

Univerzita Pardubice  
Fakulta filozofická  
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## **Cultural Differences between an 1860's and 1960's Wife**

**Bakalářská práce**

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Bachelor Paper

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### **Kulturní rozdíly mezi manželkou šedesátých let 19. a 20. století**

**Bakalářská práce**

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2006

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor paper analyzes the social position of women in two different periods in British history. One part of the paper characterizes Victorian England and its values, attitudes and stereotypes determining the women's subordinated place in a society dominated by men. It focuses mainly on the women's traditional roles as a wife and mother and analyzes their basic rights, their access to educational and working opportunities as well as the Victorians' attitude to the issue concerning sexuality around the period of the 1860s. The analysis of women's conditions in the Victorian society is based on the novel *The French Lieutenant's Women* by John Fowles. The other part of this bachelor paper characterizes the period of the second half of the twentieth century observing some of the important changes and reforms of the 1960s that have led to women's increased emancipation. This bachelor paper recognizes the progress that has been achieved over one hundred years, as well as reveals the inequalities and discrimination that have remained the same burden for women in both characterized periods. The analysis of the women's social conditions in second half of the twentieth century is based on the play *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill pointing to the new generation of modern women longing for equality with men and bigger emancipation.

## Shrnutí

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá pozicí ženy ve společnosti v šedesátých letech 19. a 20. století. První část práce, která je podložena analýzou knihy Johna Fowlese *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, charakterizuje hodnoty, morální předsudky a postoje viktoriánské Anglie, které určovaly tradiční roli ženy ve společnosti, kde měli rozhodující slovo převážně muži, což se odráželo ve všech sférách tehdejšího života. Zároveň analyzuje základní lidská práva žen včetně jejich přístupu ke vzdělání a uplatnění na pracovním trhu. Tato bakalářská práce také rozebírá vztah tehdejší puritánské společnosti k sexualitě a vystihuje tak atmosféru viktoriánské Anglie. Práce se dále zabývá 60. lety 20. století a soustředí se zejména na změny a reformy, kterých bylo dosaženo v různých oblastech. Kromě pokrokových reforem, které přispěly k ženské emancipaci v mnoha oblastech každodenního života žen, jsou zde zdůrazněny i nerovnosti a diskriminace, které se nepodařilo ze života žen odstranit ani v druhé polovině dvacátého století. Tato část zabývající se situací žen ve dvacátém století je podložena analýzou feministické hry Caryl Churchill *Top Girls* poukazující na novou generaci žen, toužící po emancipaci a rovnocennosti s muži.

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# 1. Introduction

This bachelor paper characterizes two different periods in British history with a view to the social position of women around the 1860s and the 1960s. The main purpose of the paper is to show the women's conditions as well as their traditional roles that were determined by the Victorian society, generally dominated by men. The important part of this paper focuses on the women's basic rights, educational and working opportunities, as well as the possibilities to control their fertility in both characterized periods. Even in the second half of the twentieth century, women were still only judged upon marriage and motherhood regardless of intellect or skills. Therefore, this paper analyzes the changes and reforms that have been achieved to improve women's subordinated and often discriminated place in the men's world.

The realistic characterization of the Victorian society, its values, traditions, and attitudes determining the certain place and function of women in the society at that time is essential to understand how much effort had to be made to increase women's liberalization and independence later in the twentieth century. Therefore, the analysis of the Victorians is also based on the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles who perfectly reflected the Victorian world of the 1860s and showed attitudes and stereotypes prevailing at that time. What is even more important, Fowles described the Victorian society from the perspective a hundred years later, thus in the 1960s and this fact enabled him to compare these two periods:

The Victorians were not a dialectically minded age: they did not think in opposites, of positives and negatives as aspects of the same whole. Paradoxes troubled rather than pleased them. They were not the people for existentialist moments, but for chains of cause and effect; for positive all-explaining theories, carefully studied and studiously applied. They were busy erecting, of course; and we have been busy demolishing for so long that now erection seems as ephemeral an activity as bubble-blowing. (Fowles, 1985, 215)

This novel is a study of the sexual repression and morality in the Victorian age and the behaviour as well as the attitudes of the characters are more important than the plot itself. Fowles created two completely different characters of women as far as the lifestyle and social rules are concerned to emphasize the Victorian principles of the middle- and upper-class

society. Ernestina represents a typical Victorian lady following daily stereotypes as well as the social rules and expectations belonging to her social class. As it was typical for middle- and upper-class women, Ernestina's most important aim in life is to get married unlike Sarah who is rather mysterious and does not follow the conventions of her social class at all. Even Charles, a typical Victorian gentleman, had realized that "Sarah was more intelligent and independent than she seemed" (Fowles, 1985, 105), unfortunately, such attributes were neither expected nor respected from women at that time. In this novel, Fowles stressed the absurdity of Victorian puritanism and oppression of women's intellect and skills. Such stereotypes are also followed by Charles whose opinions on women did not differ from those of the other Victorian men:

After all, Ernestina was only a woman. There were so many things she must never understand: the richness of male life, the enormous difficulty of being one to whom the world was rather more than dress, home and children. (Fowles, 1985, 114)

Generally, the social position of the Victorian women was rather difficult because they had few legal rights and nearly everything about the Victorian woman's life was predetermined, thus restricting any personal desires. When a woman married, everything she owned became her husband's and if she worked, the money she earned belonged to her husband as well. As McDowall notes, even if wives could be companions to their husbands, they were not equals and an increasing number of women found their sole economic and social usefulness ended when their children grew up. Women were discouraged from going out to work if not economically necessary and a wife was legally man's property until nearly the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, it was almost impossible for a woman to divorce her husband. As a result, many women were locked up in bad marriages. Until 1882, a woman had to give up all her property to her husbands when she married him. Until 1891, husbands were still allowed by law to beat their wives and to lock them up in a room if they wished. Men of all classes were able to take sexual advantage of working women. Women were probably treated worse in Britain than in any other industrializing European country at this time. (McDowall, 2001, 136 - 137, 162)

As O'Donnell adds, a woman was treated as a piece of property, belonging first to her father and then to her husband. The man took control of all the woman's property and children. However, not only a man thought of his wife and daughters as his property but so did the law. Women had been trying to get Parliament to give them the vote since 1867 but despite the efforts of women including thousands of meetings, petitions with millions

signatures and marches on Parliament, women were not allowed to vote in parliamentary elections until 1928 when all women over 21 finally gained the right to vote. (O'Donnell, 1993, 231 - 233)

In the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles also mentioned the issue concerning the struggle for the women's equal rights while referring to John Stuart Mill's effort to give women the legal right to vote:

Remember the date of this evening: April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1867. At Westminster only one week before John Stuart Mill had seized an opportunity in one of the early debates on the Reform Bill to argue that now was the time to give women equal rights at the ballot-box. His brave attempt was greeted with smiles from the average man, and disapproving frowns from a sad majority of educated women, who maintained that their influence was best exerted from the home. Nonetheless, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1867, is the point from which we can date the beginning of feminine emancipation in England. (Fowles, 1985, 101)

As McDowall explains, John Stuart Mill, a radical thinker, had tried unsuccessfully to include votes for women in the 1867 Reform Bill. After 1870, nevertheless, the situation, particularly for middle-class women, began to improve and women gained some basic rights such as to study or to own certain amount of their property. A very small number started to study at Oxford and Cambridge in separate women's colleges, even if men thought that their place was in the home. Despite the fact, however, that women were allowed to follow the same courses of study as men, they could not receive a degree at the end. (McDowall, 2001, 162 -163) According to *Chronicle of Britain*, in 1870, Women's Property Act became law establishing that women could retain money they had earned. Nonetheless, they could only keep inherited property and money to the value of 200 guineas, together with savings and shares or other investments to the same amount. Even if this law was not outstandingly generous, it was seen as a first step. Husbands no longer had right of ownership over their wives and all that belonged to them. (Heald, 1992, 939) Once women had achieved the right to vote and keep the property, many people felt that they had gained full and equal rights. However, there was still a long battle ahead for equal treatment and respect both at work and home, therefore, women's struggle for equality and liberalization is one of the main themes of this bachelor paper.

The aim of this paper is to recognize the progress that has been achieved in women's social position over one hundred years by analyzing the conditions of women and reforms that have led to women's liberalization in both private and public spheres. Furthermore, this paper observes the traditional women's roles as well as inequalities that remained the same for a

Victorian woman as well as for an emancipated woman of the 1960s. Thus, the other part of this paper contains the analysis of women's social position in the 1960s that reflects some of the important reforms concerning mainly the equal treatment and greater possibilities in the fields of education, work, and medicine that have contributed to women's increased emancipation. The analysis of changes in lifestyle and expectations of modern working women is also based on the play *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill that shows successful women in various times and places and demonstrates how women have evolved in their roles. This play whose plot is set in the late 1970s proves that even in the second half of the twentieth century, much progress still remained to be made to improve women's roles.

