body is constructed in the *Bible* under the dominance of male power and discourses in the premodern period, and (ii) how the woman's body is reconstructed in *The Woman's Bible*, along with the subversion of male discourses by feminist renditions in the modern period. We present our findings in the following sections.

3. Analysis: The Construction of the Woman's Body in the Bible

In the *Bible*, although various women are depicted, and compared to the portrayal of men, they are in the minority, and their images are negative. Our analysis shows the woman's body has been constructed as silent, instrumentalized, sinful, and unclean in the *Bible* under the dominance of male discourses.

3.1 A Silent and Instrumentalized Body

The soul has occupied the dominant position in traditional philosophy, while the body has been ignored, belittled, and suppressed, as Socrates defines the soul as “the ruler of the body” (Rosen, 2005, p. 160). While to Plato, “[the] body's relation to the soul is such that we are to think of the body vis-à-vis the soul as a tomb, a grave or prison, or as barnacles or rocks holding down the soul” (Spelman, 1982, p. 114). Similarly, in the *Bible*, the dichotomy of the soul and the body is also advocated, believing the soul and spirit are immortal and the body obstructs the communication between humans and God. For example, the *Bible* said that “your body is a *temple* where the Holy Spirit lives” (emphasis added, Bible, 1 Corinthians, 6(19), p. 2013) “The Spirit is the one who gives human life! Human strength can do nothing” (Bible, John, 6(63), p. 1882). In the antagonism of the body-soul system, the woman's body is much more silenced and suppressed in the *Bible*.

The woman's body is constructed as a silent body in the *Bible*. The *Bible* mainly records the history of the man, and the woman's history is marginalized. For example, in the genealogy of Adam, the woman figures have rarely been recorded; with only those women who played roles in the birth and growth of the heroes mentioned. While the documents of male descendants include their name, lifespan, achievements, and stories, the daughters and wives are usually nameless or merely appear as somebody's daughter or wife. Biologically speaking, the woman plays a significant role in the continuity of the clan or family. However, the body of the woman is almost invisible in the *Bible*.

By intentionally weakening the woman figures, the *Bible* constructs the male consciousness and the male centrality, implying women's insignificance. Simultaneously, the omission of the woman's body corresponds to the description of the God-image. The *Bible* creates a supreme male God, who regulates his chosen people's behaviors and the whole world business, but does not mention if God has a wife or

if any Goddesses exist, which also reflects the invisibility of women and justifies the male author's intentional decomposition of the woman's body. Just as Fuchs (2003) explains, "[the] male narrator wields rhetorical control; he has the power of discourse" (p. 15) Therefore, he wields the power of discourse to decide who can appear in Hebrew history and how the woman should behave.

The woman's body in the *Bible* is also constructed as an instrumentalized body for men, especially her fertility, sexuality, and life. In the *Bible*, most of the woman figures on stage are mothers. However, these mothers are still not the center of the discourse but just the means to ensure patrilineal continuity. The mothers in the *Bible* mainly include two types: the first represented by Abraham's wife Sarah and Isaac's wife Rebekah who struggle against the odds of barrenness to finally provide an heir. To these women, having a child, especially a male heir, means having a place in society. However, in these stories, the key beneficiary is the family's man as it ensures the continuity of the man's lineage, while the mother is just the means of reproduction. For example, Sarah gives birth to Isaac because God blesses Abraham with a son: "you will have a son by her" (Bible, Genesis, 17:16, p. 23). When Sarah gives birth to Isaac, she says that "I have given him a son" (Bible, Genesis, 21:7, p. 29). With these words, we can see that the son is *to and for* Abraham, while Sarah is just the reproduction instrument.

The second type of mothers in the *Bible* is represented by Lot's daughter and Tamar, who risk their reputations to have children. According to the *Bible*, Lot's daughters get their father drunk and then sleep with him to bear his offspring. Their discourses are mainly about how they deceive their father and why they do this. As for Tamar, due to her husband's death, she pretends to be a prostitute and deceives her father-in-law to have a child for her dead husband. With the birth of the descendants, these women's stories simply end. Morally speaking, the behavior of Lot's daughters and Tamar is incestuous. However, God does not mete out punishment for them but justifies the deeds in the interests of the man. In these stories, they have the similarities that women are the characters who are anxious over childlessness and bear the responsibility of barrenness, and after they have fulfilled their identity of maternity, they just disappear from the scene and become voiceless. As Fuchs comments:

