

Describe and explore the following theory – Feminism

Male patriarchy has for centuries, underpinned the ruling and running of society on a macro scale across the globe (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). With law, the life inside the home, marriage and religion all being male dominated and ruled; this can only, as result make a woman or a girl the subordinate. This type of societal rule, surrounding male domination and female oppression, until the recent centuries has been accepted, and women consequently have been viewed as the weaker and less important of the sexes (DK, 2019).

Feminism in contrast - although a term that is complex and difficult to define - (Dyer, 2016 pg. 1) is a conflict theory surrounding the liberation of women, who realize the social injustice in which they are oppressed by and in turn, do whatever they deem necessary to change the paradigm in which society views them. Following on from this feminism is the campaign against any commodity which tyrannizes women (Tandoon, 2008 Pg. 2), with the aim of a better social consciousness surrounding the social, economic and political position of women. However, feminism is a term that is complex and difficult to define, the meaning to one person can be contrary to another's (Dyer, 2016 pg. 1).

This essay aims to explore some of these ideas including the emancipation of women and the suffragette movement, women's impact and importance in parliament and politics, the struggle for equality in education, and the ongoing struggle for rights to the workplace, in the workplace and for equal pay.

In the latter part of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, women's right to vote became the central focus in the feminist movement, and became known as the suffragette movement, as coined by the Daily Mail in 1906. The movement was an ongoing struggle, crucial both in the recognition of women as full citizens and as a way of securing women's place in making changes for themselves, for the country and for their future. Emmeline Pankhurst who became the face and voice of the movement used her platform of money and power to her advantage, in campaigning for the cause of women's rights (Walters, 2005. Pg. 68).

According to the Johari window theory (Sutherland, 1995), Pankhurst can be seen to have flee from accepting the oppressed position of woman in experiencing a sense of conciencia (Freire, 1968). Progress of the suffragists, indeed was slow, this may have however of been a reflection that not all women of the period had the same perspective on the significance of obtaining the

vote. A majority were among the opinion that they had not previously suffered from its absence (Walters, 2005. Pg. 70).

On a macro scale (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the pace of change in the suffrage movement was quickening, with the vote being granted in 1893 for the women of New Zealand and in Australia in 1901, giving all the more reason for the suffragettes of Britain to adopt some new techniques (Walters, 2005. Pg. 73). However, the liberal feminists of the time who were campaigning, were beginning to understand that the peaceful means such as drawn posters, meetings, rallies and marches (Smith, 2007. Pg.19) in which their campaign had adopted, was producing little outcome or change. The nature of the suffragette campaigning and protest changed as a result of this; with the movement adopting more radical, and in some cases violent methods of protest (Walters, 2005. Pg.75).

This began with smashing shop windows and setting fire to letterboxes, however led even to destruction of castles by fire. One suffragette, Emily Wilding Davison, became a martyr for the vote in 1913, after hurrying in front of the king's horse, to almost certain death (Mambrol, 2017). By 1908 imprisoned suffragettes began hunger strikes, authorities responded by force feeding them. The First World War brought an end to the suffragette movement, as Emmeline Pankhurst suspending the campaign (Walters, 2005. Pg. 85).

The vote was granted to women over the age of 30 in 1918 under the Representation of the People Act (UK Parliament, n/d), and under the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 (UK Parliament, 2015), ten years later, all women were enfranchised. In practice, meaning, women had secured full citizenship, equality and the right to influence in the running of their country (Walters, 2005. Pg.85).

The impact of the Equal Franchise Act didn't stop at giving women the right and opportunity to vote. Women's initial power, subsequently led to the first woman be elected to the Houses of Commons as a Member of Parliament in 1919, Nancy Astor, one hundred years ago (UK.Parliament, 2015). Since women have had the opportunity to become members of parliament, a considerable focus of theirs have been to influence changes in women's issues, such as campaigning for family allowances, and better childcare provision. Without these influential women highlighting these issues, the progression of legislation changes in provision surrounding issues such childcare, would have been substantially slower (Merrick, 2019).

These changes were not however easily obtained, due to the hostility faced by their male colleagues and antifeminist attitudes towards women at the time. An example of this would be the physical prevention of Nancy Astor to take up her seat in the Houses of Commons by male colleagues (Merrick, 2019).

Another remarkable breakthrough for women in Parliament, was Baroness Margret Thatcher becoming the United Kingdom's first female Prime Minister in 1979. This was after becoming the leader of the Conservative Party, who were the opposition at the time in 1975 (Gov.UK, N/D). In contradiction to this however it has been reported that Margret Thatcher identified to have hated feminism, and to have never considered herself to be a feminist. With this Thatcher also did very little to promote the advancement of women as politicians and in Parliament while she served and only promoted one female cabinet minister in her time as Prime Minister (Crocket and Yee, 2019). Regardless of this Margret Thatcher achieving the highest position in British Parliament, regardless of the fact the Parliament system is heavily male dominated, goes against the 'Glass ceiling theory' (Purcell *et al*, 2010) completely, proving with hard work and determination, women can achieve the same as men can in society and in Parliament (Crocket and Yee, 2019).