As Churchill explains the background of her play, Britain in the 1970s witnessed a profound change in the consciousness of women as a group. Perhaps for the first time in history, changes in law, media, the arts, attitudes to public morality and in social habits altered radically the base from which women viewed their lives. Several Acts of Parliament had a sudden and major influence on women's changing sense of personal independence and their status with employment. In 1967 The Abortion Act made abortion far easier to obtain; in 1969 The Divorce Reform Act broadened grounds for divorce; in 1970 The Equal Pay Act established that equal pay for men and women doing the same job; in 1974 contraceptives became freely available; and in 1975 The Sex Discrimination Act banned sex discrimination in employment, education and advertising. The Women's Liberation Movement was formally active in Britain throughout the 1970s and did much to focus attention on women's issues and to raise women's consciousness of their demands and needs. Feminism questioned any assumption that women were secondary and dependent on men and that the social and sexual division of labour was natural and unchanging. In this play Churchill contrasts the "modern woman living at a time of shifting priorities and expectations as far as women are concerned" with the "traditional women dependent on men and limited by the rules and conventions of a male dominated world." (Churchill, 1991, 25 - 28)

The play includes stories of several women from different times and different social backgrounds, however, it appears that all these women have the same experience of oppression as they have always been expected to fulfil certain roles and have been denied access to various spheres in life that were open only to men. Nevertheless, this bachelor paper focuses mainly on the lives of the modern women in the play who have to deal with many challenges in a society that have been controlled by men.

The following analysis of women's conditions in various parts of their lives in both characterized periods should answer the question whether the British women have finally

achieved their liberalization and equal rights with men, and whether they have been finally able to escape from traditional restraints and prejudices so even the emancipated French Lieutenant's Woman, whose 'immoral' behaviour was so disapproved by the Victorians, would be accepted as an intelligent and independent woman in the society of the second half of the twentieth century.

## **2. Victorian marriage versus 'modern marriage' of the 1960s**

Marriage has always played a very important role in most women's lives, however, in the twentieth century, the expectations of women have changed since the time when a woman's future was determined by the strict Victorian society dominated by men. Modern women of the 1960s demanded to be equal partners in their marriages and have the same opportunities as their husbands. The following analysis of women's position in these two different periods shows the changes women have achieved over one hundred years as well as the traditional barriers women still had to face despite the progress of the modern world.

According to *Encyclopedia of European Social History* by Peter Stearns, Victorian marriages have been mostly characterized as patriarchal arrangements in which a husband was expected to be a role model for his family and servants, exercising self-control and good wisdom, ruling firmly over his family. A wife was responsible for running her household and servants, and for feeding and disciplining her children. However, she was required to respect

husband's authority and expected to perform the marital duty of having sex and procreating. Infidelity was disapproved, and a woman was obliged to guard her honor and reputation by behaving in a modest and civil manner and not indulging in excess. (Stearns, 2001, 152)

In his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles pointed out the stigma of a woman who did not follow rules belonging to her social class and did not behave as a lady. Sarah became a moral outcast, not only because she had sex as a single woman but she also continued going to the forest near the town even if she was not supposed to go there. Who knows what she does there? In the Victorian period, everybody who did something secretly was considered immoral and therefore Sarah's independence and 'immoral behaviour' made a stain on her character.

Charles was overcome by equally strange feeling – not sexual, but fraternal, perhaps paternal, a certainty of the innocence of this creature, of her being unfairly outcast, and of her appalling loneliness. He could not imagine what, besides despair, could drive her, in an age where women were semi static, timid, incapable of sustained physical effort, to this wild place. (Fowles, 1985, 65)

Relations between spouses have often been characterized as cold and distant, especially in arranged marriages based on property and not on love. In the issue of such marriages, Stearns explains that "arranged marriages made by parents determined to create agricultural, commercial, or political alliances, usually with economic and lineage interests foremost." Stearns further adds that in the nineteenth century, middle- and upper-class women spent most of their time in the home nurturing and providing a comforting atmosphere, while men were engaged in politics and professional life outside the home. (Stearns, 2001, 32)

As upper-class women usually did not work, had nannies to look after children and servants to run the house, their main role was to be dutiful and obedient wives to their husbands. To stress the Victorian values and expectations concerning the lifestyle of middle- and upper-class women whose only accepted 'career' consisted in getting married and fulfilling the duties of marriage, Fowles created his main character, Sarah, too emancipated and independent for a woman of her time. Sarah, thinking and behaving in a twentieth century way and refusing being tied up with Victorian restrictions, is ahead of her time and resembles a 'modern woman' of the 1960s. Her attitude to marriage makes her a 'new woman' who prefers her freedom to becoming a good wife dependant on her husband. "I wish to be what I am, not what a husband, however kind, however indulgent, must expect me to become in marriage." (Fowles, 1985, 385)

According to Leonore Davidoff who contrasts the responsibilities of upper-class and working-class wives in her study *The Family in Britain*, the households at the highest level depended on large numbers of specialized servants and childcare was largely turned over to nursery maids and nannies. Thus, woman's first duty was to her husband's position and included mainly taking part in the events of the upper-class society. Whereas the mid-nineteenth century working-class marriages were usually based on male financial support in return for wife's household management, cooking and sexual services. A married man expected to be able to turn all housekeeping and childcare over to his wife when he turned over his weekly wage. Wives at all levels prided themselves on their ability to keep the household at the highest standards while husbands expected their comfort to be considered, to have their meals ready as much to their taste as possible. A wife who was not able or did not bother to keep up these standards was not living up to her part of the marriage contract. As fighting between husbands and wives was accepted, a level of interpersonal violence seemed endemic among some sections of the working-class. The sparking points were rows over money and the wife's personal services, especially where a husband felt his 'manhood' had been infringed. (Davidoff, 1990, 101 -116)

As for the division of labor between husbands and wives, in the typical pattern of Victorian marriage, husbands worked away from home, being wage earners in factories and offices and wives remained at home to supervise households and children. Only married women from poor families worked outside the household. Husbands had the legal right to control wives' property, to determine their standard of living, and to make all decisions regarding estate management and the upbringing of children. Thus, most women lacked basic legal rights and married women were subordinated to their husbands. Therefore, feminists of the late nineteenth and twentieth century fought for the basic rights of married women, such as the right to their wages, to own property, and to share the governance of children with their husbands. (Stearns, 2001, 153)

The effort of feminists brought certain success and as Davidoff further adds, women's independence started to grow with the claim to control their own property in the 1860s. By the 1890s, husbands were no longer able to imprison or chastise their wives with impunity as pressure increased to incorporate women as individual citizens through voting. Despite the feminist challenge, the structure of marriage remained through men's dominance in the economy. Women's greatest chance of economic and social survival was still through marriage despite the opening up of some professional and clerical positions. (Davidoff, 1990, 105)

Nevertheless, the women who lived in the unsatisfactory marriages had very few possibilities to leave their spouses because in most cases, they could not afford to get divorced. As women had neither independent means of support nor rights to get any property after divorce, only upper-class women with property of their own could afford legal separation or divorce and thus, divorce was more accessible to men until the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, inequality of divorce until the mid-1960s consisted in the fact that if a man wanted to get divorced, the only thing he had to do was to confirm that his wife had been unfaithful to him. However, as Storry and Childs note in their study *British Cultural Identities*, a wife needed to prove that adultery and desertion, bigamy or cruelty had taken place to divorce her husband. (Storry, Childs, 1997, 144 – 145) Divorce remained highly restricted, particularly for women during most of the nineteenth century but Stearns pointed out that changes in laws, usually associated with the discussion of new rights for women, altered the situation late in the century when England founded a Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes in 1857. (Stearns, 2001, 158)

From the mid-nineteenth century, however, there had been restlessness among women subordinated within the domesticated role of the middle-class family and as Davidoff notes, the first, very limited divorce reform in 1857 raised the arguments and fear that law would interfere in the family; that fathers' rights would be undermined or they would shirk their responsibilities. (Davidoff, 1990, 99 - 105)

In their study *Women in the Family*, Leonard and Speakman mention the following opinions concerning the divorce reform in the nineteenth century. On the one side, there were arguments for divorce reform such as to help people locked in bad marriages or forced to live together because of a past 'mistake' while on the other side there were those who argued that to make divorce any easier would further encourage the breakdown of the family. However, it was not until 1960 when changes in the provision of legal aid made divorce financially possible for the poor as well as the rich.

While discussing the position of Victorian women in the family, Leonard and Speakman explain that in the nineteenth century, the majority of single women worked for their fathers and brothers or as servants, and were maintained by their relatives or masters and mistresses until they married. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 40 - 45) *Top Girls'* heroines Isabella, the Victorian traveller, and Lady Nijo, the Emperor's concubine from the thirteenth century, are good examples of women subordinated to their fathers who point to their universal experience consisting in the fact that no matter in which century they lived, they both always did what their fathers wanted. In further discussion, Isabella agrees with Griselda's opinion that a wife



must obey her husband. (Churchill, 1991, 3, 21) Leonard and Speakman further add that it was usually the families controlling whom and when their daughters married. From the mid-nineteenth century, concern that those who did not marry should have a fulfilling occupation, led the first feminists to campaign for the opening of middle-class occupations and the professions to women. However, it was not until the next century when it finally became acceptable for middle-class women to be employed until they married or had children so women from all social classes could be self-supporting. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 40 - 41)

During the twentieth century, the role and status of wives began to improve. With wider educational opportunities, women became better educated and acquired the access to the labour market. New technology freed women from the hard domestic tasks and enabled them to gain more control over their household and lifestyle.

