

Feminism Movement in Czech Republic

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This paper examines the influence of both the communist government and the media on the feminist movement inside the Czech Republic. It begins by defining the idea of gender and feminism within the Czech Republic, and how it varies from that of the feminist movement of the United States. Then, this paper will explain how the effects of communist rule inadvertently caused a feminist movement. Factors included discrimination in career opportunities and inequality in pay. The paper will then go on to explore how negative and positive perceptions of gender equality and feminism have either helped or hindered advancement. Finally, the paper will analyze the media coverage or lack thereof about the feminist movement and gender equality within the Czech Republic. Throughout the paper, there are comparisons of media, government influence, and society's feelings regarding gender equality and the feminist movement, when applicable, to the United States.

Defining Gender and Feminism in Czech Terms

Many factors influence and shape a feminist movement that do not factor into American feminism. Government, media coverage, lifestyle choices, upbringing, and place of residence all affect how the feminist movement is not only shaped, but also viewed. It was not until 1989 that the word gender was created in the Czech language and even lacked the academic rhetoric for gender discourse (Martin, 2009). Women and men involved with gender studies actually prefer the term 'gender' to feminism because they view it more open to negotiation (Nash, 2002). For example, the word "feminism" is still a dirty word in the Czech Republic, even now (Houston, n.d). The perception of feminism is a negative concept, and is viewed as anti-family, anti-child, anti-men, and anti-feminine (Sloat, 2005). According to Houston, a Czech woman, who claims to be a feminist, cannot say it with pride

(2004.) Women, who consider themselves feminist, approach the word carefully. If asked in English, then women feel comfortable saying they are indeed feminist, but in Czech, women would say that they are pro-woman instead (Houston, 2004).

Being a feminist in the Czech Republic implies a hatred for men. Feminist ideas in the U.S are quite different, in that that the main idea is to strive for equality for all. The movement for Czech feminism became a search for increased liberty (Martin, 2009), ideas born out of the fall of communism. The Czech movement was not just a reaction to the transition out of communism in 1989, but a developing movement by individuals with a collective desire for increased liberties (Martin, 2009). Currently the idea of feminism in the Czech Republic, even in Prague, is seen as suspicious and unpopular to speak in favor of it (Houston, n.d.).

Differences of West vs. East

The idea of feminism in the Czech Republic is much different than that of the United States. The U.S. movement is engaged in activism aimed at advancing women's political rights (Wood, 2011), whereas, the feminist movement, while not specifically called that, in the Czech Republic is based on gender roles, family options, and challenges in the labor market (Houston, n.d.). Czech feminist issues are more related to the private sphere rather than the public one, which often cannot incorporate legislation to amend family issues and gender roles, or career opportunities and the flexibility of part-time work. Also, in the Czech Republic there is a lesser focus on activism than in the U.S. American activism is automatically tied with politics because the interests are tied to legal rights. American feminism was born out of fighting for the right to vote and continued on to earn the right to

work, battled legislation for the reproductive rights and sexual harassment, and more recently an legal equality for all, whether it be race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or social class.

Obvious signs to westerner's, that an eastern feminist movement like the American's movement, is not a real possibility, lies in the fact that Czech women do not see clear, identifiable issues of inequality as problems (Vesinova-Kalivodova, 1998). Patriarchy, as a concept, is absolutely fundamental to the western feminist discourse; however was a useless and foreign idea in the early 1990's to Czech gender studies (Nash, 2002). It was not the belief that women were in control by the state, unlike the western feminists (Nash, 2002). In order for a real movement to take hold, society must realize that inequality exists in many forms such as feminization of poverty, limitations of patriarchal patterns of male-female relationships, and expressions of outspoken male sexism (Vesinova-Kalivodova, 1998). In the U.S., there is a more clear identity of who American women are unlike the Czech women. While there is still some dispute among Americans about the identity of the American women, the Czech women just do not share a unified identity as women at all.