The prospective mother initiates actions, holds speeches and dominates other characters. Nevertheless, her thoughts and words will be "reported" only since they are related to the implied telos of the story – the birth of a male heir. Upon the birth of a male heir, mother-figures slip out of the literary scene and are rarely mentioned in subsequence (2003, p. 46)

The other aspect that embodies the woman's body as an instrumentalized body is the man's power over the woman's sexuality. In the *Bible*, the women: Sarah, Rebekah, the Levite's concubines, Bathsheba, and Tamar for example, are all described as beautiful, which embodies their sexual appeal, but they all become the victims of the man's power. For instance, Abraham, for his preservation, says to Sarah, 'Please save my life by saying that you are my sister' (Bible, Genesis, 12:13, p. 17), and takes Sarah to the Egyptian king's house. Isaac does the same thing with his wife Rebekah. While Sarah and Rebekah have been made to sacrifice their sexuality for their husbands' requirements, they are silenced, and no one cares about their ideas and feelings. Laffey (1988) comments that 'Isaac lied, risking his wife to

secure his well-being. He was more important than her, and if one should suffer, quite logically it should be the woman [...] Rebecca never speaks, never has a choice, never makes a decision' (p. 32).

Another two apposite examples where the woman's sexuality is sacrificed are about the Levite's concubine and Bathsheba. As for the Levite's concubine, she was sent out by her husband, the Levite, to sexually satisfy the men of Gibeah when she and the Levite spent the night in Gibeah. The Levite did so to avoid himself being sodomized by the men of Gibeah. However, when he found her the next morning on his threshold, she has been raped multiple times. He ordered her, saying "Get up! It's time to leave" (Bible, Judges, 19:28, p. 432), not caring that she had been so abused she was unable to stand up. When she failed to respond, he picked her up, threw her onto his donkey, and took her home where he dismembered her. During the whole story, the Levite treated her as an inanimate object but not a person, and she says nothing. What is more, her suffering and sacrifice even become the justified reason for the Israelites' war with Benjamin. As for Bathsheba, she is Uriah's wife. Because of her beauty, King David commits adultery with her. To cover up his behavior, David sets a trap and kills Uriah. Similarly, Bathsheba's feelings and decisions are never considered. As Fuchs comments:

The wife in the adultery type-scene lacks a point of view of her own, both in the perceptual and psychological sense. The readers are not told what she feels or thinks before, during and after her encounter with the adulterer (2003, p. 177).

Tamar's story provides another typical case to demonstrate how the woman's body is instrumentally abused in the *Bible*. Tamar is the daughter of King David. When she is tricked and raped by her brother Amnon, she tries to persuade him that his action is intolerable: "This sort of thing is not done in Israel. It's too disgusting! Think of me. I'll be disgraced forever! And think of yourself. Everyone in Israel will say you're nothing but trash!" (Bible, 2 Samuel, 13:12-14, p. 525). Here Tamar is not silent and does speak. However, it changes nothing. Amnon ignores her. "He was stronger than she was, so he overpowered her and raped her" (Bible, 2 Samuel, 13:14, p. 525). The stress on Amnon's strength highlights the woman's vulnerability and helplessness and the man's powerful force over the woman's sexuality. The *Bible* says, "[when] a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife" (Bible, Exodus, 22:16, p. 123). However, Amnon just sends Tamar out from Israel. What happens to Tamar later, and how she lives after she lost her virginity, is not mentioned in the *Bible*.

In these stories, the women all share the similarity that they lack power as their bodies are marginalized and instrumentalized. During the entire narrative, they are silent, or they do speak something, but their words are under the power of male discourses and count for nothing. Such narratives create the collective unconsciousness that women are the second sex, which makes women believe and accept the deprivation of their identity and subjectivity in marriage (Blackstone, 2016). The most important thing for her is to be a mother and a wife, but not herself, which makes her believe that the self-sacrifice for the father, the husband, and the son are more valued than her own self-development.

3.2 A Sinful and Unclean Body

The *Bible* has constructed the woman's body as a sinful body which is responsible for original sin and human deterioration. Though there is no clear definition of *original sin* in the *Bible*, it provides an interpretation of original sin and a justification for the woman's inferiority (Crisp, 2015). Eve's story about the original sin from the *Bible* is often used by the male Biblicist to vindicate the gender hierarchy in secular life (Bellis, 2007). The story is about Eve's temptation by the serpent, which sentences women to sin and eternal inferiority. In the Garden of Eden, God forbids Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree in the middle, or they will die. However, the serpent tempts Eve to eat the fruit and says they will not die but "will know the difference between right and wrong, just as God does" (Bible, Genesis, 3:5, p. 4). Because of the serpent's temptation, Eve eats the fruit and gives some of it to Adam, and then they know that they are naked and become ashamed.