Hopkins describes these changes as follows:

The working-class marriage underwent considerable changes in the period 1951-74. The old Victorian picture of the working class mother toiling away at the wash-tub surrounded by a numerous brood of small children had vanished completely, being replaced by a mother with usually not more than two children who spent much her time outside the home in paid employment. (Hopkins, 1991, 166)

As Stearns compares the conditions of women in the 1960s to those in the Victorian period, more married as well as unmarried women worked and supported themselves, family size became smaller, and husbands increasingly shared family and household responsibilities. More marriages were based on affection and sexual attraction than the formal arrangements of the previous century. The relationship between husband and wife became less authoritarian and more affectionate. Growing numbers of women acquired white-collar jobs, giving them independence and the possibility of change in lifestyle. (Stearns, 2001, 153 - 154)

The women also gained the possibility to escape from the unhappy marriages as the further changes concerning divorce procedure made it finally more accessible even to them. According to Storry and Childs who further analyze this issue, the Divorce Reform Act in 1969 made divorce more possible to both men and women, especially if there was a mutual agreement and no young children. Moreover, it was one of the important changes that contributed to the liberation of women. (Storry, Childs, 1997, 144 – 145) Besides the Divorce Reform Act, changes towards sexuality, morality, and religion as well as the relations of men and women and social and economic conditions in the second half of the twentieth century contributed to the fact that divorce became accessible to all social groups. As Stearns suggests, the twentieth century-life also brought change both in the expectations of marriage

and in the attitudes towards divorce. Premarital pregnancy, which previously had propelled couples into marriage, lost its social stigma and single parenthood gained recognition. (Stearns, 2001, 158 -159)

Let us conclude this issue concerning the roles and status of wives throughout the century with the commentary by Abercrombie and Warde who suggest that the position of women has changed in many ways. Due to the Divorce Reform Act, a wife did not have to put up with an unsatisfactory marriage any more. The increasing proportion of married women in full-time work contributed to their greater financial independence so they did not depend on their husbands any more. Even if inequalities within marriage remained, especially in access of women to labor and unequal pay, women gained more independence than they used to and this fact could influence women's decision to leave a marriage. (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994, 295)

### **3. Sexuality versus morality**

Although Victorian England was known for its puritanism and sexual morality stressed mainly within the family life, the reality was rather different in public life where prostitution and sexual deviance were widespread. Sexuality was one of the main moral issues of the Victorian period. Sex within marriage was considered a duty, however, it was morally unacceptable mainly for women to have sexual experience outside of the marriage. Even if there were many strict moral rules about the woman's clothing and behaviour and the female body had to be hidden so not even woman's ankle was allowed to be seen to provoke man's attention, paradoxically, there was a huge number of brothels in London and prostitution spread mainly in the Victorian period. Nevertheless, the brothels and prostitution did not exist officially and that issue was never discussed in public. As Stearns notes:

The Victorian world that was full of repression as for sexuality, spent a great deal of time and energy focusing on sexuality. If sexuality was a secret then it was a secret invested with enormous powers. Medicine, social scientific theory, legislation, moralism and popular opinions of the nineteenth century all contrasted the purified home as the emotional center of the family with the polluted world of public life, where sexual deviance took place. (Stearns, 2001, 251)

O'Donnell has described prostitution as widespread, some of it highly organized, much of it was a source of supplementary income for ill-paid or out-of-work milliners, dressmakers and domestic servants. The 'double standard' of Victorian sexual morality was notorious, and it was reinforced by the sexual frustrations imposed upon so many marriage beds by the ignorance and prudery in which most middle-class girls were brought up. (O'Donnell, 1993, 41 - 43)

In the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles nicely described the atmosphere of the Victorian age while stressing the paradoxes of the nineteenth century known for its sexual repression and sexual mores, however, also for dealing with the issue of prostitution:

What are we face with in the nineteenth century? An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen-year-old girl. Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel. Where the sanctity of marriage and chastity before marriage was proclaimed from every pulpit, in every newspaper; and where so many great public figures, from the future king down, led scandalous private lives. Where the female body had never been so hidden from view, and where every sculptor was judged by his ability to carve naked

women. Where it was universally maintained that women do not have orgasms; and yet every prostitute was taught to simulate them. (Fowles, 1985, 231 - 232)

While talking about the nineteenth century, Fowles also stressed the fact that despite the great development in the industry and science during the Victorian period, sexuality was not even discussed in Victorian literature and remained a total taboo for any discussion in public.

Where is not a single novel, play or poem of literary distinction that ever goes beyond the sensuality of a kiss. Where there was an enormous progress and liberation in every other field of human activity; and nothing but tyranny in the most personal and fundamental. (Fowles, 1985, 231 - 232)

Victorian women were believed to be naturally good. They carried good values and they were supposed to behave in a moral way. That means that women of middle- and upper-classes were sexually ignorant before marriage. Fowles describes Ernestina as a typical upper-class woman of her time who will not even allow herself to look at her own naked body, or let Charles touch her except for the kisses on the cheek or hand. Paradoxically, she considers herself very much in love and in real intimacy with her fiancé.

She unbuttoned her dress and stood before her mirror in her chemise and petticoats. She raised her arms and unloosed her hair, a thing she knew to be vaguely sinful and imagined herself for a truly sinful moment as someone wicked – a dancer, an actress. She suddenly stopped turning and admiring herself in profile; gave an abrupt look up at the ceiling. And she hastily opened one of her wardrobes and drew on a *peignoir*. (Fowles, 1985, 29 - 30)

Even if sexuality was considered a duty within the marriage, it was terrifying for a girl of middle- or upper-class. Ernestina is a great example of the Victorian girl longing to get married well however being scared of a ‘monster’ that the marriage involves.

She sometimes wondered why God had permitted such a bestial version of Duty to spoil such an innocent longing. Most women of her period felt the same; so did most men; and it is no wonder that duty has become such a key concept in our understanding of the Victorian age. (Fowles, 1985, 30)

In his *French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles compares the attitudes to sexuality in the Victorian period and in the second half of the twentieth century. He argues against the theory supposing that the Victorians were not in fact highly sexed. According to Fowles, they were as much sexed as the people a hundred years later. In his words: “They were certainly

preoccupied by love and sex and devoted far more of their arts to it than we do ours.” (Fowles, 1985, 232) Fowles further explains that the Victorians had simply not been so open to talk about sex as people were in next hundred years.

The Victorians chose to be serious about something we treat rather lightly, and the way they expressed their seriousness was not to talk openly about sex, just as part of our way they is the very reverse. (Fowles, 1985, 232 - 233)

According to Fowles, it seems very unlikely that the Victorians experienced less frequent, sexual pleasure than people in the following century. However, the Victorians kept this pleasure more in private than it was common a hundred years later when sexuality was treated more freely and without such strict restraints. Fowles also argues the puritanism of the Victorian age: “The prudish Puritanism we lend to the Victorians, and rather lazily apply to all classes of Victorians society, is in fact a middle-class view of the middle-class ethos.” Fowles further refers to “Mayhew, the great Commission Reports and the rest” to point out that the premarital intercourse was more common than it could be expected from the Victorians: “The hard – I would rather call it soft, fact of Victorian England was that what a simpler age called ‘tasting before you buy’ was the rule, not the exception.” (Fowles, 1985, 234)

Sexuality has always been important part of people’s lives no matter the period they lived, however, as Davidoff analyzes in her study *The family in Britain*, there were few mid-nineteenth-century working-class families that deliberately practiced contraception. A fatalistic acceptance of children, a belief by both men and women in the husband’s sexual rights, the importance of children as subsidiary earners and the belief that any discussion of sex was dirty and shameful, combined to produce ignorance and lack of motivation to limit family size. Fear of pregnancy and exhaustion made many women endure rather than enjoy sex. Undoubtedly, many women tried to bring on miscarriages, using herbal and patent remedies through information gathered from female relatives and friends. They seemed to be unaware of the laws passed in the 1860s making self-induced abortion a criminal offence, although infanticide cases were given wide publicity. Many women would have liked to have borne fewer children but did not know how and they often spent an average of fifteen years being pregnant, nursing, and caring for babies. (Davidoff, 1990, 116 - 117)

As Leonard and Speakman noted, sexuality within marriage was still not much mentioned by writers about the family even during the 1960s and indeed, it was not much talked about

outside marriage at that time. However, this was certainly an area in which it was thought that past inequalities between men and women needed rectifying and great progress was felt to have been achieved by the late 1960s. Contraception was seen as having freed women from the fear of pregnancy. Since then, the wives would be the ones to use the contraceptives and would not gainsay their husbands. They could now enjoy sex because it was fun and because it was not out of duty but it expressed their love for their husbands. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 18)

During the Victorian period, women's sexuality was considered to be important only for maternity rather than for any pleasure or physical desires. These women's needs were usually overlooked. As Stearns pointed out, the sexual conservatism stayed until the 1960s. Yet during the 1960s, the feminist movement contributed to transformation of sexual morality and sexual behaviors in Europe. The stigma against women's unmarried sexual activity lessened, so young women considered sexual intercourse as an individual right and pleasure that did not involve marital intentions. Thus, marriage became less important. Another important step contributing to the greater independence of women was made by liberalization of laws on sexuality and lifted restrictions on birth control and abortion in Great Britain and other Western European states during the 1960s. (Stearns, 2001, 255 - 256) However, the following chapters deal with the issues of contraception and abortion in more details.