Another example of influential women in Parliament would be Dianne Abbot who became the first black woman MP in 1999 for the labour party, and has served as an MP since. Abbot was seen to have made history when becoming the first ever black woman elected into British parliament, overcoming not only the gender barriers posed by society but the equally as challenging race barriers (Operation Black Vote, N/D). Despite Dianne Abbotts many achievements, she, just like a great deal of other female MP'S have been and still are subjected to a great deal of abuse. It is reported that because Dianne Abbott's intake of racial and misogynistic hate and threats is so high, that the police receive them in series on a weekly basis from her office (Merrick, 2019).

Female MP'S have faced scrutiny throughout history for a number of reasons, including the way they dressed. It's reported that women in political influence who decided to dress in what was seen as feminine or striking outfits were seen to be trying to make a point of their appearance and were furthermore patronized for doing so. This, again, reinforces the fact that women in power have been scrutinized throughout history, firstly for being a woman, and then moreover for everything that comes as a consequence of being a woman in a society, which is underpinned by male patriarchy (Reeves, 2019).

There are many negative aspects and consequences which come hand in hand with being a female in power in a male dominated world. However, it is essential to remember the positive impact that has been made in the past century by women in parliament who have highlighted and campaigned for change in issues surrounding a plethora of issues affecting women, regardless of the majority of politicians being predominantly male (Merrick, 2019). Legislation changes have underpinned shift in paradigm in all the issues explored in this essay.

The world of work has been a battle ground for women since day one, as the vast majority of the male population believed a woman's place was in the home. During World War One (WWI) and with a large percentage of the male population in Britain away to war, women were recruited for the jobs suffering from male absence. This was especially jobs which were essential towards the war efforts, such as munition factories, which became the highest employer of women in Britain in 1918. Although women were taking the position of the work which had been formerly male dominated, they were receiving a substantially lower pay, and from this began some of the initial demands for equal pay (Striking Women (SW), N/D). during WWI women's employment rates increased from 23.6 percent in 1914, to a staggering 37.7 percent to 46.7 percent in 1918, highlighting in practice, just how essential women had become in the work and running of the country (Braybon, 1989. Pg. 49).

Despite women's participation employment during the war years, when the soldiers returned from war, women were 'sacked' from their jobs and again denied access to power and pay (Sauhami, 1986, pg. 43). The Second World War (WWII) saw women re-joining the labour force, and in many ways women's employment in WWII, mirrored that of WWI (Souhami, 1986). However, women were entering more highly skilled occupations such as engineering, nevertheless, like in WWI, this was for lower pay than men. Again, women were demobilised with the return of male workers following the war (SW, N/D).

The 1940's and 1950's however saw periods of economic growth, and with that came the opportunity for expand in the labour force, meaning government were now encouraging women to stay in employment. The introduction of the Welfare state also created opportunity for women to stay in employment (SW, N/D), however the 'glass ceiling theory' can be applied as women were participating in employment but could not advance to the level, they were capable of (Purcell *et al*, 2010). The vast majority of this work was 'women's work' such as cleaners and was still for a low wage (SW, ND).

The Equal Pay Act (1970) which came into force in 1976, prohibited the discrimination of pay towards women, and made equal work for equal pay law, regardless of gender, an economic and social breakthrough for women (Sisterhood and after research team (SAFT), 2013), which could be applied increasing the status of women's work (Souhami, 1986. Pg. 112).

Since the Equal pay act, the number of women entering the labour market has increased tremendously and advancements in addressing inequalities for women are ongoing. However, in 2018 there was still a large gender pay gap among a number of occupations and professions, where men are still earning a greater amount than women for the same work, highlighting inequality and discrimination in the work force towards women, even over forty-five years after the introduction of the Equal Pay Act for women (Kommenda *et al*, 2018). Regardless of this, there are more women employed in formal work today than there ever has been in history in the United Kingdom (Gaag, 2014).

It is also important to note that many women feel oppressed because of having to balance paid employment work and the unpaid domestic labour involved in being a wife and mother, sometimes described as the second shift (SW, N/D). If housework was considered as seriously as paid work, it would evaluate to 39 percent of the gross national income and a London study of mental health revealed forty two percent of women with young children felt socially isolated and were suffering with depression highlighting the enormous responsibility of a woman and her work (Souhami, 1986. Pg. 89).

Throughout the war years women had the opportunity, and with this opportunity proved, that they as a gender are more than capable of undertaking the tasks usually reserved for men, and to just as high a standard. With this came the realisation that girls and women should have the opportunity and encouragement to excel in education to the best of their ability (Souhami, 1986, pg. 51). This realisation would have been pushed in an even more powerful manner by socialist feminists, who wanted the recognition of sex discrimination to be eliminated in all areas of life, so that women have the same opportunity to achieve across society (Napikoski, 2019).

