

The role of women in 20th century europe research paper example

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Introduction

The 20th century is the time period from January 1st 1901 to December 31st 2000. It was an era that was wrought with all kinds of discrimination - whether it was of race or sex. Europe in that time had gender roles that they abided by as the society via religion, norms and traditions stated the roles that felt suited men and women. The 20th century Europe was patriarchal as it delegated feminist roles to the women and masculine roles to the men. Women were seen as been unable to handle the same duties as men as they were believed to be the weaker sex. It was believed that their work should mainly be in the home and they were allowed little to no participation in politics. They were meant to submit to the men, bear children and care for the children and the homes. As a result of these limitations their freedom and independence were hampered. Feminists today believe that this made the success of their womenfolk slow. However feminists in the 20th century did fight and advocate for equality between genders and human right. These movements gave rise to more diverse and stronger roles of women in the 20th century Europe.

Europe went through a lot of changes in the 20th century that affected the continent and world at large. Some of the most devastating wars happened in this period; changes that were taken in politics affected the way the people lived, cultural, social and economic changes also affected life in general. With these changes came a paradigm shift and a change in what people saw as the norm with regards the roles played by the sexes. During the First World War women played a very essential role. Most of the men that worked were now on the battlefield and someone had to handle their

jobs back home and it fell on the women to do so. Bronstein & Harris stated that women who had been previously relegated to the homes now had to take up jobs in the factories and industries (2012). For the first time women provided the major source of labor as they were needed to provide equipment and weapons that was needed to fight the war. In Britain alone millions of jobs were vacated as a result of the war and women had to step up and fill these vacancies. Women worked as clerks, in hospitals and transport in addition to the other industries they worked in. This change was not just happening in Britain alone as other countries like Germany for instance was experiencing a similar shift.

Germany however was prevented by their trade unions and other laws from benefitting from having their women occupy the workforce that had been vacated by the men (Link 1). Their laws made it impossible for their women to be engaged fully in the workforce as the roles they were allowed to handle were those of the manual form. Many have claimed that their inability to utilise their women in times of war must have contributed to them losing the war.

Jobs

Although women had now taken the jobs that were once held by men they were still underpaid and this led to strikes. When the war ended the men assumed the women would naturally go back to manning the homes.

German Nazis considered women as inferior to men and claimed that feminism would have a bad effect on all concerned so they worked to stop it. Hitler led the Germans to believe that women were taking the jobs meant for

men during the great depression (Bronstein & Harris, 2012). They were chided for wanting to accomplish anything else than reproducing and submitting to the men.

World War II saw women move from traditional jobs of home making to taking up the jobs left vacant by the men who were at war fighting. The fact that the men expected to be able to take their jobs back from the women after the war was indicative on how the woman was viewed in this period. Unfortunately for them these women were not going to let go without a fight and these different fights opened doors for women in the second half of the 20th century. One of the greatest battles won by women was the right to continue in the paid services and not just return home for reproduction purposes. Domenico and Jones said that women have always been looked at as being immoral or negligent mothers when they chose their career lives over the home (2006). Therefore the women who wanted to pursue a career were faced with many challenges that the men were spared. While most of them were not seen as being serious or capable by their male counterparts or bosses, they still combined their duties as a career woman with duties of being a wife or a mother and as these demands ran concurrently her career was often affected. As women began to work there seemed to be some invisible ceiling that she could not crack as she was never seen to be mentally or emotionally capable to handle the high risk and ultimately high reward job roles her male counterparts handled

Education

In the early 20th century women were not allowed to attend school and this action prevented them from competing favourably with the men in the society. While the number of women enrolling in schools fell during the Nazi rule in Germany, it did pick up greatly in 1944 when the men were fighting the war. While equality was fought furiously in the 20th century it did not begin there. The first school aimed at educating women put the issue of equality in the forefront as women were expected to be able to participate in society with the right education. According to Radek, that was in 1865 (2006). As women became educated they realized that although it was okay to get those degrees they were not getting the job as they were still seen as predominantly male oriented roles. Hence you could see women get the degree of a lawyer or doctor but still unable to serve.

The 1944 Education Act was established to provide free education for all from primary to secondary school. Unfortunately quotas were put in place for the kids planning to write exams to gain admission into the grammar schools (Murray, 2011). Most people claimed that the girls were brainier than the boys and these quotas prevented as many girls that could possibly have made it from gaining a place in these grammar schools. These quotas only got stopped when they were ruled as discriminatory by the High Court.

Politics

Women of this era were also not represented favourably in politics as they were not allowed to engage in political activities. This unfair treatment saw to the rise of movements that were being set up to fight for the women's

rights. While the end of the 20th century saw women with the power to vote, they did get this power at different times. In Finland, England, Norway, France and Switzerland the women began to vote in 1906, 1928, 1928, 1946 and 1971 respectively. Women's relevance in politics was still a long way off as though they could vote they did not hold important political positions or play dominant roles in the parties.