#### **4. Femininity, women as mothers**

The Victorian society considered motherhood as a woman's main role and this opinion survived until the following century. Even in the 1960s, motherhood was still seen as a main achievement in a woman's life. As Leonard and Speakman analyze in their study *Women in the Family*, for all women whether or not they did eventually have children of their own, the probability of giving birth and bringing up children has always been a part of their lives from early childhood as well as a central focus of their socialization experiences. The types of toys that young girls were given, the household tasks they were trained to carry out, the lessons they learned at school and the sorts of occupation they were encouraged to enter, were all preparing them for an adult life as wives, housekeepers and especially mothers. Even today,

women who do not have their own children or who do not enjoy motherhood are still viewed as odd or abnormal. Women who are unable to have children often see themselves as failures, and women who make a conscious decision to remain childless, especially if they are married, are often seen as peculiar, unfeminine, selfish, or awkward. Married childless women are forced into a position of constantly having to explain or justify their situation. However, the female role and identity has not been defined solely in terms of motherhood, but in terms of marriage and motherhood. A woman, who conceived, gave birth to and was raising children outside marriage, was usually seen as deviant, though perhaps less in the 1960s than a hundred years earlier. Nevertheless, motherhood and marriage were still going together and a woman's reproductive capabilities were closely linked to her sexual identity within a heterosexual relationship as much in the 1960s as in the 1860s. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 50 - 51)

The play *Top Girls* also suggests the universal female experience consisting in the fact that being a woman has always been linked with motherhood and this issue has been universal to women of all social backgrounds in various times and places. The story of Isabella Bird shows a woman who feels guilty because she “spent years in self-gratification.” (Churchill, 1991, 18) Even if Isabella Bird is a Victorian character, she represents rather a future modern woman as she is independent, preferring travelling around the world to family life, which was more common for men in the Victorian era. However, as she explains she always travelled as a lady and refused any suggestion that she was other than feminine. She did not get married until she was fifty but soon she found married life drudgery. Even if she never left her husband, she resented all she had to do in domestic and social work and she feels that she could simply not live the life of a lady. She never had any children and all these aspects made her feel that, as she was not a good wife and mother, she was not good enough in her life. She declares that whenever she came back to England she felt she had so much to atone for. (Churchill, 1991, 8, 10, 18)

Leonard and Speakman explain that since the late 1960s, however, the position of women as mothers has been the subject of critical debate by many feminists as they were trying to come to terms with their own reproductive capabilities, with their desires to have children or to remain childless; or with their involuntary childlessness or unwanted pregnancy. They wished to understand how having children affected their identity and situation as women, and to improve their opportunities for equal access to education and employment if they had children. They wanted, in many cases, to have the same right as men not to make choices. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 50 - 51)

Yet despite the fact that motherhood was still considered as a woman's main role, and as Leonard and Speakman further add, the position of women of all social classes has changed dramatically over the past one hundred years and their lives have moved from the traditional stereotypes. Women have had fewer children than they did in the past and now most women spend only about four years of their lives either pregnant or looking after a child. Women started to be generally accepted both as waged workers and as housewives and mothers. These changes in the position of women and in ideas about femininity have been also reflected in medical perceptions of women, and in contemporary medical education and practice. It is clear that during the twentieth century, the Victorian belief in the physical weakness of women disappeared but it was gradually replaced by an emphasis on their psychological weakness. Even in the 1960s, it was still believed that a woman's natural role was motherhood and thus, the capacity to have children continued to be seen as the central characteristic of a woman's nature. The woman's role to be a mother was still seen to make her intellectually and emotionally different and by implication, inferior. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 180)

Churchill's characters, especially a modern working Marlene and her sister Joyce, also show that to handle both career and family has never been easy for working women and therefore Churchill focused on this issue as one of the major themes in her play *Top Girls*:

The key problem for professional women in Britain has always been the difficulty of reconciling a career with a family. Access to top jobs is easier for those women who have few or no family responsibilities. (Churchill, 1991, 34)

In this play, Marlene prefers the role of "the high-flying lady" who concentrates mainly on her career and for that reason she gave up her daughter at birth and let her sister adopt the child. As a result, Marlene refusing to become "the little woman at home" is a successful businesswoman unlike her sister who has to combine her motherhood and domestic responsibilities with various low level jobs in order to survive. (Churchill, 1991, 20)

Despite the traditional roles that women have always been tied up with, the modern technology of the twentieth century, as Thébaud points out, brought women better health and longer lifespan, infant mortality dramatically reduced and women have also obtained the finest education available. Modern life also meant for women changes in the nature of housework and child-rearing. Since less time needed to be devoted to these activities, more was left over for participation in social life. Furthermore, for women, modernity also meant



achievement of individuality, full citizenship status as well as economic, legal and symbolic independence. However, it was not until the middle of the 1960s that gender relations began to change. One of many factors responsible for this change was the women's movement, which denounced 'patriarchy' and all its icons. Gregory Pinkus, the inventor of the contraceptive pill, was also definitely responsible for one of the greatest changes of the 1960s that brought new possibility into the women's life. More liberal attitudes towards contraception and abortion have enabled women to reclaim possession of their bodies and sexuality and women could finally determine when and if they wished to have children. Access to education and jobs also led to greater emancipation of women and women found themselves increasingly constrained by the demands of motherhood. (Thébaud, 2000, 7 - 9)

## **5. Attitudes to birth control methods and their development**

As Doyal and Elston explain in their study *Women, Health and Medicine*, in the past, women had their own ways of preventing pregnancy and causing abortion, though some of these methods were unreliable and others were certainly dangerous. Abstinence and withdrawal were the most common methods of birth control but, for women, abortion, however dangerous, was probably the main method of preventing unwanted children. In Victorian Britain, women were seen above all as mothers, and both contraception and abortion were strongly opposed by the Church, the State and the medical profession. Any attempts to alter the natural processes of pregnancy and childbirth were regarded with abhorrence, and most doctors emphasized the danger of all forms of contraception. They wrote about the terrible damage to health that was likely to follow from any interference with a woman's sacred duty. Thus, medical arguments based on the flimsiest evidence, were used to justify what was essentially moral opposition to contraception. (Doyal, Elston, 1986, 182 - 183)

### **5.1. Contraception**

As Nadine Lefaucheur analyzes in her study *Maternity, Family, and the State*, the move towards birth control began at the end of the nineteenth century in most Western countries, but it was not until the 1960s when oral contraceptives became available. Contraceptive methods promised a major change in sexual relations determining who took the initiative and had control over not only contraception but also perhaps the whole sex life. The pill, invented in the 1960s, was much more reliable than earlier contraceptive methods and one great benefit of this oral contraceptive was that it was taken by the woman, who no longer had to rely on her husband's competence in the use of other birth control devices and methods. When women chose these forms of contraception, men, for the first time in history, could no longer expose them to the risk of pregnancy against their will. (Lefaucheur, 2000, 441)

Thus, development of the contraceptive pill was one of the most important factors contributing to the better lifestyle and greater independence of women, giving them a new kind of freedom. Finally, women could control over their fertility and they could decide to have sexual relations without unwanted pregnancies. Development of this pill meant a big change for both married and unmarried women as it opened up new possibilities for many modern women who wanted to concentrate on their career first and have children when they were ready. For the first time, women could plan their families according to their own wish or decide whether to have more children or not. Although the contraceptive pill brought many advantages that could positively change a woman's life, as Gisela Kaplan notes in her study *Contemporary Western European Feminism*, there has always been a risk of adverse side effects and negative responses to using this birth control method:

The availability of a contraceptive pill must be seen as an important precondition: on the one hand, technology helped women to gain some control over their own fertility and health, on the other entrenched moral values sometimes forbade them to legitimately exercise that control. (Kaplan, 1992, 13)

Though this new contraceptive method soon became a popular way of preventing pregnancy for many women, some women continued to experience difficulties in meeting their needs for contraceptives. As Abercrombie and Warde pointed out, although doctors themselves played very little part in the early development of contraceptive techniques or in campaigns to bring knowledge about contraceptives to women who needed it, the control of these improved methods including abortion, gave them a new and important source of power. In reality, it was not women who controlled their own fertility but the doctors who made

decisions about what method of contraception a woman was using or whether she went on with a pregnancy. Therefore, women demanded to control their own health and fertility, and medical control of reproduction through control of contraception, abortion and childbirth facilities became important aims of the women's movement in the second half of the twentieth century. (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994, 400)

## 5.2. Abortion

In the issue of abortion, Lesley Doyal and Mary Ann Elston suggest that attempts to liberalize the laws on abortion faced even greater opposition than campaigns to extend the availability of contraception. Under the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, all abortions had been made a statutory offence – even when the woman's life was in danger – and it was not until the 1960s that abortion law reform was accepted as a serious possibility.

