

History Term Paper has been saved

## The Education of Girls in Eighteenth Century England and France

The proper education for young women has long been a subject for debate in Europe. In the eighteenth century, the opinions about what sort of education girls should have become increasingly divided. Throughout Europe, the primary goal of girls' education was to prepare them for their roles as housewives and mothers. In this paper, I will explore the similarities and differences of ideology and practice in eighteenth century England and France. During this period, some radical beliefs about girls' education began to arise to counter the typically lightweight education provided to upper class females.

The ideology regarding girls' education in the eighteenth century was basically the same throughout Europe. Women were believed to be superficial, shallow, incapable of reason or sound judgment, and intellectually inferior. (Hill, 44) The education that was provided reflected this ingrained belief. Harriet Watson states that "the aim of education is to produce adults who are able—and willing—to play specific roles in society." (Deville 2009)

The information in Figure K-23 has been entered as a citation for the quote ending "roles in society"

Considering the prevailing assumption that women are naturally inferior, it is not surprising that women's education concentrated solely on a woman fulfilling the social role as obedient housewife. Women were not believed capable of the same intellectual rigors that men were, and therefore were supposed to devote their life to becoming a good wife and mother. Hill quotes Dr James Fordyce, author of *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex* in 1776, who refers to women as "those who were formed to delight [men], not so much by an emulation of intellects, as by external graces and with the softer virtues of the heart, and the sprightlier charms of the fancy."<sup>1</sup>

Three footnotes appear with the 1, 2, 3 number format

<sup>1</sup> Fordyce, quoted from Hill, page 50

Fordyce’s comment reinforces the belief that women’s sole purpose is to be attractive, loving, and entertaining.

The greatest differences in education between England and France can be seen in the education provided for the lower class. The differences between the two countries can be attributed primarily to the effects of the Protestant Reformation and Industrialization in England. Following the Protestant Reformation, King Henry VIII closed the monasteries and by extension the convent schools, which had been almost the only source of education for working-class girls. In their place the charity school was established, which “was to be the basic form of popular education in England.” (Stock, 70) Charity schools provided basic education for the poor. However, educational standards were low and curriculum varied from school to school. This level of education was insufficient for poor girls anything further was discouraged.<sup>2</sup>

The text “popular education in England” is followed by a placeholder

The Placeholder1 citation displays the Phyllis Stock source and page 70

As the century progressed, the nature of charity schools and of Protestant education began to evolve. The onset of industrialization in England in the mid to late eighteenth century meant that children of both genders were needed for work, and as such “the charity school movement became absorbed into the workhouse movement.” (Stock, 72) Workhouse schools, rather than just imparting religious morals, provided girls with practical skills.<sup>3</sup>

In France, on the other hand, education for the female poor was primarily religious and did not train them for a life outside of marriage – or even outside of the convent. Not having gone through the Protestant Reformation, therefore convent schools continued to exist as

The text “in the eighteenth century” follows the text “English girls” in footnote 2

The footnote text is single spaced

<sup>2</sup> English girls in the eighteenth century were also taught basic religion by means of memorizing catechisms, in the hopes of educating them in the Protestant religion.

<sup>3</sup> For example, training in textiles enabled girls to obtain employment in the factories.

Your Name

A footnote has been entered for the text “practical skills”

they had for hundreds of years. These convents were concerned almost exclusively with religion and morality, and nuns taught the young girls the virtues of modesty and obedience. Unlike in England, girls were not prepared for their role and work in later life. They were instead prepared for religious life and often ended up remaining at the convent to become nuns. This French quote discusses one of the drawbacks of eighteenth century convent education:

The paragraph of French text is displayed using the Intense Quote style

*L'enseignement charitable des filles va aussi se développer sur le même modèle avec les Ursulines, la Congrégation Notre-Dame ou les Filles de Notre-dame. Ces femmes ne peuvent participer à la vie extérieure. (Coutinot 2007)*

Education of middle and upper class girls varied less between England and France, although there are some interesting differences. Girls in both countries were sent to boarding schools, where they were taught “accomplishments thought likely to attract a husband.” (Stock, 99) The curriculum offered at these schools may have helped the girls attract husbands, but often did little to instruct them in what to do after they were married.

Of the two countries, France remained the most traditional. The most advanced boarding school for girls was Saint Cyr, which was established for noble girls. Girls received a purely practical education at Saint Cyr. Instead of training girls in accomplishments, Saint Cyr educated girls in “practical household activities.” (Stock, 93) In fact, Saint Cyr provided a “sensible religious education aimed at secular life, and...useful training in household arts.” (Stock, 95) Saint Cyr was certainly an improvement over many other French boarding schools, but it did little to advance egalitarian education for girls. Young women were still expected to conform to the traditional domestic role of housewife and mother, and were dissuaded from engaging in more intellectual pursuits.

The citation for the text “household activities” uses the Chicago style

The page number is 93, and no year is displayed

Movement towards equal education for both genders came more readily in England than in France as a result of the efforts of the Unitarians, a radical religious group that “derived chiefly from

Protestant dissent of the eighteenth century.” (Watts, 3) The Unitarians’ belief in the importance of education and knowledge led them to question the assumption that women were intellectually inferior. As a result, they “[saw] the need for women to be well educated both for their own moral and spiritual development and to fulfill their traditional maternal and caring roles.” (Watts, 8) The education they advocated was based on Enlightenment ideas of reason and science. Experience was considered the most important tool for learning. Yet, in spite of their considerable advances towards equal education, the Unitarians still expected women to fulfill the role of wife and mother. Equal education was meant to allow women to be good companions for their husbands, and “to give rational amusement to themselves when alone.” (Watts, 78) Nonetheless, the Unitarians pushed the boundaries of female education and paved the way for further advances in the nineteenth century.

The eighteenth century proved to be a time of great change in women’s education, particularly in England. By the end of the century, England had opened the door to equal education, which began to flourish in the nineteenth century. France was less advanced than England and still resisted intellectual education for girls, but it too made some advances and after the Revolution educational opportunities for girls began to increase. Both countries made definite improvements in female education, which would eventually come to fruition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A bibliography matching  
Figure K-24 has been created

## ***Bibliography***

Charlton, Kenneth. *Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern England*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Coutinot, Lionel. "L'Education sous l'Ancien Régime." *Le Fil de l'Histoire*. 2007.  
<http://lionelcoutinot.club.fr/tps/ch4b.html> (accessed January 27, 2007).

Deville, Martha. *Eighteenth Century Female Education*. London: New Arcadia Publishing, 2009.

Hill, Bridget. *Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984.

Lougee, C. C. "Noblesse, Domesticity, and Social Reform: The Education of Girls by Fenelon and Saint-Cyr." *History of Education Quarterly*, 14, 1974.

There is no entry for James  
McDonald displayed

Stock, Phyllis. *Better than Rubies: A History of Women's Education*. New York: Capricorn Books, 1978.

Watts, Ruth. *Gender, Power, and the Unitarians in England: 1760-1860*. London: Longman, 1998.

The name Watts is spelled correctly