The idea of a feminist movement, like the U.S. movement, is almost inconceivable in the Czech Republic for many reasons. Czech women wanting equal opportunities and more rights are faced with problems on several fronts. First, they have to deal with their high degree of aversion to politics, being uncomfortable in the public sphere versus the private sphere because of the gender roles that were placed upon them during communism.

Secondly, the fact that they were enveloped in anti-feminism created during communist times also played a role. Finally, Czech women face extreme capitalist policies on a daily basis that are only focused advancing the elite (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). While the Czech Republic is mostly atheist, it is the complete opposite in the United States. American women

struggle against the laws and morals that are based on the Christian ideals, regardless of the fact that there is a separation of church and state. The struggle against religious imposition on legislation is very different from the Czech capitalist ideals.

Czech female authors, Jalusic and Antic, found that the idea of anti-feminism is one that is strongly pronounced among the elite of educated women (2001). These women feel that a women's movement is not an appropriate instrument to introduce changes, and rather prefer the individual strategies of self-actualization (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). However, it is quite the opposite in the United States, the more educated the women become, the more open to ideas of change through a feminist movement. Results from the 1996 General Society Survey show that American feminists are most likely to be highly educated, urban women who self-identify as liberals and Democrats (McCabe, 2005). Research by McCabe found that the American feminist self-identification significantly relates to views about the impact of the women's movement and to core causes of gender inequality (2005).

Czech Public Feelings of Feminist Movement & Gender Equality

The communist role of oppression greatly shaped not only how the feminist movement came about but also how men and women viewed the female gender. More than 50% of men and over 33% of women consider feminist groups fighting for women's rights useless, while 25% of both sexes remain uncertain about them (Sloat, 2005). Equal opportunities are not seen as a matter of long-term public interest (Jalusic & Antic, 2002).

Communist Influence: Creating Gender Differences

It was due to the universalism and the human rights agenda of Charter 77 that opened the door for the modern feminist movement (Martin, 2009). Martin described the Czech feminist

movement not just as a reaction to the transition that took place in 1989, but also due to a collective desire for freedoms and increased liberties (2009). The influence of communism had very different effect on what would be the current day Czech Republic's movement. Feminism was associated with the state's hand in creating gender inequality between 1948-1989 (Argent, 2008). During the time of state socialism, Argent found a common idea among central Europe that treated the two different sexes as if they were the same (2008). This can be seen in the government's failure to encourage the ideas of gender equality within employment system. Ironically, generous compensation policies for new parents have only created more problems for women in the workplace as men view maternity leave as "maternity vacation" even though recent legislation has made the same policies available to men as well (Houston, n.d.).

The communist government viewed feminism as official propaganda as a 'bourgeois ideology', which had nothing to offer 'socialist' women (Smejkalova, 2004). According to the Marxist doctrine, the concerns and issues of women were resolved in the course of social revolutions (Smejkalova, 2004). Between 1952 and 1966, there was no representation that directly represented the interests of Czechoslovak women (True, 2003). According to True, due to the nationalization of property, the regime figured that so called "women's questions" had been take care of and that a separate women's organization was considered to be bourgeois (2013).

Another influence of the communist government on the feminist movement, albeit an indirect one, was that during the time when everyone was assigned jobs as part of the socialist system, many of the scholars and thinkers fled the country. Scholars in sociology were also seen as possible threats after the Warsaw Pact's invasion in 1968, since it they

were seen as prime supports of the Prague Spring liberation processes (Smejkalova, 2004). Without scholars the study of women's issues and dissertations about women's studies were not done. It was because of the lack of sociology scholars that the ideas flowing to and from American contacts were discontinued (Smejkalova, 2004). Sociology was wiped from the Czechoslovak academic scene in the 1950's, which was stigmatized as 'Western pseudo-science', and did not make a return until the 1960's (Smejkalova, 2004).