The 1960s were a period of more general social reform, and for many people the possibility of abortion under medical supervision no longer represented a threat to the social order and the majority of doctors supported the proposals for reform. Consequently, the 1967 Abortion Act made it legal for a doctor to perform an abortion if two other registered medical practitioners agreed that the continuation of the pregnancy would be a greater risk to the life or health of the woman, than an abortion would be, or if there was a serious risk that the child would be physically or mentally handicapped. This was a very important step forward in widening the availability of abortion. Of course, doctors were in a position to make judgements about individual women and to decide whether or not they should be allowed to have an abortion. These judgements provided an important illustration of traditional medical ideas about the nature of female sexuality and reproduction, and about the moral issues surrounding them. Yet it was more difficult for married women than an unmarried woman to obtain an abortion, since most doctors assumed that having babies was a normal part of being married. (Doyal, Elston, 1986, 182 - 187)

According to *Chronicle of Britain*, The Abortion Act, allowing women abortions if approved by two doctors and The National Health Service Act, allowing local authorities to provide contraceptives and contraceptive advice, were results of more liberal and permissive attitudes to sexual behaviour that have characterized the 1960s and led to bigger availability

of contraceptive pill as well as to safer and legal abortions carried out on the medical ground. (Heald, 1992, 1161)

The issue of abortion is also one of the themes of *Top Girls*, reflected in the story of Marlene who underwent two abortions because her career simply became her priority in life. Unlike Joan, who lived in the ninth century and had neither any knowledge nor option of abortion or contraceptive, Marlene's character proves that abortion became quite acceptable and much easier to obtain in the second half of the twentieth century than before. (Churchill, 1991, 15)

Let us conclude this issue with the work of Abercrombie and Warde who suggest that sexuality is an area in which women are often supposed to have made great advances towards equality with men. The sexual revolution is supposed to have liberated women from the constraints of Victorian ideology, with its oppressive double standard in which non-marital sex was acceptable for men and not for women. (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994, 228)

The issue of double standard allowing men sexual experiences outside the marriage on the one hand, and treating women with similar experience as absolute immoral outcasts of the society on the other hand, was one of the main themes of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles. As Fowles suggested, Charles had experienced several sexual relationships, especially in the "City of Sin" relating to Paris where he spent some time of his single life. Nevertheless, the double standard seemed to be accepted by many Victorians and the fact that "the matter of whether Charles had slept with other women, worried Ernestina less than it might a modern girl" (Fowles, 1985, 68) shows the recognized moral codes of that time.

Abercrombie and Warde further add that the much greater availability of contraception and safe abortion has made the consequences of sexual intercourse for women. Development of cheap, fairly reliable and fairly safe forms of contraception, together with the liberalization of the laws on abortion, was among the most important factors that contributed to women's emancipation. (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994, 228)

## 6. Women and education

According to Davidoff, many Victorian girls were educated at home by mothers, elder sisters or governesses. Yet the mother's primary function was to train her daughters for social conventions, appearing in company and preparing them for the marriage. The girls' public and grammar schools began from the 1870s, however, especially less academic and finishing schools continued to stress accomplishments and lady-like behavior. (Davidoff, 1990, 101)

In her study *State Education Policy and Girls' Educational Experiences* while elaborating the issue of girls' educating and establishing girls' public school, Madeleine Arnot explains that by the end of the nineteenth century, the demand of many middle-class parents for girls' public boarding schools resulted in the establishment of schools designed along similar lines to the famous boys' public schools. Yet despite the rapidly increasing number of girls' boarding and day schools in that century, there was also considerable controversy over the educability of girls, their brainpower, and the possible detrimental effects of educating girls into an academic curriculum. It was generally assumed that boys and girls should receive different educations, and women of different social classes were expected to need and receive different types of schooling. In the nineteenth century, it was stressed that the curricula of elementary schools should 'fit girls for life'. That was the reason why domestically oriented special school subjects were introduced and in 1862, for example, needlework was made compulsory for girls in such schools. Especially working-class girls were expected to receive a domestic training so that they might become servants, as the domestic service was the largest category of female paid employment in that century. Consequently, the 1870 Education Act was established focusing the curriculum of girls' education around their domestic future as wives and mothers. (Arnot, 1986, 146 - 147)

The Victorian character of *Top Girls*, Isabella explains that she was also engaged in needlework, music and charitable scheme not because she enjoyed it but because it was expected from her. (Churchill, 1991, 3)

Arnot further suggests that according to the Victorian ideology, boys were seen as the intellectual elite, having imagination, ability, and creativity while the girls were expected to concentrate more on being clean, well dressed and controlled in their language rather than becoming academically oriented.

The division between the public sphere of paid employment and the private sphere of family, through the work of the schools, was linked to the division of the sexes in such a way that the public sphere was seen as male and the private as female. Women, therefore, were not only defined as being 'home based' but were mainly prepared for the domestic sphere. The development of female education obviously had a different impact on middle-class and on working-class women. Generally, education and the increasing work opportunities gave middle-class women far more freedom and rather more chances to break away from their family situation than it gave the working-class women. Later in the early twentieth century, it allowed them access to university education and to the newly developed professions such as nursing and teaching. It also allowed them a certain degree of financial freedom as single women. As for some working-class women, access to education gave them a chance to aspire to non-manual occupations such as clerical and office work, and to take up jobs where basic literacy was required.

However, within the broad pattern of female domestic ideology, class specific ideals of femininity were also taught. Although middle-class girls were educated to become the 'perfect wife and mother', the ideal that the middle class imposed on the working-class girls was that of the 'good woman'. The middle-class girl was to learn the new ideal of femininity that combined the Christian qualities such as self-denial, patience, and silent suffering; ladylike behavior that meant refusing any paid or manual employment; and a ladylike etiquette including dress, style, and manners. The working-class girl was to learn in essence what it meant to be a good housekeeper, wife, and mother by being trained in the practical skills of domesticity, with no pretensions of becoming a lady. She would acquire enough conscience and ability to safeguard the family against crime, disease, immorality, and other social problems to which, in the eyes of the middle-classes, the working-classes appeared to be so prone. (Arnot, 1986, 148 - 149)

Concerning higher education, Stearns argues that although wealthy women tutored at home could be intellectually accomplished, it was not until women were admitted to universities in the second half of the nineteenth century that higher education became available. (Stearns, 2001, 33) Yet in the 1860s, as Doyal and Mary Ann Elston explain, women in different social classes led very different lives. Middle-class women were generally regarded as weak and dependent who met doctors most frequently. They provided many doctors with the major part of their income. Rest was often prescribed and most activities outside the home were frowned upon. Higher education in particular was seen as a danger and women who took it up were said to do so at the risk of both their health and their femininity.

Working-class women, on the other hand, spent their lives labouring extremely hard inside and outside the home. It was therefore difficult to describe them as physically weak and dependent. (Doyal, Elston, 1986, 194 -196)

Such a medical view of the Victorian women is greatly represented by Ernestina, who has been described by Fowles as a dependant and weak middle-class woman being frequently examined by “half Harley Street who found nothing because she had never had a serious illness in her life.” (Fowles, 1985, 28 – 29) In the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles created his main character, Ernestina, as a typical example of her time, a girl perfectly healthy, however, “since birth her slightest cough would bring doctors; her slightest frown caused her mama and papa secret hours of self-recrimination.” (Fowles, 1985, 28)

By contrast, Sarah worked as a governess, which was one of a few female paid occupations in the nineteenth century. “She was trained to be a governess. Sarah’s father most wisely provided the girl with a better education that one would expect.” (Fowles, 1985, 32 – 33) Although Sarah did not gain a great education, she was very intelligent, which was not expected from a woman of the Victorian age. She was sensitive and able to recognize hypocrisy and see people the way they really were. Unlike Ernestina, Sarah did not follow Victorian patterns. She was too different and mysterious and these attributes were not suitable for ‘a good woman’ at that time.

Sarah was intelligent, but her real intelligence belonged to a rare kind; one that would certainly pass undetected in any of our modern tests of the faculty. The instinctual profundity of insight was the first curse of her life; the second was her education. Given the veneer of a lady, she was made the perfect victim of a caste society. (Fowles, 1985, 50)

Another important field of female study and work that should be mentioned is health care. Lesley Doyal and Mary Ann Elston discuss the issue of female work in the field of medicine in their study *Women, Health and Medicine* and they observe that the history of qualified women doctors in Britain begins in the mid-nineteenth century but in fact, the history of women as healers is much longer. Healing and nursing was main women’s work for centuries and although they were midwives and pharmacists, cultivating healing herbs and exchanging the secrets of their uses, they were doctors without degree, learning and passing on experience from each other. Despite these women’s skills and knowledge, by the middle of the nineteenth century, medicine was seen as entirely male profession. (Doyal, Elston, 1986, 194 -196)

It was extremely difficult for women to gain the qualification as they were excluded from the institutions providing the necessary education. Although, as Doyal and Elston further point out, nursing was something women did in their homes long before, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century when it became a distinct and paid occupation. The reform of nursing into a trained and skilled occupation suitable for women is often associated with Florence Nightingale who contributed to organizational reform and opened The Nightingale School for Nurses in 1860. Despite the reform of nursing in the second half of the nineteenth century, the difficulties in access of women to universities remained. Doyal and Elston also mention the struggle of Sophia Jex-Blake and other women to be allowed to qualify at Edinburgh University and when they failed, they established the London School of Medicine for Women in 1874. However, even when access to the higher education was achieved, later in the 1870s, women were not accepted into all sections of this profession. (Doyal, Elston 1986, 194 -196)