The woman in the *Bible* is often voiceless and has no right to make decisions. However, here it is the woman Eve who is tempted, and it is the woman Eve who decides to eat the fruit with Adam, which foreshadows the woman's responsibility for original sin. While God condemns Adam and Eve, Adam blames Eve, saying that 'It was the woman you put here with me. She gave me some of the fruit, and I ate it' (Bible, Genesis, 3:12, p. 5). The woman does not make any excuse for her behavior nor does she blame Adam. Because of the original sin, God curses the woman: "You will suffer terribly when you give birth. But you will still desire your husband and he will rule over you" (Bible, Genesis, 3:16, p. 5). God's curses to Eve are related to the body, the body becomes the instrument and medium for God and man to discipline and control the woman's body, especially when God's curses grant the man authority and power over the woman's body. When God denounces Adam's eating the forbidden fruit, he also throws the blame on the woman that "[y]ou listened to your wife and ate fruit from that tree" (Bible, Genesis, 3:17, p. 5). Moreover, in the *New Testament*, Adam is also absolved from the responsibility for "Adam was created before Eve, and the man Adam wasn't the one who was fooled. It was the woman Eve who was completely fooled and sinned" (Bible, 1 Timothy, 2:13-14, p. 2089).

Eve is viewed as sinful and negative, always associated with sin and sexuality, and frequently shows up in biblical interpretations and literary works as the causation of original sin. Meyers (1988) comments that "from [Eve's] sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (p. 75). It can be said that the story of Eve settles the cognition of the woman's body as evil and her need for domination by the man.

In addition to a sinful body, the *Bible* has also constructed the woman's body as an unclean body, which confines women's sphere of activity. The *Bible* develops the *clean* and *unclean* systems and makes regulations regarding cleanliness and uncleanliness. The *Bible* regulates that during a woman's menstruation period, she is unclean and if the man contacts her or touches the things she used, he would be unclean too, which tells the woman's terrible influences on man's purity and cleanliness. Furthermore, the woman's childbirth, which is essential for the clan's continuity, is also believed to be unclean. The period of uncleanliness is much longer when the woman gives birth to a daughter than to a son, reflecting the man's superiority and privilege. Women's irregular bleeding also leads to the

uncleanliness of women. Compared with the man, the cause of the man's uncleanliness is much less than that of the woman, which reflects that "women potentially are a more serious source of pollution than men" (Brenner, 2001, p. 156). Bellis (2007) concludes that "[d]uring much of women's life-bearing cycle, they were *unclean*. This can be seen as an acknowledgement of their participation in divine power" (emphasis added, p. 159).

Depicting the woman's body as evil and unclean re-emphasizes the man's superiority and the woman's dependence on the man. As the woman's body is sinful, it places higher moral requirements on the woman, especially the woman's virginity and loyalty to the man. By indicating the woman's body as unclean, it assigns the specific activity sphere for the woman. Thus, these regulations of the woman's uncleanliness, on the one hand, provide reasonable excuses for men to keep women out of the public sphere, like political or religious fields; and on the other hand, it justifies man as the agency of the woman to participate in the public area. Meanwhile, it helps the man use the sinful woman in the *Bible* to construct *the perfect woman* under the man's gaze to serve the gender hierarchy. For example, the ideals of femininity of "true womanhood" (Welter, 1966, p. 151) in the 19th century, which "cast women as nurturing, pious, gently submissive and delicate, [meant that] they were supposed to reside apart from the coarse male world in a separate domestic sphere dedicated to the ultimate womanly [purposes] of home-making and child-rearing" (Rich, 2016, p. 58). Even today's biased opinions about women online as we mentioned at the beginning of the discourse, to some extent, are due to the perception that the woman is sinful and negative, therefore she should be responsible for the man's fall and deterioration (Meyers, 1988).

4. Analysis: The Woman's Body in *The Woman's Bible*

In *The Woman's Bible*, Stanton and other feminists reinterpreted the contents related to women in the *Bible* from a feminist perspective. Stanton considered religion as the origin of oppression, as she said: The Old Testament makes woman a mere after-thought in creation; the author of evil; cursed in her maternity; a subject in marriage; and all female life, animal and human, unclean. The Church in all ages has taught these doctrines and acted on them, claiming divine authority therefore. "As Christ is the head of the Church, so is man the head of woman." This idea of woman's subordination is reiterated times without number, from Genesis to Revelations; and this is the basis of all church action (1898, p. 8).