During the socialist times, policies were instituted that made it affordable for couples to start families, raise children, have housing and build weekend houses (Vesinova-Kalivodova, 1998). It was during this time that false prosperity was created. Vesinova-Kalivodova found that it was during this time, however, when the patriarchal influence on relationships did not change but only became worse (1998). The Czech women did not have the opportunity to demand change for themselves and their roles in society and accepted the so-called new freedoms stowed upon them. Women who were previously enjoying life at home were forced into taking a job. This is quite the opposite of what women experienced in America as they were left out of the job market originally or received menial jobs.

Communist Influences: Career Opportunities & Salary Differences

Blue-collar men doing manual labor benefited from superior wages to those white-collar, better-educated women that were associated with administrative, care or social services (True, 2013). The gender-differences were even demonstrated when both unskilled men and women worked for the same firm. Men and women were generally given very different tasks in different areas (True, 2013). The same women were also excluded from the managerial and bureaucratic networks of the communist "party exploiters," where were the equivalent to the "old boys clubs" (True, 2013).

The Czechoslovakian women under the socialist regime also paid a heavy price because not only did they were obligated to contribute to the labor force, but they had to also maintain the home and family. Women were forced to spend their unpaid work time providing or securing goods and services for their family (True, 2013). This is where the majority of the resentment from women came towards the idea of their so-called emancipation by the socialist government. These women experienced more work and burdens more than any type of freedom previously promised. Their work for the home and family was not valued as important as their work inside the labor force as it was not considered constructive or productive. Because of this, women routinely had less leisure time and not rewarded for their management of the family and home (True, 2013). The employed Czechoslovakian woman was to blame for everything wrong in society: economic difficulties, rising divorce rates, insufficient work habits, and little concern for her family and home (True, 2013). The sanity of the working women was under attack.

Women in both the United States and the Czech received less pay than men. Under the socialist law, women were to receive equal pay for equal work, but actually only received 76% of what men were paid (Haskova, 2005). “Women earn a fifth less than men, differences prevail” (2013) reports that this gap still exists today but it slightly lower as it is 84%. The previous reasons for this difference in pay were due to the fact that women accepted responsibility for the family and children, and could not accept such demanding work as men (Women’s International Network News, 1996). Haskova found that employers also justified paying women lower salaries by claiming it was the man’s obligation to feed his family (2005). Women in the United States earn 77% of that of their American

counterparts earn actually putting them at a disadvantage when compared to Czech woman. (American Association of University Women, 2013).

True reported that by 1960, Czechoslovakia had reached virtually full female employment (2003). In 1963, Czech psychologists and pediatricians provided evidence that the state-run nurseries did not provide sufficient attention for the children's normal development, which only disadvantaged and damaged women even more. (True, 2003).

Women were now to blame for "overemployment" of women, the idea that the whole sector had been feminized, denigration of housework, and the lack of quality childcare.

Communist Influences: Pregnancy, Motherhood, Families & Women's Healthcare

The government's socialist policies forcing women into the workforce had unintended consequences. Due to high employment and higher education for women, the birth rate declined in Czechoslovakia and the government intervened once again to raise the population (True, 2013). Abortion and women's healthcare were restricted and motherhood incentives were all initiatives to help grow the population, but also contributed to the growing gender equality differences. The restrictions and incentives only affected women in a largely negative way.

The government came up with "motherhood incentives" that were in place throughout the 1960's, as were family allowances and maternity allowances (True, 2003). Disincentives such as increased restrictions and higher cost abortions were put in place (True, 2003).

These policies did have an effect on increasing the birth rate, but these socialist policies continued to lessen equality. Employers treated women's labor as less efficient than men's due to the motherhood incentives (True, 2013). Being a woman in the workplace had yet

another disadvantage, the chance of becoming pregnant. Women were consistently denied jobs if they were in their mid 20's, which was prime motherhood age. Maternity incentives such as maternity leave were viewed by men as "maternity vacation" rather than an opportunity to stay home with a child.