Sophia Jex-Blake and the female emancipation campaign in 1869 have been also mentioned by *Chronicle of Britain*. Sophia Jex-Blake became the first woman to be a medical student in Britain in 1869, when after initial resistance, the university accepted her application. However, those academically minded women who believed that there was more to women's fulfillment than marriage alone and were trying to get access to universities, were usually criticized for having too much freedom and not enough of the traditional female qualities to make them attractive to men as wives. (Heald, 1992, 937)

By contrast, in the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of 'dual careers', of being 'equal but different', was promoted, particularly amongst the middle-classes suggesting that middle-class girls would be interested in combining a career with motherhood but working-class girls were still to be educated largely for their domestic role, even if they were more likely to be found in employment in adult life. In the 1960s, secondary schooling was undergoing radical reform through the movement which aimed to set up comprehensive schools. It was assumed that by bringing both sexes into the same building, inequality of the sexes would be reduced. Moreover, the middle-class girls could benefit from the opportunities offered by the new non-selective schools to take formal examinations and later go on to higher education. By the end of the sixties, however, the contradictions and tensions of women's dual roles were beginning to be discussed more publicly. New demands were being made for women's rights to the equal education and equal treatment within schools. This movement was reflected in the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 which made it



unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sex in education, as well as in employment and training. (Arnot, 1986, 151)

Nevertheless, Thébaut argues that the educational system responded to the 'sexual demonstration' by funnelling female students into suitable, 'feminine professions'. The schools reproduced social divisions in the certain courses of study that proved disadvantageous. Even if more girls had degrees, their degrees were not worth as much, and many found that their education was not suited for the present condition of the job market. Thus, the educational system played a role in reproducing social distinctions between the sexes. (Thébaut, 2000, 7-9) However, as Rose-Marie Lagrave writes in her study *A Supervised Emancipation*: "For women, step up the ladder of the educational hierarchy meant a step out of the kitchen into the workplace." According to Lagrave, education encouraged women to seek work, and it directed them to feminized sectors of the economy, especially banking, public and private services or retail sales. Since 1965, primary and secondary teaching has become increasingly feminized with a great number of women concentrated at the lowest levels. (Lagrave, 2000, 471 – 473)

Until 1970s, the majority of young women who wanted to achieve a higher education were usually trained for the teaching profession. Teaching was seen as a good job for a woman because she would still be able to be a good wife and care for her children because as Crompton mentions in her study, 'being a good mother' meant full-time devotion to the care of children". Although the educational opportunities offered to girls were clearly better than they had been before, education was still part of a process, which prepared young women for gendered roles both in employment and within the household. Even highly educated girls were expected to go into a very restricted range of careers. Nursing and teaching, therefore were two of the major occupations into which relatively well-educated girls were channelled.

Teaching, however, played a very special part in higher education for women until the 1970s through the development of the teacher training colleges. The training colleges provided the only form of higher education available to women when they did not have access to the universities. Although teacher training, like the universities, involved full-time higher education, it was, nevertheless, seen to be of lower status, had lower entrance requirements, and prepared women for a career in which they would be more than likely to occupy a lower place in the job hierarchy than the minority of men who trained alongside them. Another important feature of teaching as a profession was that this job offered working hours and conditions which enabled employment to be combined with a domestic labour. Women in the teaching profession experienced discrimination but teaching was, nevertheless, broadly

supportive of a woman's domestic role. Teacher training was still the most important route to higher education for women at the time when second-wave feminism began to make a significant impact in Britain.

Since the 1970s, young women have participated in professional education and training other than teaching, and well-educated young women have been going into 'new' professional occupations in the finance sector, public service and so on. Women with ambition and qualifications who went into non-gendered occupations, however, found a combination of practical difficulties and discriminatory practices. The complaint was that women with qualifications equal to or better than male applicants had less chance of being offered the same job. These practices prevailed since women were first recruited in large numbers in the early 1960s – that women will have a 'job' while men will have a 'career'. However, as Crompton concludes this issue, women were no longer happy to accept a second-class status in the world of work and pressures from individual women, and the women's movement have also been extremely important in bringing about changes in attitudes concerning especially the acquisition of women's rights and equal treatment. (Crompton, 1992, 59 - 68)

## **7. Women and employment**

To analyze the status of women in the employment market, let us begin with the work of Diana Leonard and Mary Anne Speakman who explain that as nineteenth-century values increasingly stressed division between the private and public sphere, women became associated with the private sphere, with the home and with the values attached to it. Men were expected to be competitive, calculating and unemotional, while women – the 'angels of the house' - were supposed to be warm, caring, calm, stable and supporting other family members.

As for middle-class women, they belonged to their families and homes where they exercised considerable control and influence. However, if women were to be found outside the home, it was usually in voluntary activities or jobs that were in certain respects extensions of their domestic caring roles such as nursing, teaching, visiting the poor and helping to raise money for charity - jobs that were often unpaid. Rather different criteria were applied to working-class women. They were supposed to stay at home but if they had to earn money, they were quite likely to be employed to do rough, heavy production work or dirty domestic work such as laundry, for example. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 10)

However, as Leonard and Speakman further pointed out, it was assumed that married women should not have paid employment. For a wife to have to go out to work was considered shameful and unnatural, and to undertake paid work within her own home for example by taking in laundry, wet-nursing babies, being a landlady or to work in other people's homes as a washer-woman, needlewoman or children's nurse lowered the family status.

Leonard and Speakman assume that the exclusion of women from the public spheres was both cause and effect of their restriction to the home and family and the fact that domestic and caring work was consigned to them. Nevertheless, the restrictions placed on women's lives by their role in the family have led to demands for change concerning divorce reform, wives' employment and other transformation contributing to the liberation of women. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 70 - 71)

The Victorian ideology placed women at home, but according to *Chronicle of Britain*, there were 701,000 more women than men in 1861. Consequently, there were increasing numbers of middle-class women, unmarried and needing work to survive. Therefore, the women's employment bureau was opened in the same year to help guide such women into new types of work such as cooks, copyists of law papers, interior decorators, shoemakers or telegraphists. Despite the resistance of many men, opening those new professions meant an important step in the field of women's employment from the lowly paid jobs such as nursing, teaching or working as governesses. (Heald, 1992, 935)

Fowles also mentioned those new female agencies and prejudice of men against growing female emancipation in his novel while Charles was searching for Sarah:

He also helped his men to investigate the booming new female clerical agencies. A generalized hostility to Adam was already evident in them, since they had to bear the full brunt of masculine prejudice and were to become among the most important seedbeds of the emancipation movement. (Fowles, 1985, 350)

Undoubtedly, women have experienced many difficulties in their long struggle for equal opportunities and equal treatment in the labour market because as Abercrombie and Warde explain, a woman's identity has been always organized around the home, domestic work and child rearing. Thus, a woman's life has been largely confined to private spaces – the home - while men have dominated the public spaces outside the home. However, in the second half the twentieth century, the romanticized picture of housewives happy over their domestic labour was replaced by image of depression among women with small children who stay at

home, of women's eagerness to take paid work even at low rates of pay, and of the hard work and monotony of domestic labour. Nonetheless, even when women took paid employment, they still did the bulk of the domestic work and men took the important decisions. Therefore, the degree of sharing of domestic work and women's position in the marriage seemed to make a little difference over one hundred years. (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994, 222, 293) Speakman and Leonard also emphasized the fact that although the expectations had changed in the twentieth century so it became accepted that married women would probably work, possibly part-time, and most wives made their own decision about whether or not to take a job, it was still seen that if wives decided to take employment or to return to education, it would be on condition that it minimally inconveniences their husbands. (Leonard, Speakman, 1986, 30-31)

While elaborating the issue of women's changing attitudes to paid employment in the study *Maternity, Family, and the State*, Nadine Lefaucheur pointed out the fact that until the 1970s, the nature of the home and the tasks changed considerably as a result of modern equipment of household and growing use of modern consumer products, such as canned, frozen, and prepared foods, detergents and other household cleaning products. Furthermore, housewives increasingly turned to "outside suppliers" for many things formerly made at home, such as clothing and meals. Since women no longer needed to devote full time to housework chores, they were freed up for productive work outside the home. The same transformation of housework also made such outside work necessary, because many families required two incomes in order to afford the new products, equipment, and services that partly or totally replaced traditional forms of housework. (Lefaucheur, 2000, 443 – 444)

As mentioned above, women have met with many inequalities and difficulties in the employment market because many professions were not open to them. In this issue, Stearns pointed out that in spite of the fact that the service sector, consisting of retailing, office work, healthcare, and other non-blue-collar work, started to grow in the mid-nineteenth century, it took until the last third of the twentieth century when it became a large employer of women. Many of these jobs such as secretary or bank clerk were formerly held by men and women were generally excluded from high-paying male service jobs or professions such as university teaching, law, or medicine. As opposed to men, they were offered low-paying female positions such primary school teacher or female nurse. However, when women started to take the rapidly expanding jobs in the service sector, the positions lost status, pay declined, and various kinds of service work became "female ghettos" lacking any opportunity for advancement. As Stearns further adds: "Service jobs tended to go to young attractive women who lost their post as they aged or married." (Stearns, 2001, 28)

In the play *Top Girls*, Caryl Churchill also emphasized the fact that older women have been more unlikely to get a satisfying job in the service sector when Win, one of the employees of the Top Girls' Employment Agency, interviews a forty-six year old Louise looking for a new job. When Louise admits her age, Win acknowledges that as a sort of handicap: "It is not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it is not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something." (Churchill, 1991, 51)