By pinpointing the oppression of the woman's body in the *Bible*, we argue that *The Woman's Bible* has reconstructed the woman's body as a *glorified* body with *independent voices*.

4.1 A Body with Independent Voices

In the *Bible*, the male discourses frame the woman's body according to the requirements of strengthening the man's power over the woman. The *Bible* constructs the woman's body as the instrument of maternity and sexuality. Women in the *Bible* almost have no discourses to argue for themselves and no power to resist. Therefore, they are passively absent in the man's discourses and

become a subordination to the man. However, to reconstruct the woman as a live, equal, and independent body with a voice, *The Woman's Bible* has identified the implied discourses of the woman in the *Bible*.

The Woman's Bible has weakened the women's *mother* identity. For example, the *Bible* stresses God's blessing to Abraham that he will have a son by Sarah, Sarah's jealousy of Hagar because of the fertility, and Sarah's subordination to Abraham, which are all around the man Abraham. *The Woman's Bible* considers more about Sarah herself. Stanton (1895) criticizes the biblical interpretation of "Sarah's desire being to her husband, and Abraham dominating her" (p. 39), but believes that "he [Abraham] seemed to be under her control, as the Lord told him "to hearken to her voice, and to obey her command"" (p. 39). Here, Stanton breaks Sarah's inferior position in the family as she has the right to speak, which is guaranteed by God. In doing so, *The Woman's Bible* views Sarah as the central part of the story, not 'merely a connecting link between two generations' (Stanton, 1895, p. 42).

The Woman's Bible has also constructed the woman's body as an independent body by removing the descriptions of the barren mothers and the fertility rivalry. For instance, in Isaac and Rebekah's marital relationship, the *Bible* uses the words *being taken* and *took Rebekah*, which makes Rebekah sound like an object to expand the family and clan. Therefore, Stanton suggests translating it into a more appropriate language. She considers that it would be '*more appropriate* to the occasion if the words *took Rebekah* had been *omitted*, leaving the text to read thus: "And Isaac brought her into her mother's tent, and she became his wife, and he loved her"' (emphasis added, Stanton, 1895, p. 47). Thus, to Stanton, it can 'place their conjugal relations on a more spiritual plane than was usual in those days' (p. 47), which regards the wife as an independent person, rather than an objectified tool of sexuality and maternity. Thomas (2016) argues that this omission in translation is more aligned with Stanton's advocacy of the marriage based on free love, which 'make[s] her the peer of the groom by her side' (p. 90) and 'trust[s] both men and women with the same freedom in their social relations' (p. 95).

The Woman's Bible has also omitted descriptions about Lot's daughters who deceived Lot to have children with them. Stanton (1895) considers such texts are 'unworthy a place in *The Woman's Bible*' (p. 67). These feminist interpretations do not mention much about the woman's bareness and fertility, which changes the image of the instrumentalized body as a mother to one that portrays her as a woman in her own right, outside the identity of the mother, and a woman who is equal to the man or sometimes superior to him.

The Woman's Bible has rediscovered the woman's voice in the sexual relations with the man. For example, in the *Bible*, when Sarah is given out by her husband Abraham to save his own life, Sarah is voiceless, and no one cares about her feelings or decisions. However, *The Woman's Bible* explains that Abraham's deceit was brought about by cowardice, while Sarah connived at the fraud for love of her husband, being sought to do so to save his life. Perhaps, too, she might have been amenable to the gracious tribute to her beauty that Abraham gave in asking the request (Stanton, 1895, p. 42).

In *The Women's Bible*, Sarah's actions were not by force of the man Abraham's power, but due to her

love for her husband and the tribute to her beauty. In doing so, “she (Sarah) carries her point, and Abraham follows her instructions implicitly, nay, is even commanded by God to do so” (Stanton, 1895, p. 42).

In the story of Vashti, whom king Ahasuerus commands to present her beauty to his people, she rebels, which results in her being divorced and banished by the king. Vashti’s example in the *Bible* depicts the woman’s body as the property of the husband and is often instrumentally used to teach “all the wives shall give to their husband’s honor, both to great and small” (Stanton, 1898, p. 84). However, in *The Woman’s Bible*, Vashti has been highly praised for her rebellion. Although in the *Bible*, Vashti says nothing to defy her husband’s demands, *The Woman’s Bible* has interpreted her words: “Go tell the king I will not come; dignity and modesty alike forbid” (Stanton, 1898, p. 85). In doing so, Vashti is reconstructed as “*the first woman* recorded whose self-respect and courage enabled her to act contrary to the will of her husband” (emphasis added, Stanton, 1898, p. 87).