It was from such struggles with finding part-time work, discrimination, and unequal wages, that the need for women's groups began to form within Eastern Europe and specifically the Czech Republic. It was during the post-1989 transition period that offered the opportunity to increase women's political representation and to mainstream gender interests.

Resolutions: Formation of Women's Organizations & NGO's

The Czech narratives of past experiences with the state served as their framework for entering into the post-socialist era. Women were more comfortable in the private sphere, where they were in control of the household and spending instead of dealing with issues of the public realm. Even in the face of anti-feminism and the influence of their past gender roles, small groups emerged and worked to create gender studies centers, women's studies programs, feminist research projects and writings (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). Since the mid-1990's interest has grown and there are gender centers emerging all over Eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). The Gender Studies Center in Prague is small but full of all kinds of journals, books and resources, implying there is a growing interest in gender equality.

Even though a large number of new organizations sprung up, many non-traditional women groups that were created to abolish stereotypes and work towards greater representation of women in political institutions. Jalusic and Antic both agree that rather than being a rule, these groups were “rare enclaves” (2001). Only 5% of women’s organizations were concerned with politics in the narrower sense of the word, while there is not a women’s or feminist movement similar to that of the U.S., such groups are working towards equal opportunities policies, and relevant legislation and policies (Jalusic & Antic, 2001).

A large problem with women not feeling included in politics is related to the fact that they do not feel comfortable in the public sphere (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). This feeling can be attributed back to the times of socialism when women were largely in charge of the private sphere, home life, and men were most active in the public sphere, everything outside the home. Czech women simply do not feel comfortable in the world of politics. The idea is that with training and help from non-governmental organizations, (NGO’s) that women can gain enough education and confidence to join the public sphere and enter the political sector (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). In the Czech Republic, a training of this kind was organized by the Social Democratic Party with cooperation from the Norwegian Social Democrats and Socialist International (Jalusic & Antic, 2001). The idea of women in politics is covered by the media but usually not early enough to influence any type of election results. Jalusic and Antic did report that it was interesting that the topic of women’s participation was not brought up by women’s organizations; rather they left it to the parties and media to mention (2001).

Feminist Organizations' Use of Media

An important strategy of social movements is the development of efficient media communication, which can be used not only as an internal channel of communication but also a way to counterbalance to the movement's opposition's media communications (Klandermans and Goslinga, 1996; Koopmans, 2004). There are those feminists, who get much more media space to represent the movement than the rest of feminists. According to Ing. Petr Pavlík, Ph.D., the director of the Institute of Masters Studies and a member of the Department of Gender Studies of the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, these feminists usually do not represent the movement well and the most prominent example is Jirina Siklova, the a poster-woman for feminism (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). He reported that while she was very important for establishing Gender Studies in the early 90s, she is now out of touch with the current feminist thought and theory, and her ideas are in direct contradiction with gender equality policies (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013).

The feminist movement does try to use media to advance their movement to the best of their abilities. Women's organizations publish brochures and newspapers for distribution, make TV and radio appearances, use social media to capture new activists and share news updates. According to Pavlik, feminism has some presence in the media, but it is not anywhere close to what it should have (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013).

Media Coverage of Czech Feminist Movement

People worldwide throughout the world have used media to raise awareness to issues of injustice, criticize the government and to express themselves (True, 2013). Women's

complaints about the unfulfilled promises of socialist emancipation were integral to this social movement and to success of *Vlasta*, the Women's Union magazine that had wide circulation in the country (True, 2013).

In the early nineties media coverage in Czech Republic negatively represented feminism, creating the image that any feminists within the country must be like the crazy American women that hate men, and want to start a revolution (Hron, 2002). But Hron writes that by the end of the nineties there were higher standards of media covering the feminist movement (2002).