Despite the growing number of women employed in the service sector since the 1960s, women were still generally kept out of executive positions even for following decades. Rose-Marie Lagrave stressed the reality that while large number of women participated in the educational system and workplace, they were simultaneously relegated to feminized and therefore devalued jobs or to the lowest levels of the hierarchy. The difference in pay was seen as a logical consequence of the kinds of jobs women held. Furthermore, it was difficult for women to gain promotion to upper levels of the hierarchy as it was believed that women were less skilled than men. These factors seemed sufficient to explain the continued gap between men's and women's compensation. The segregation of women by job category, part-time work and holding back of promotions had the effect of creating a dual labour market: one for men, highly skilled and highly productive, the other for women, underskilled, underpaid, and devalued. (Lagrave, 2000, 467 – 476)

Abercrombie and Warde offer the following explanation for women's disadvantaged position in employment:

It is a result of their taking greater responsibility than men for the care of children, the house, and the elderly. Women are seen to have fewer skills and less labour-market experience as a consequence, which in turn lead to less skilled jobs and lower wages. However, even women with the same qualifications as men usually earn less. Women's disadvantaged position is also seen as a result of the restriction of women's access to the best jobs by patriarchal practices in the labour market and the state. (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994, 222)

In her play, Churchill pointed out the existence of a dual labour market created mainly because of the discrimination and prejudices consisting in the opinions that women were less skilled than men. This issue is emphasized in the part where one of the characters, Win, describes her experience from a previous employment: "Men like to make out jobs are harder than they are. Any job I ever did I started doing it better than the rest of the crowd and they did not like it." (Churchill, 1991, 65)

Even if women's paid employment started to be accepted fact of modern life, not only in the 1960s but also even in the following decades, it was still regarded by many as an undesirable one. However, according to the work of Chalmers and Cheyne, in the 1960's, changes in industry had helped to create more jobs open to women and growing light industries and service industries recruited large numbers of women. Yet women continued to experience inequalities in the labour market. To stress the issue of women's discrimination that remained even in the second half of the twentieth century, Chalmers and Cheyne used a quote from *Shrew* magazine published in 1971:

Women in our society are oppressed. In jobs we do full work for half pay, in the home we do unpaid work fulltime. Legally we often have only the status of children. We are brought up to feel inadequate, educated to narrower horizons than men are. (quote from *Shrew* magazine, 1971, Chalmers, Cheyne, 1992, 90)

As a result of pressure by women's groups and their struggle for equality, a series of acts were passed which aimed to improve the position of women in the 1960s and 70s. The most important of them were 1970 Equal Pay Act establishing that men and women should be paid the same wage for doing the same work and 1975 Sex Discrimination Act banning the discrimination against women in employment, education, training, trade union activities and in advertisements for job vacancies. These acts were supposed to provide women with the same treatment, housing and employment and change the inequalities that women had suffered. However, inequalities between women and men in the labour market have proved particularly difficult to change. The law has proved to be extremely limited in its effectiveness in dealing with women's situation in the labour force and despite the growing liberation of women in the society in the twentieth century, inequalities between men and women remained, especially in the spheres of education and labour. (Chalmers, Cheyne, 1992, 90)

In spite of the inequalities, women's paid work was definitely becoming more recognized and acceptable. Nevertheless, as Veronica Beechey pointed out in her study *Women's Employment in Contemporary Britain*, not only in the sixties but also in the following decades it was still assumed that a woman's work outside the home should not interfere with her domestic responsibilities in caring for her husband and for her children and other dependent relatives. Women's paid work had to fit in with her domestic role and she was expected to be a good wife and mother. (Beechey, 1986, 125)

Marlene, a character representing the modern businesswoman in *Top Girls*, also faces the question whether to prefer a professional career to a child. Not only had she abandoned her

daughter to the care of an aunt at birth, but she also had two later abortions to be able to concentrate on her career. (Churchill, 1991, 81)

O'Donnell argues that legislation has made it easier for women to continue and progress in their career and it has become socially acceptable for married women to work. As a result of increasing educational opportunities and greater expectations of a satisfying career, a greater proportion of women in Britain were in paid employment in the 1960s than at any previous period of history. (O'Donnell, 1993; 232, 233) However, the play *Top Girls* by Churchill proves that even in the 1970s and in early 1980s, women had to face the same problems of discrimination and inequalities concerning working opportunities and differences in pay as in the previous decades. As Churchill noted, social changes in Britain affected women in relation to employment but the national pattern was, in fact, relatively unshifting. Despite equal opportunities legislation, women remained concentrated at the bottom of the hierarchies of pay and promotion opportunities. (Churchill, 1991, 32) The interview of Louise and Win shows the attitude of women to paid work as well as the discrimination and inequalities that Louise has experienced at work during the two decades. Louise is a great example of a modern and ambitious woman who has been devoted to her job for more than twenty years and who has given up her social life for her career, however, as many other women, she has always lost in the competition for promotion with men:

I have built up a department and it works extremely well, and I feel I am stuck there. I have spent twenty years in middle management. I have seen young men who I trained to go on, in my own company or elsewhere, to higher things. Nobody notices me, everybody takes it for granted that my work is perfect. (Churchill, 1991, 51)

Churchill's play *Top Girls* shows the position of women in the second half of the twentieth century as well as their struggle to get out of subordinate positions in society and to be finally treated and appreciated on the same level as men. Furthermore, this play reflects the differences in pay and in promotion opportunities because women were often employed in professions that did not offer high salaries for example, in education, health and welfare or in clerical occupations, and because so many women worked part-time. As mentioned above, however, women's employment was mainly in service industries and therefore 'Top Girls' Employment Agency helps to find employment for women mainly in this sector. As Churchill explains, more women became available for work in the 1970s, and with girls and women gaining more academic and vocational qualifications all the time, they became more competitive in the labour market. Nevertheless, changes in social lifestyle affected the labour

market as well. Women had fewer children. Women had their first child later and their last child sooner, and so the time spent bearing and raising children declined. A shift in the moral climate made single mothers acceptable, and reduced the pressure on young people to marry and have children. Nell, one of the employees in Top Girls Agency, who refused to get married because she does not want to be “tied down” and “play house” represents this new changed attitude to the married life and ambitious Win also admits that she got married in “a moment of weakness”. Churchill further notes that together with an increase in the divorce rate these changes placed more women in need of economic independence and available for work. During the 1970s most housework was still carried out by women, the basic drudgery has been relieved by mechanical aids, freeing women for other things. The social activities organised for women helped take women out of the house. Health clubs, fitness classes, dancing, aerobics and such like activities brought women together and developed women’s consciousness of possible alternatives. (Churchill, 1991, 32-34)

## **8. Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, by the second half of the twentieth century, the position of women in society has improved since the Victorian period when life of women had been difficult as women had lacked the basic rights and had usually spent their entire life in the home subordinated to their husbands or discriminated against in the workplace. All the considerable changes of the 1960s certainly affected the traditional marriage. First of all, the roles have changed. A woman was able to control over her pregnancies, she had greater possibilities to get divorced



if she wanted to end her marriage. Marriage no longer meant the dominant husband who made the money and submissive wife who stayed at home, did housework and cared for children. More and more women had a paid employment so they gained more economic power and became more independent. As Lagrave analyzes, after nearly a century of stagnation, there was a major upheaval in family law and women's rights. Not only Britain but nearly all countries, no matter what their tradition, have been forced to adapt their legal codes to changing social practices concerning new, modern conception of marriage, rise in the number of women working and consequently desirous of greater independence. (Lagrave, 2000, 471 – 473)

Nevertheless, despite their growing independence and better position in the society, women still had to face great inequality and discrimination or sexual harassment in many parts of their lives, especially at work.

In Hopkins's words:

By no means all working-class women, married or single, were affected by the changes set so far. Although many benefited from them, the social status of working women in England in the early 1970s was based upon many centuries of subordination to men, of biological limitations stemming from the role of woman-as-mother. Enforced gender inferiority of this kind was not likely to be overthrown within the space of a few years. Even in work, women continued to be subjected to the sexual harassment which was still traditional in many workplaces. In higher education, fewer girls went to university; in some families, it was still considered that sons needed more education than daughters did, and that higher education was wasted on girls who might soon get married and settle down to domestic life. Therefore, inequalities in society of many different kinds remained as a handicap to women in spite of the advances of the time. (Hopkins, 1991, 171)

Yet growing emancipation of women brought bigger demands for independence and equal treatment in the world dominated by men and their struggle for a radical change of their subordinated and discriminated role in the world full of traditions and prejudices led to the liberation movement. According to Stearns, the women's liberation movement was part of a number of protest movements known as the "New Left", which emerged in the period after 1960. Women fought mainly for equal working conditions, political rights and for the same access to education as men were provided. They protested against legal, political and social injustices as well as against inequality and sexual oppression, which they had to face in everyday life, and they demanded these injustices to be finally removed. (Stearns, 2001, 52)