The feminist movement greatly affected the roles of women in Europe as now they were learning that they indeed had a right over their bodies in delicate issues like contraception, abortion and childcare. As these issues were fought and been won women began to experience a greater independence and freedom in the society. The suffragette movements also began to campaign for women's involvement in government and their ability to vote. The ability to vote was a great concern the women had as they believed voting to be a right shared by all since the person elected would eventually rule over them. They believed that with voting they could find an in into the other facets of society that they were excluded from.

Men on the other hand did not really want the women to be given the rights to vote as they saw it as them losing their control over the women. As Radek put it, these men believed that when the time for voting came the women would vote as a unit or a block and this could very way dictate how they would be led (2006). They also believed that women would vote without knowledge as the issues of government was too technical for the woman to understand. But mostly men feared that women been more moral than they were would begin to affect and alter the legislations in ways that would not benefit the men.

In fighting for suffrage women and men spent years to work towards equal voting rights and in 1920 the 19th Amendment was passed. And in 1922 women were able to cast their votes in a federal election. Having achieved such a monumental right they believed that they were suddenly equals with men in the political arena and what they needed to fight for was their personal freedom. Women in Britain were clamouring for democracy in their homes so that responsibilities and available right could be equally shared at home. In the workplace they asked for the same thing as it did not make much sense to them anymore why these rights could not exist. After all they believed it only to be fair to pay people that did the same work the same wage irrespective of whether they were males or females.

The Power to Choose

Birth control was viewed as an immoral act as people believed that the right to control life should not be left with the woman as that should be God's choice and the husband's. The church also was not on board the woman practicing birth control as they believed it to be murder. But one of the people who fought for this was Margaret Sanger who fought for and found Planned Parenthood. Historians, according to Radek came up with reasons why the government was not on board with women having access to birth control with some claiming that it was for moral reasons while others claimed it was for economic or even political reasons (2006).

In pursuing this freedom of personal choice women started dressing as they wanted as they aimed to perform ' male activities' like drinking and smoking. Their altered their looks and became more sexually free as they believed

they should be allowed to bed different lovers if the men were could as well (Link 4). This drastic freedom of choice and appearance led to the term “flappers” that came to be used in that era. While the fear men had that the women would participate in block voting never materialized as these women went along with their husbands or fathers when the time came for them to vote.

In the late 60s women began to break free from the norms that shackled their dreams thanks in part to the second wave of feminism (Murray, 2011). Women now began to question the roles that society had given them as they redefined who they could and should be. For the woman change did come and in many ways as well as she saw herself being transformed from the docile housewife and mother of the 19th century to the woman with a mind of her own in the 20th century.

Positive Change

Many aspects of the woman's life were altered for the better in the 20th century. Renaissance London (n. d.) have agreed with historians who stated that there was a progressiveness that had not been seen in any of the other centuries that the woman enjoyed. She was emancipated and given political and legal rights as she also saw her social and economic status change. No longer was she tied to the bootstraps of the man but she could actually go out and do something with herself. Although inequalities still existed in the mid-20th century Europe between the man and the woman, women had achieved enormous progress and gone through change.

- Women fought to be able to enjoy many political rights but the most

important of all these was the right to vote. The suffragists through their various campaigns saw women given the right to vote in 1918 even though one had to be over 30 to enjoy that right. In 1928 men and women over 21 were also given the right to cast their vote. This right gave women the notion that they mattered and could very well determine how they were led. In 1919 Nancy Astor became the first female Member of Parliament. As women were beginning to participate in politics on the big stage, they also occupied positions of authority in the local government. Jesse Wilston Phipps chaired a council sub-committee in 1909.

- Just as with politics women also began to demand legal rights that basically had to do with equality with men. In 1919 the 'gender bar' was removed from some professions as a result of the Sex Disqualification Act. In 1922 the first woman was called to bar. Her name was Ivy William. Women were granted the rights to initiate divorce proceedings on the same grounds as the men through the Matrimonial Causes Act and in 1926 women were given the right to own property.

- As women's rights began to change they became more free and independent and they showed this in their way of life and leisure activities. Clothes began to move away from the Victorian style of the past and become more practical. Women began to wear trousers and those that wore skirts and dresses saw their hemlines begin to get shorter. They were no longer banned from being seen in public and they could go unaccompanied to the cinema while they wore makeup. Others enjoyed their freedom by smoking.

- While some men and organisations did not welcome the change, companies and businesses that were benefitting from these changes couldn't be

happier. Manufacturers of cigarette began to target their new consumer base and began to tailor adverts and make cigarettes geared towards women.