Throughout history, women's rights to education have been perceived to be the teachings of becoming a good wife and a good mother (University of Cambridge (UOC), N/D). Virginia Woolf wrote in her book 'A Room of One's Own', that women throughout history had been perceived as smaller and weaker than men, portraying them as metaphorical looking glasses,

which enhances the way men are perceived, in order to make women, seem less. this (Sahoumi, 1986, pg. 55).

The University of London was the first to open its doors to the access of higher education for women. Many women who were campaigning for their right to vote in the beginning of the twentieth century were doing so alongside campaigning for rights to education. In 1920, Oxford allowed women to take degrees, and Cambridge, last university in the UK to allow access, followed in 1948. Meaning, women had better opportunity and access to money, jobs and power. Nonetheless, women who studied at these universities at this time, were often discriminated against, and treated immorally by the male students (Oxford Royale Academy, (ORA), 2017).

The woman's liberation movement, formed in 1969, campaigned around the UK for the rights of women, the campaigns often surrounded issues such as rights to education and job opportunities and independence from men in regard to finance. These campaigns were persistently pushing for changes, such as eradicating sex discrimination (ORA, 2017).

The Sex Discrimination Act of (1975), eliminated the opportunity for Universities to priorities male students, over female. The sex discrimination act prohibited the discrimination of a person due to their sex, in employment, education harassment and housing. This meant employers were no longer allowed by law to employ a man over employing a woman based solely on gender, and could no longer refuse employment to women (ORA, 2017). The act also meant that girls in schools had the right to study what had formally been perceived as male subjects, such as sciences and maths this meant that the facilities of these subjects for women or girls also had to be the same high standard as they were for boys. With this, the youngest ever mathematics scholar at Oxford University was a female student, in 1985; proving the enormous impact and opportunity that this act gave women (Souhami, 1986).

Women and girls in the 21st century have gone against the societal and male paradigm they have faced throughout history in regard to education. Over forty years following the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act, the landscape of education and educational attainment has converted immensely (ORA, 2017). In the year 2000, girls overtook boys for the first time in attainment of A*-C grades in A-Level examinations (Judd, 2000), and in 2015, five-year-old girls, achieved predominantly above boys in all aspects of early learning goals (Weale, 2015). It is also important to note that it was reported in 2016, that women were now more likely to go to university Britain than men, proving in practice, just how much of a

positive shift - on a Meso scale in the UK (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) - has occurred since the beginning of the twentieth century, and how much significant progress girls and women have, and still are making in education, from primary to university level (Weale, 2016).

On a Macro scale however (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it is important to note that girls in some countries around the world still have little access to education, due to issues such as cultural beliefs and poverty. An example of this would be that in Liberia, education of females is still not considered as important as that of males, due to this, it is estimated only thirteen percent of girls finish school. Even more shockingly, the predominant reason for girls leaving primary education in Liberia surround issues of risk and fear of sexual harassment. Emphasising, that although women's rights to education in the UK have advanced so successfully, this is not the case for many other parts of the world (Sawe, E, 2018).

To conclude, the lives of women in the UK has changed dramatically since 1918, when it seemed necessary to starve yourself, or launch yourself in front of a horse to have your voice heard as a woman (Walters, 2005). Women in today's societies have much greater influence and power in the; decision making in the country, due to the access to voting rights (Walters, 2005. Pg.85) and female power in parliament (Merrick, 2019) and a greater influence in the day to day running of the country due to better access to education and furthermore, employment (Souhami, 1986. Pg. 89). This is along with a huge amount of other changes that have been made in the last century towards the advancement of women.

Feminism itself also looks a lot different to how it would have one hundred years ago, significantly with the advancement of technology and access to platforms in which you can put forward a voice with just the click of a button. The world of blogging has become a very familiar platform used by feminists alike to argue their cases and campaign against a male patriarchy (Merrick, 2019).

For example, technology has played an enormous factor in the recognition and advancement of the #MeToo movement on a macro scale. Where the internet has been used as an extremely useful platform in campaigning against sexual harassment against women, a significance so massive that it is being referred to as 'the hashtag that rocked the world' (LaMotte, 2017).

In contrast, the fact that there is a need for a #MeToo campaign to begin with, highlights that even one hundred years later, that women still face oppression. Sexual harassment and violence

being some of the biggest issues and forms of oppression faced by women in the modern world (Cosslett and Baxter, 2013).

Although there have been, and still are positives and negatives in the feminism struggle for equality of women. It's safe to say, there has been remarkable progress and change made in the past century due to the work of powerful and influential women (Dugan, 2010). Also, regardless of the fact feminism may have changed a great deal since the beginning of the twentieth century, the driving force behind the concept remains the same. The eradication of inequality in the lives of girls and women (Tandoon, 2008 Pg. 2).

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