One of the main issues of the women's movement in 1960s and 1970s was abortion and the greatest support was collected around this subject. As it has been discussed above,

abortion and reproductive technologies have been themes since the nineteenth century. (Stearns, 2001, 294-295) The law relating to abortion and the invention of the contraceptive pill were important factors that have contributed to the greater independence of women. In the past, women had their own ways of preventing unwanted pregnancy. However, these methods were often unreliable or dangerous. As Hopkins explains, before the 1967 Abortion Act was passed, abortion was generally illegal. Illegal operations carried out by some unqualified and unskilled person and other attempts to get rid of an unwanted baby were accompanied by considerable risk to the physical and mental health of the woman concerned, and even to her life. By the Act, abortion became legal, provided that it was certified to be necessary on medical grounds by two doctors (Hopkins, 1991, 168). According to Kaplan, the abortion issue was one of the most unifying issues that brought together literally millions of women, including those who had little inclination to join a local women's movement. The abortion issue began to acquire new meaning through the rise of women's movements that view abortion as a necessary condition for the liberation of women. (Kaplan, 1992, 13 -14)

Thus, the 1960s definitely meant an important period as some of the considerable changes contributing to women's liberation took place at that time. As results of the women liberation movements, the sixties have been noted for bigger sexual permissiveness, more freely available contraception in newly developed forms as well as legalized abortion. In the essay *Truth, Dare or Promise*, Liz Heron nicely described the atmosphere of the 1960s from a woman's perspective:

The sixties are seen as the point at which our lives became different from those of our parents, and particularly, for girls, different from those of our mothers and this applies to all women of our generation. Through educational expansion and changes in the law, through a greater control over women's reproductive capacity and a greater sexual freedom for women, for the first time, we are not at the mercy of our biology and we have a sense that we can still move forward, even though the equality that is our goal may still seem a long way off. (Heron, 1992, 8)

As Heron further explains, despite the new economic boom in the sixties that needed women in the workplace to produce, to earn, to spend, marriage and children were still the only safe goal. Yet women of her generation were the first to have the chance to refuse burdens "to understand that it was possible to refuse them, to realise that if you still could not have everything, you could at least make some choices about what you could have." (Heron, 1992, 68)

Nonetheless, according to Mike Storry and Peter Childs, British women are still far from achieving equality in the workplace even nowadays. Despite legacy of hard-won women's rights legislation, such as the Equal Pay (1970) and Sex Discrimination Acts (1975), women are still much more likely to be discriminated against on grounds of age or physical attractiveness, although employers are no longer able to openly specify gender in a job description. In practise, however, equal pay legislation is difficult to enforce and discrimination hard to prove. (Storry, Childs, 1997, 141-142)

Despite the remaining inequalities and discrimination, women's social position and their possibilities in many fields of life has improved and they have gained full basic rights equal to men as well as wider educational and working opportunities. New technologies in medicine have improved women's health and enabled them to plan the family according to their wish. Women's traditional roles have changed and they have no longer been tied up with restrictions and strict rules that had been typical for the Victorian society. Overall, women have achieved a greater emancipation and freedom in a more permissive society that Sarah could only dream about while saying to her lover Charles: "You have given me the consolation of believing that in another world, another age, another life, I might have been your wife." (Fowles, 1985, 308)

## **Resumé**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá kulturními a sociální rozdíly v postavení ženy ve společnosti v 60. letech 19. a 20. století. Zaměřuje se nejenom na tradiční role ženy jako manželky a matky, které byly zejména ve viktoriánské době považovány za nejdůležitější náplň života ženy, ale také na základní práva žen a jejich celkově podřízenou pozici ve vztahu vůči mužům.

Postavení žen ve viktoriánské společnosti nebylo jednoduché, protože měly pouze málo práv a jejich možnosti v tehdejší společnosti byly omezené. Ženy postrádaly nejenom právo volit a to až do roku 1928, ale až téměř do konce 19. století neměly právo dědit ani vlastnit majetek. V praxi to tedy znamenalo, že veškerý majetek vdané ženy i peníze, které případně vydělala, patřily jejímu manželovi. Tato situace odsoudila většinu žen k podřízenému postavení vůči mužům a ženy se tak stávaly majetkem svých manželů, kteří měli také výhradní právo o všem rozhodovat. Nerovné podmínky v manželství se ovšem týkaly také případného rozvodu, který byl dostupný obvykle pouze mužům a to až do konce 19. století. Ženám, které většinou neměly vlastní finanční prostředky ani nárok na majetek po rozvodu,

nezbývala jiná možnost, než zůstat uvězněny v nevyhovujícím manželství. Situace se významně změnila až v 60. letech 20. století, kdy reformy zákonů, umožnily rozvod všem sociální skupinám. Větší dostupnost rozvodu byla také umožněna uvolněnější a tolerantnější atmosférou ve společnosti, která s sebou přinesla změny o představě a přístupu k manželství i k roli žen.

Viktoriánská společnost považovala manželství a mateřství za hlavní roli ženy a tyto názory přetrvaly až do následujícího století. Proto byla většina dívek v 19. století vzdělávána pouze doma matkami nebo guvernankami. Jejich výuka spočívala především ve společenském chování a v činnostech praktických pro manželství. I když na konci 19. století začaly vznikat dívčí internátní školy, přesto se stále věřilo, že „slabé“ dívky by měly obdržet jiné vzdělání soustředící se více na praktickou výchovu, oblékání či vyšívání než „intelektuální“ chlapci, kteří byli považováni za mnohem bystřejší a kreativnější. Viktoriánské ženy nebyly diskriminovány pouze v oblasti vzdělávání, ale protože pracovní trh byl otevřen převážně mužům, ženy měly velmi málo pracovních příležitostí. Od ženy se totiž neočekávalo, pokud to finanční situace rodiny nevyžadovala, aby pracovala, ale aby se věnovala výhradně péči o domácnost a rodinu. Vzdělávací instituce tedy připravovaly chlapce na budoucí kariéru, zatímco dívky byly připravovány na dráhu v domácnosti. I když v 70. letech 19. století, ženy získaly přístup ke studiu na univerzitách, přesto pro ně většina profesí zůstala uzavřena. Tato situace se změnila až v následujícím století, kdy ženy získaly větší přístup ke vzdělání a více pracovních příležitostí, zejména v sektoru služeb. Širší možnosti v oblasti vzdělání a pracovního uplatnění samozřejmě přispěly k větší finanční nezávislosti žen. Životní styl i pozice žen ve společnosti se také zlepšila s příchodem novými technologií v oblasti bydlení, díky nimž ženy již nebyly připoutány tolik k domácím pracím jako dříve. Nicméně i přes dosažení určité emancipace, ženy i v druhé polovině 20. století čelily diskriminaci a nerovným podmínkám v mnoha oblastech každodenního života, zejména v oblasti vzdělání a zaměstnání.

Viktoriánská Anglie byla známá svým puritánstvím a morálními předsudky a to se samozřejmě odráželo i v představách o řádné a počestné ženě, jejichž hlavním životním cílem je stát se dobrou manželkou a matkou. Tato doba byla ovšem i plná rozporů, neboť přes vyhlášené puritánství a sexuální zdrženlivost, se hojně rozvíjela prostituce. Ženy musely dodržovat přísná pravidla, která předepisovala jak se má žena oblékat a především vhodně chovat. Na rozdíl od mužů, nevěra či jakákoliv intimní nemanželská zkušenost odsoudila ženu na pokraj společnosti. Situace se opět změnila až v 60. letech 20. století, kdy se uvolnily mravy a především přístup k sexuální aktivitě neprovdaných žen, stejně tak jako ke

svobodným matkám. Dostupnost antikoncepční pilulky v 60. letech také významně přispěla k větší nezávislosti žen, které se díky této nové antikoncepční metodě již nemusely spoléhat na muže, a mohly se věnovat své kariéře beze strachu, že otěhotní v době, kdy na dítě ještě nejsou připravené. Reforma zákona o přerušení těhotenství v 1967 umožnila větší dostupnost interrupce, zejména pokud se jednalo o riskantní těhotenství. I když nové antikoncepční metody a rozšířené možnosti interrupce vyvolaly rozporuplné reakce, významně přispěly ke zlepšení života žen.

Šedesátá léta 20. století byla obdobím reforem a bojem žen za svobodu a nezávislost. Životní styl mnoha moderních žen spočíval ve skloubení kariéry s péčí o rodinu. I když mnoho žen získala díky větším pracovním možnostem finanční nezávislost a také lepší pozici ve společnosti, ženy se stále potýkaly s nerovnými podmínkami v mnoha směrech,. Ženské hnutí tedy bojovalo za rovnoprávné podmínky ve vzdělání a zaměstnání, potlačení diskriminace, za srovnatelný plat s muži ale také proti sexuálnímu obtěžování, pro větší dostupnost antikoncepce a interrupce. Výsledkem ženského hnutí bylo, kromě jiného, schválení několika reforem, které zakazovaly jakoukoliv diskriminaci pohlaví a zpřístupnily již zmíněnou interrupci.

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## ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Cultural Differences between an 1860's and 1960's Wife
Autor práce	Lenka Voborová
Obor	Anglický jazyk pro hospodářskou praxi
Rok obhajoby	2006
Vedoucí práce	Mgr. Olga Zderadičková, M.Litt.
Anotace	Tato práce srovnává role ženy-manželky v šedesátých letech 19. a 20. století. Zaměřuje se zejména na pozici ženy ve společnosti a její podřízenost vůči mužům.
Klíčová slova	Matka, manželka, podřízenost, diskriminace, emancipace