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Marriage, Motherhood, and Morality: The Role of the Bourgeoisie Woman During the Age of Napoleon

The French Revolution ended the absolute monarchy and altered the social hierarchy, but it also caused a revolution in the realm of family life. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a noticeable shift in the fundamental aspects of parenting. The affectionate nuclear family emerged beginning with the bourgeoisie or middle class of French society. Spouses began marrying for love and worked together to ensure that their children were well maintained. They raised their children in an atmosphere of indulgence and security. Prior to this parenting revolution, families were patriarchal institutions where the husband's interests took precedence and the happiness of his wife and children were secondary. The Revolution, along with Enlightenment philosophy, allowed for the consideration of individual happiness within the family dynamic. There were still, however, moral and social obstacles that limited women to predetermined roles within the religious infused culture of French society. Despite the ideals of individual happiness, marriage and subsequent motherhood remained the primary purpose of a woman's existence. This was especially true of bourgeois women whose position in the home would become evermore confining in the years following the Revolution.

The Nuclear Family:

Historians have speculated on why the realm of domestic life shifted toward the convention of a nuclear family but have not found a conclusive answer.¹ The private nature of

¹ Samia I. Spencer. *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*. (Indiana University Press, 1984), 97.

middle class family life leaves us with little documentation to determine the exact origin of this movement. Letters of communication exchanged by the French nobility, however, describe this growing trend toward the nuclear family. The nobility's notion of family life changed during the Ancien Regime, just prior to the Revolution. Noblewomen altered their priorities and adopted the values associated with the nuclear family. Domesticity and life centered around the comforts of home became a dominant theme. In 1781, the marquise de Bombelles wrote to her husband, the French ambassador to the Holy Roman Empire:

“The court is a dog of a place. I shall long regret the sweet and tranquil life I led at Ratisbon and I feel certain that my lot should have been to be a good wife [une bonne femme] occupied solely with her husband, her children, and her household. For the pleasures of the court, of what is called good taste have no attraction for me, and I have too bourgeois a way of thinking for that place.”²

The marquise was the lady-in-waiting to Mme Elisabeth, the great-aunt of King Louis XVI. Her letter demonstrates her desire to leave court life in order to focus on her home and family. She identifies with the bourgeois mindset that believes a woman's role is to be a good wife. The marquise was not alone in her attitude. Scores of French noblewomen in the 1770's and 1780's rejected their traditional court careers in favor of the roles of wife and mother.³ This reflects a distinct shift in attitudes concerning a commitment to the home as well as the role of wife and mother. The nobility adapted their lifestyles and became family centric. Wives that were conditioned to be ladies-in-waiting abandoned their posts to raise their own children and provide a comfortable home for their husbands. They focused on the ideals of the nuclear family which included taking an active role as mother, wife, and domestic overseer. This obvious change in the nobility's mentality concerning family life is accredited to the bourgeoisie.

² Spencer. 98.

³ Spencer, 98.

A new gender order was established after the French Revolution by women of the former nobility. As they began accepting a life of domesticity, these women came to see the measures of a court-centered existence as corrupt. They choose to adhere to the more bourgeois style of conduct when it came to managing their families. “By 1815, womanhood had truly been redefined, and the domestic ideal had been established as the dominant model of femininity.”⁴ These new ideas concerning the nuclear family were eventually filtered down to the lower classes as well.

Sex Outside of Marriage:

It was rare for women who were of marriageable age to be single. France, as well as the rest of Europe, held strict classifications for women in the social sphere. Women were either virgins, wives, widows, or nuns. A single woman who did not fit into one of these categories risked being associated with the group that was not socially acceptable; prostitutes.⁵ The notion that a single woman may have chosen to have noncommercial, voluntary sex threatened the sense of social control. In society, a woman was either thought of as an object or as an object of sexuality.⁶ During the Enlightenment there was some exceptions afforded the *maitresses de maison*, women who played an essential role in the social function of the “salons.”⁷ These were often widows of some financial means who were politically connected and hosted philosophical discussions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸ These women seemed to be afforded more sexual freedom and often had affairs.

⁴ James F. McMillan. *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 44.

⁵ Judith M. Bennett, and Amy M. Froide. *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 127.