By reassessing the woman’s virtues which have been ignored or distorted in the *Bible*, *The Woman’s Bible* has deconstructed the woman’s social identity as a silent and instrumentalized body of sexuality and has reconstructed her as a person who has self-consciousness and self-respect, but not merely the accessory and property of the man. Here Stanton reminds the reader that the woman has the same natural, inalienable rights as the man, and the woman’s body and life belong to herself, and are not controlled by the father or the husband. Therefore, while Jephthah decides to sacrifice his daughter to fulfill his promise, Stanton expects the girl to rebuke:

I will not consent to such a sacrifice. Your vow must be disallowed. You may sacrifice your own life as you please, but you have no right over mine... I consider that God has made me the arbiter of my own fate and all my possibilities. My first duty is to develop all the powers given to me and make the most of myself and my own life. Self-development is a higher duty than self-sacrifice. I demand the immediate abolition of the Jewish law on vows. Not with my consent can you fulfil yours (1898, p. 25)

Discourses relating to the woman’s body in the *Bible* often appear on specific occasions, such as the birth of children, the appeal of women’s sexuality, the relationship with, and the temptation of, the man. However, *The Woman’s Bible* rediscovers and reassesses those discourses in the *Bible* that cast the woman in the identity of a wife and a mother, overturns the obedient, silent, and instrumentalized woman, and reconstructs her individuality and body outside the identity of a mother and a wife. Through the reconstruction of the woman’s body, *The Woman’s Bible* breaks the divine authority of the man over the woman’s body by reconstructing the women’s body as a glorified body.

4.2 A Glorified Body

While the man uses the divine words as the testimony to consolidate the gender hierarchy and make the woman internalize her degradation, the feminists question the portrayal of women as sinful, unclean, and immoral, but sanctify and glorify the woman’s body.

The Woman’s Bible finds implied equal discourses between the woman and the man. For example, in the text “So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women” (Bible, Genesis, 1:27, p.

1), Stanton discovers the feminine element in the image of God, which elevates the woman's body. Compared with the man's interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, which includes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are all shown as male personages, Stanton (1895) denies the rationality of three male personages but considers the Trinity as "a Heavenly Father, Mother, and Son" (p. 14). In this way, "the masculine and feminine elements were equally represented" (Stanton, 1895, p. 14). The appearance of the feminine element in God's image and the simultaneous creation of the man and the woman indicates the glorification of the woman's body and the equality of the two genders. *The Woman's Bible* has also analyzed the woman's supremacy from Adam's naming of Eve as Woman from the ancient word Womb-man, which implies that "[s]he was man and more than man because of her maternity" (Stanton, 1895, p. 22). Therefore, from these feminist reinterpretations, we can find that the woman's body has God's image, and is of the same importance as the man's body, even high above the man.

In contrast to the *Bible* where Eve, the first woman created by God, is deemed to be responsible for original sin and the fall of human beings, *The Woman's Bible* rediscovers the noble character of Eve in this incident. Kern (1991) points out, "In this passage of *The Woman's Bible*, Stanton attempted to redeem Eve's behavior which, she argued, had been misappropriated by traditional male renderings of the garden of Eden" (p. 375). Stanton (1895) believes that the tempter tempts Eve with the promise of knowledge, and wisdom of God, but not other material things, which reflects the woman's high character. She takes the fruit which also presents her courage, dignity, and lofty ambition. Weedon (1993) argues that "all meanings have implications for existing social relations, contesting them, reaffirming them or leaving them intact" (p. 138). Stanton here not just disputes the traditional meaning of Eve's behavior but reinterprets the meaning of it as the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, which changes the evil image of Eve and relieves her of the responsibility for original sin.

The Woman's Bible has reassessed Adam's behavior as cowardice and Eve's superiority over Adam. According to the *Bible*, the man is the head of the woman. Therefore, when the serpent decides to tempt the human, Eve should have no right to speak before her husband Adam. Thus, Adam "assuredly would have taken upon himself the burden of the discussion with the serpent, but no, he is silent in this crisis of their fate" (Stanton, 1895, p. 29). As the authority in married life, while Eve gives him the fruit, he should have said something to warn her or protest but just takes it from his wife's hand. While God appears to demand why his command has been disobeyed, Adam endeavors to shield himself at his wife's expense. By re-evaluating the details in the story of Adam and Eve, *The Woman's Bible* breaks the victim image of Adam and objects to the stigmatization of Eve as a sinful body.