Current coverage of the feminist movement in the Czech Republic is still varied depending on the media outlet. According to Pavlik, coverage of Czech feminism is mostly negative and the minority that does cover feminism in a positive light tend to write in a polarizing way, in that so called "good feminists" are reasonable and are part of the mainstream, while "bad feminists" are radical, male-hating, and hysterical (2013). Pavlik found that negative portrayals include the idea that "feminism is a threat to traditional social relations and a source of potential disintegration of social order" (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). Another negative image construed by the media is that the feminist ideological movement is trying to restrict freedoms of some while trying to gain an unfair advantage for others (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). Negative images were created early after 1989 by a group of male emigrants, most notably Josef Skvorecky, who warned the Czech society against feminism as one of the negative aspects of the Western culture (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013).

Even now there is still little knowledge in the mainstream media about what feminism really is, and what feminists are striving for within the movement. Pavlic wrote that there are few journalists who understand feminism at all (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). Some journalists just outright deny the existence of feminism and women's issues. While the feminist movement works towards educating women and men of their plight, Osvalda reported that the feminist movement highlights new issues and challenges within the Czech Republic, but that the portrayal of the movement and its ideals are mostly negative (2004).

As noted previously, the coverage of feminist ideas are both negative and positive. Pavlik explained that there are unintended consequences because of the way media works (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). For example, the media has created a space for feminists to present their ideas but it is questionable to the extent that this space is used productively (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). Those involved in the feminist movement are not particularly skilled with media and do not know enough about it to understand the tendency to create figureheads or spokespeople (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). The problem lies in that the media will use the same representatives of an issue over and over again, and these feminists get caught up in the media game, and do not understand the dynamics. It is when they give opinions on subjects other than feminism or their expertise that the negative fallout happens with feminist views. The public then creates a bad impression of feminists that speak about topics they know very little about (P. Pavlik, personal communication, August 14, 2013). In the world of feminism, media fame can be a double edged sword.

Media Reports by Academia & NGO's

A report called the Shadow Report on Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men is a study of the government's implementation of equal opportunities for women and men. The Shadow Report was created by a non-governmental sector and academia, the Programme of EQUAL Community Initiative, to highlight current day issues as not only a constructive initiative for the Czech government, but also intended for those with issues of equal opportunities (Shadow Report, 2008). The very idea that there are organizations collaborating with so many experts shows that there is an interest in gender equality even if not under the name of feminism or feminist movement.

Conclusions of this particular report show that equality among men and women is a marginal issue for the Czech government, and that neither the government or individual ministries have yet to create a framework for implementing equal opportunities to serve as a basis for goals, measures, and measurable indicators (Shadow Report, 2008). Also, the Shadow Report neither the government nor the ministry priorities have been created on the basis of professional experts, which has led to the arbitrary conceptions of current measures and the neglect of key aspects, while not permitting effective removal of gender inequalities (2008). Finally, subsidies to promote gender equality are completely insufficient and the Czech government's approach to cooperating with non-profit organizations focusing on equality falls short in European standards (Shadow Report, 2008).

Conclusion

The feminist movement, if it can be called that, is still relatively new compared to the U.S. The Czech women face much different issues and find family matters and career opportunities most important. The need for a feminist movement to obtain equality between

the sexes was born out of the very socialist movement that was put in place to keep everyone the same. It is quite ironic that the very steps the socialist government put in place actually fueled the fire of feminism. Today, there are many women's issues and "feminist" groups through the Czech Republic working on behalf of the issues of domestic violence, gender equality, career opportunities and pay. It is only when these groups can overcome the negative stereotypes that they will begin to see a change in the public perception of their role and the role of feminism.

Currently, there are several groups working with NGO's to encourage the government to implement more gender equality policies and legislation. One of the main goals is to persuade the government to implement legislation that would decrease women's poor representation in media. Changing how the media portrays women can influence gender equality in many different arenas. The Czech feminist movement is there, but it just is not as vocal and loud as the American's yet. Not only will it be interesting to see if the Czech women's perception of themselves changes, but if the public's, government's and media's portrayal of women and their struggles change for the better.

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