⁶ Bennett, 127

⁷ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

⁸ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

Contrary to the sexual restrictions imposed on women, men were allowed sexual liberty. This double standard is evident in how society accepted a man's "needs" as a valid reason for him to participate in sex outside of marriage. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose political philosophy helped influence the French Revolution, noted that the behavior of men was guided by different physiological means than women.⁹ In relation to sex, he argued that men "will and are able" and that women, who were passive and weak, were designed to please men.¹⁰ Women had restricted social roles but were charged with maintaining moral authority. They "could and should exercise moral suasion over their mates in the privacy of the home or bedroom."¹¹ When in public they should be modest, and act in accordance with religious and social expectations.

Men and women in agrarian families faced challenges that made legitimate sex and marriage possible. During the late eighteenth century there were few new lands to farm in France. "Population growth combined with equally-divided inheritances would have resulted in fragmented landholdings and generalized poverty."¹² Hence, marriage was often postponed until a young man could economically establish himself. The eldest son held the right of inheritance and all of his father's financial worth and property would pass to him. Subsequent sons were left with nothing and had to seek out their own fortunes. Most younger sons were forced to leave home and search for financial means. Their limited skills and education prevented them from attaining social mobility. They were often confined to servant positions, and military or religious service.¹³ Some young men choose to emigrate instead of being confined to the limitations of

⁹ Kathleen Wellman. "Physicians and Philosophes: Physiology and Sexual Morality in the French Enlightenment," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 35, Number 2, (Winter 2002), 270.

¹⁰ "Physicians and Philosophes," 270.

¹¹ "Physicians and Philosophes," 271.

¹² "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

¹³ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

their station. Daughters whose parents were not able to provide a dowry had even fewer options. They would often have no other choice but to enter into domestic service or commit themselves to a convent.¹⁴ Not having the means to marry, these young men and women were required to live a life of celibacy according to church doctrine. Religious and social pressures restricted unmarried couples from acting upon their sexual urges. Nevertheless, sexual relations did occur and illegitimate children were conceived. From the religious point of view, marriage (i.e. the license to reproduce) was a sacrament imposed so strictly by the Catholic Church that the frequency of prenuptial conceptions and of illegitimate births long remained negligible.”¹⁵ During the Revolutionary period, however, illegitimate births began to rise. This change in sexual behavior can be attributed to young couples defying the moral constraints of the Church.

A man is a socially independent and complete individual who is afforded privileges because of his gender.¹⁶ Sex outside of marriage challenged the social order and women would bear the responsibility for this sinful act. Pastoral literature defines the moral implications of “fornication” and describes its sinful nature as an offense to God.¹⁷ The church would often impose punishments on these wayward women and society would brand them harlots. Any illegitimate offspring that resulted from these affairs would be labeled bastards and be confined to life-long social limitations. It was in a woman’s best interest to adhere to social expectations and contain sexual activity to the marriage bed.

¹⁴ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

¹⁵ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

¹⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), 426.

¹⁷ Bennett, 129.

Marriage:

The Revolution, which drew on elements of Enlightenment thinking, stressed the importance of sentimental and emotional ties.¹⁸ A large part of the development and implementation of these ideas redefined marriage while stressing personal happiness in family life. This resulted in a cultural revolution within the dynamics of marriage and parenting. French legislation aided in the process of redefining marriage through the Constitution of 1791. The Revolutionary constitution enacted new legislation on the family. The Legislative Assembly secularised the process of marriage in the hopes that this reform would lead to a more modern conception of marriage.¹⁹ The law stated that marriage was not a sacrament that needed to be witnessed by a priest but rather it was a civil act. This law was passed to discourage parents from pressuring their children to marry someone they did not choose for themselves. The law's objective was to allow a citizen to use their own free will when choosing their spouse.²⁰ Having done away with the archaic regulations of the Ancien Regime, the revolutionaries devised alternatives to the traditional family system. Daughters gained the right of equal inheritance, the right of divorce was introduced, and a family court was established.

Marriage in the Post-Revolutionary period was based on a concept of separate spheres.²¹ Society regulated that a woman's place was in the home where she was required to raise her children and maintain household order. A man's destiny lay outside the home, in the public realm, where he must manage his affairs and earn an income for his family.²² His role in society is that of producer which justifies his existence and guarantees that he is the dominant figure in

¹⁸ McMillan, 42.

¹⁹ McMillan, 33.

²⁰ McMillan, 33.

²¹ McMillan, 42.

²² McMillan, 42.

the relationship. Characteristics of marriage during this time included later age of marriage, neolocal residence, and a nuclear household. The nuclear family system depended on three unwritten rules: “no conception outside marriage, no marriage without the means to establish a household for the young couple, and no cohabitation between the new couple and the older generation.”²³ These marriage standards became imbedded in the middle class structure and would continue throughout the nineteenth century.