As for the other women who are considered sinful in the *Bible*, *The Woman's Bible* has also rediscovered the noble characters in them or removed the related texts so as to better provide models for the modern woman. For example, the selfless and wicked Jezebel is reconstructed as a brave, fearless, generous woman, who whole-heartedly devoted herself to the person she loved (Stanton, 1898). The prostitute Rahab is reconstructed as a woman who "fully understood the spirit of her time,

and [has] keen insight and religious fervor, [and] marked characteristics of women” (Stanton, 1898, p. 11).

In contrast to the *Bible* where maternity becomes a curse and instrument for human continuity of the woman’s body, *The Woman’s Bible* believes that it should be a high virtue that should be the basis for elevating the woman’s position. Stanton (1895) indicates that the supposed curse of maternity can be easily transformed into a blessing and “the mother of the race has been the greatest factor in civilization” (p. 25). For example, Sarah’s laughing and anticipation of motherhood in the event of Isaac’s birth shows that maternity is not a sin or curse that should be suffered, but a merrymaking thing (Stanton, 1895). Furthermore, the Pentateuch regulates that the young Hebrews should have been told to honor their mothers. However, Stanton (1895) questions how the attitude to the mother and the other gender runs counter to the *Bible*’s teaching and how the churchmen glorify Mary, the mother of Jesus, and chant the *Magnificat* while despising maternity as a disability of the woman. What is more, while the texts in the *Bible* describe the woman’s body as unclean because of the normal physiological phenomenon of menstruation and maternity, which limits the woman’s activity, Stanton (1895) uses the woman who breaks the dichotomy of the public and private spheres to fight for inalienable rights for the woman. While the prophetess Huldah is neglected in the biblical interpretations, Stanton (1898) speaks highly of her and regards her as the most outstanding character. In the *Bible*, it is mentioned that she has been married. However, the identity of a woman, a wife, and maybe a mother does not confine her to the private sphere, as Stanton says:

She was a statesman as well as a prophetess, understanding the true policy of government and the Jewish system of jurisprudence, able not only to advise the common people of their duties to Jehovah and their country, but to teach kings the sound basis for a kingdom. Her wisdom and insight were well known to the king (1898, p. 82).

From the story of Huldah, we can see no hint of the woman’s body as unclean and the woman’s degradation, but instead her intelligence and the respect and worship from the ordinary people and the King. It fully proves the inconsequence of using the excuse of the woman’s body as unclean to confine the woman and subordinate her.

By identifying the woman’s body as the silent, sinful, and unclean body, the *Bible* constructs the woman as the second sex and subordinate to the man. However, by reversing the judgment under the male discourses and power, and endowing the woman’s body with a positive value, *The Woman’s Bible* uses the same tool to fight such subordinated recognition of the woman by reconstructing her body as an independent body with voices and a glorified body which provides the possibility for the woman to fully develop herself. As is pointed out by Sutherland and Feltey (2017), “in the power-over model, women use [the same tools] for power, control, revenge, and/or protection” (p. 622). In doing so, *The Woman’s Bible* breaks the man’s authority, promotes the awakening of the woman’s consciousness, and allows her to believe that she has the natural rights of freedom and equality and that she can and should have a voice in the public sphere like the man.

5. Conclusion

We have conducted critical discourse analysis to investigate the texts relating the woman's body in the *Bible* and *The Woman's Bible* respectively. We first examined how the woman's body is constructed as a silent, instrumentalized, sinful, and unclean body in the *Bible*. We then analyzed how *The Women's Bible* has deconstructed the women's body in the *Bible* by reconstructing it as a glorified body with independent voices. We argue that the transfiguration of the woman's body from the *Bible* to *The Women's Bible* is the result of the dynamic interplay between the discourses and power relations of man and woman. Our analysis offers an individualized theoretical prescriptive to understand the woman's body in the contemporary period and provides a conceptual tool for modern women activists to "join forces with others in the fight for social justice" (Fahs, 2017, p. 193) and their bodily rights. As Weedon (1993) indicates:

In order to develop strategies to contest hegemonic assumptions and the social practices which they guarantee, we need to understand the intricate network of discourses, the sites where they are articulated and the institutionally legitimized forms of knowledge to which they look for their justification. The most common guarantees of the 'truth' of discourses are science, God and common sense (1993, p. 126).

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