Magazines tailored to the needs of women began to spring up and in 1972 the glossy Cosmopolitan was created. Other consumer goods that had been tailored to men in the past began to look to the women to purchase their goods.

- The second half of the century saw the second wave of feminism challenge more attitudes and seek more equality between men and women. By the end of the century London like most European towns saw the population of women increasing as they were begin to seek more places for themselves in the workforce.

- One of the biggest fights that were won in the 20th century was the right to the women's bodies. Birth control pills became available in the 60s and now women could decide if they wanted children or not. While these liberations could be seen to be doing some good, it sometimes seemed to take the liberty to an extreme. One of such instances was the disrupting of the Miss World contest by women's liberation groups in 1970. They claimed that women were paraded like sheep to be slaughtered and they wanted the world to know that they were more than just beauty. They wanted the world to know they had brains as well. As they fought for their rights women also fought to receive equal pay for doing identical jobs as men. In 1975 an Act made it made it right to pay men and women that did the same jobs in recruitment and education equally.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the 20th century changed the roles women held in the European society. Gone were the days when it was believed that the woman should be seen and not heard and all she was good at was reproducing and watching over the home. Women began to fight for their right to live and be treated like equals and many women began to think outside the box. While we still don't live in a world where the role of men and women in our society is the same, we have evolved to the point where women can play some certain roles as she holds positions of authority without people believing she is underserving because she is female.

The twentieth century will be viewed as a time of change and great technological and political strides but for the women it will carry a very special meaning. Many historians and researchers have coined the phrase the "woman's hour" (Murray, 2011) to describe how things drastically changed for the woman in Europe in the 20th century. Prior to this century the roles of men and women were set in stone - the men provided for the family financially while the woman reproduced and stayed at home to cater for the family and the home. Having an education would not be top on her list as she very well was not allowed to as that was the lot of the men. It must be said that women did try to fight with names like Millicent Fawcett and Elizabeth Garret coming to mind, but even then their fight could only benefit those women whose fathers or even husbands were enlightened and privileged enough to allow their women a chance at the ladder of opportunity. The suffragists also fought long and hard to grant women these rights that have eluded them over time because of their gender. While not

immediately successful they did over time become successful but this only came about after lives had been tortured, imprisoned or even lost.

The changes that happened in the 20th century were the greatest yet.

People's lives were changed drastically as technology, equality, social status and education saw changes to what they had known to be the norm (Greg, 2008). As things changed for the better the one thing that seemed to be occurring across the world was the fighting of wars with wars like World War I, World War II and Vietnam War as some of the wars that took place in this century. As the men were off fighting wars the women were left behind and had to take up the currently vacant jobs that were made vacant due to the fact that the men were now off fighting in the wars.

Although it must be noted that these different roles that the women played in the 20th century was not handed over to her but rather came at a price. People fought and bled and died to give women the right to enjoy and work in these roles and because of that the 21st century can only look brighter for all. Feminism that was once seen as a word of shame is now often used to denote a strong woman and as the world in general and women in particular trek through the opportunities and available roles in the 21st century, they must realise that the women who fought for and defined these roles in 20th century Europe need to be applauded.

References

Bronstein, J., & Harris, A. (2012). *Empire, State and Society: Britain since 1830*. Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons. E-Book.

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=vP4jluprqYYC&pg=PT268&lpg=>

<https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-women-in-20th-century-europe-research-paper-example/>

PT268&dq= Women's+dilemmas+in+postwar+Britain:
+career+stories+for+adolescent+girls+in+the+1950s.
+History+of+Education&source= bl&ots= iHhM7bNIj&sig= lWWWVYfM-P-
7lVYcc9PTvBrsIE4&hl= en&sa= X&ei= deb2UajuBIOI0AWNnID4Cg&ved=
0CEkQ6AEwBA#v= onepage&q= Women's%20dilemmas%20in%20postwar
%20Britain%3A%20career%20stories%20for%20adolescent%20girls%20in
%20the%201950s.%20History%20of%20Education&f= false

Domenico, D. M., & Jones, K. H. (2006). Career Aspirations of Women in the 20th Century.

Renaissance London. (n. d.). Women: 1900 - 1950. Exploring 20th Century London.

Retrieved from <http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk/women-1900-1950>

Radek, K. M. (2006). Women in the 20th Century and Beyond.

Retrieved from http://transcoder.usablenet.com/tt/www2.ivcc.edu/gen2002/twentieth_century.htm?un_jtt_redirect

Murray, J. (2011). 20th Century Britain: The Woman's Hour. BBC.

Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/jmurray_01.shtml

Greg. (2008, June 21). The Status of Women in the 20th Century.

Retrieved from <http://canal89.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/status-of-women-in-20th-century.html>