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## The 1960s Changed The Future For Women Today

The role of women in Canadian society changed dramatically throughout the 1960s. At the beginning of the decade, women were displayed as weak, fragile, emotional homemakers. Women who did not strive to marry were made out to be unattractive and sinful, while those who stood up for themselves, and feminism in general, were dismissed as naggers. Women were to make their best attempts at the beauty, poise, marriage, children, and a well-managed home. The aim of this essay is to bring attention to the great things women accomplished despite evident oppression, and how the ladies of the 60s have changed the future for females today.

When you hear someone talking about the “Women’s Movement,” first you will most likely think about women gaining the right to vote, and while that was a very significant historical accomplishment, it actually happened in 1917. Therefore, other leaps taken during the 1960s in regards to equal treatment of women included things like when the Food and Drug Administration approved birth control pills for regular use (1960), or when John F. Kennedy appointed Eleanor Roosevelt as chairwoman of the President's Commission on the Status of Women (1961). The Women’s Movement of the 60s was a nation-altering part of history because along with other minority groups, women were finally standing up for equality. Done with being complacent, they changed the lives of women today.

In the 1960s, cultural changes were greatly altering the role of women in North American society. Women were active in the workforce during World War II, due to the fact that many men were away acting as soldiers serving their country. Without their husbands around, women had to get jobs to support their families. This is when women were entering the workforce, and actually receiving payment.

Traditions like; the men going off to work while the woman stays in the home and takes care of the children, wives expected to prepare three meals for the family daily, pour drinks for their husbands after their day of work, keep the household tidy, and always listen to the men talk about their day - all amounted to an undeniably demeaning way of life. When women started entering the workforce, it was almost as if they were made to believe that the new opportunity to work was a “privilege” and that they should be grateful to be receiving any pay at all.

Along with arguably equalizing the role of men and women through allowing them to work, also brought upon attention to the new sparked issue; dissatisfaction of women in regards to obvious gender differences in pay and promotions. In the 1960s a huge gender-pay gap was obvious between men and women.

In the 60s, women earned 61 cents for every \$1 a man-made. Today, they earn 78 cents for every dollar a man makes. Surprisingly, this is the biggest pay jump since the recession (the biggest economic downfall since the Great Depression). This is still very far from equal pay. The pay gap was caused by factors like blatant discrimination, traditions and stereotypes, and household labor. At this time women were seen as less than men, the undervalued, weaker, incompetent sex. That in itself is discrimination.

Some argue that the reason there is still such a prevalent pay gap today is that many women

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work in different industries than men do. For example, growing up, how often did you see men working as teachers? It wasn't until these last few years that we've seen an almost balanced ratio of women to men teachers. Still to this day, society considers jobs to be gendered, as well as differently valued. With the way our world works, women often shy away from going into career fields like scientists, engineering, police work, business, etc. It is no secret that these occupations are heavily dominated by men, which is an intimidating and discouraging truth for women. Though these statistics have leveled slightly throughout the years, both gender roles and discrimination are still highly apparent in our society.

The pay gap wasn't the only setback women faced at this time. In the 1960s, a bank could deny an unmarried women's request for a credit card, and even if she was married, her husband was required to cosign for it. It wasn't until 1974, that the Equal Credit Opportunity Act made so that it was illegal to deny a woman a credit card based on gender.

Laws vary depending on where you lived, in many places women were not permitted to serve on a jury. The reasoning said to be behind it was because their primary responsibility was to act as "caretakers", and therefore it would be unjust to pull them away from their home responsibilities. Women were also said to be too fragile and sympathetic to be able to stand their ground against the objecting side.

Women were hardly permitted the right to decide the fate of their own bodies. In 1960, birth control pills were approved as a legal method of contraception. Even then, still highly frowned upon. They were said to be "immoral" and to promote prostitution. Society in the 60s even went as far as to say that contraceptive pills were basically equivalent to abortion. That of which was also not legalized in Canada until 1969. By the end of the 60s, more than 80 percent of wives were using contraceptive pills. This step to the future provided so many women with more freedom and control of their lives.

It wasn't until 1969 at the earliest, that Ivy-League educational institutions started accepting women into their schools. Highly respected places like Yale and Princeton didn't accept women into their programs until 1969, Harvard only following suit in 1977. And even then, most admissions were on a case-by-case basis, generally only accepting their applications if the school felt that women, in particular, would be beneficial to them.

As the role of women in Canadian society evolved, television still widely featured stereotyped female characters, but movies began to show women acting in "non-traditional" roles. For example, though she wasn't introduced until 1981, Superwoman was a huge step in the right direction of feminism. Though she was still partially sexualized within society, introducing a female superhero was a big deal.

Following the topic of changes in women's rights reflecting on the social and cultural aspects of Canada - while the "roaring twenties" occurred 40 years prior, the 60s were clearly still an age of rebellion, except less by youth and more by women as a whole. This seemed to reflect in younger women's fashions. Among this decade, popular clothing segwayed from neat, prim, and proper outfits to more casual tie-dyed shirts and jeans.

The feminist revolution of the 60s changed women's experience of life forever. While we are still working towards full equality, it is now normal to see female politicians, doctors, business leaders, etc. In Canada's society today, it seems crazy to even imagine a woman being

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automatically dismissed as less intelligent than a man, simply based on her gender. Not all that long ago, women were not even allowed to attend school, let alone speak up and write an essay about women's rights and hardships in a way like this. It is remarkable to see how women's role in society has changed throughout the last century.

We now recognize that it is incredibly important that women are given a choice about how they want to live, behave, and spend their time. Women throughout history have not always had that choice. We should be forever grateful to those who came before us and changed society forever.

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