Marrying within your social station or above it ensured the solidarity of the bourgeoisie. Financial assets and social position were the most important aspects parents considered when choosing a potential spouse for their child. Marriages were arranged with concern to the reproduction of bloodlines, and to financial, professional, and sometimes political interests.²⁴ “Wives and children were subordinate to their husbands and fathers, who exercised both legal and actual power over their property and their persons.”²⁵ Fathers would assert their will onto their children by arranging marriages for them that would suit the family’s economic desires rather than considering their children’s happiness. These arrangements often lead to cold and distant relationships between husband and wives, and parents and children.²⁶ Arranged marriages were considered good common sense and love matches were rarely pursued. Disruptions of the social order could result from falling in love and so girls had to trust the guidance of their parents

²³ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

²⁴ Bonnie G. Smith. *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton University Press, 1981.

²⁵ Spencer, 97.

²⁶ Spencer, 97.

in these matters.²⁷ Although there were some that protested this system, most people cited its advantages.²⁸

The French Revolution pushed the notion of marrying for love and personal happiness over financial gain. The bourgeoisie adopted this philosophy but in limited measure. Parents considered their child's happiness in regards to choosing their mate, however, maintaining social status and financial security was also of great importance. The endeavour of bourgeois parents was to ensure that their children would have the same economic security that they had achieved when they married. Children's ascension in the social hierarchy was also desired and marriage matches were arranged with this in mind. It was thought that a successful marriage could be accomplished when partners shared financial, political, and social connections. Parents required their children to conform to these ideals and honor established social expectations. In this, the practice of arranged marriage was altered but not eradicated within the middle class.

Daughters were confined to the home and parents sheltered them from the public sphere of influence. They were not allowed the personal freedom to explore their desires or independently experience life in the public realm. Protecting their daughters in this way allowed parents to control their destinies. Only acceptable men who met bourgeois marriage standards were introduced to daughters. Courtship was more a of preliminary stage of marriage or type of engagement instead of a dating period and was closely supervised. Young women and their virtue were fiercely guarded and defended within the constricts of the home. Rarely were young women given the opportunity to meet men outside of this controlled environment.

²⁷ Bonnie G. Smith. *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century*. (Princeton University Press, 1981), 59.

²⁸ Smith, 59.

Young middle-class women viewed their arranged marriages as a solemn duty to their parents and their God rather than a joyful stage in life. After accepting a proposal from the man her parents arranged for her to marry, one young woman wrote, “I believe I have found gathered together all the conditions for a completely intimate happiness, placed in addition, under the Christian auspices so that there can be no better guarantee.”²⁹ Betrothal periods were often short and couples would have limited contact. These periods were used to establish a household rather than to allow the couples to get acquainted. The home was required to be established for the hopeful arrival of children as soon as possible.

The wedding ceremony was a religious rite that authenticated a couple’s marriage and proclaimed the legitimacy of their offspring.³⁰ Having the ceremony performed in a church fulfilled the Catholic sacrament of marriage. The union was blessed and validated in the eyes of God and a church ceremony also ensured that the couple’s vows were publicized. The role of the bride was passive; she was handed from one male figure, her father, to another, her groom.³¹ A woman was almost always under the protection of a man. The ceremony was an exchange of not only a family’s wealth, possessions, and social station but also a promise to produce heirs. It was a woman’s role and duty, above all else to reproduce and continue the family line. Also, as citizens of France it was a Christian couple’s responsibility to produce offspring.³² A Christian marriage signified the couple’s commitment to each other but more importantly it demonstrated their commitment to raising a family. It was “the most effective guarantee that children would be

²⁹ Smith, 61.

³⁰ Olwen Hufton. *The Prospect Before Her*. (New York: Random House, 1995), 137.

³¹ Simone De Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), 429.

³² Hufton, 177.

provided with a sheltering environment designed to ensure that a woman was not left to rear her family alone or a man allowed to escape from the responsibility of maintaining his offspring.”³³

A Catholic manual from the eighteenth-century promoted the idea of holy matrimony and the importance of parenthood:

“After the consummation of holy matrimony comes its precious fruit, children. Married people, having received the gracious gift of fecundity from God, one which he withholds from some, must render him thanks in all humility every time a child is born. They must ask of him grace and the sanctification of their parenthood through the Christian education they will bestow upon their progeny.”³⁴

This statement makes clear that the purpose of marriage is to produce children. Having children is a blessing from God and couples should give Him thanks every time a child is born. It outlines the parents responsibility in instilling Christian teachings and values in their children. This perpetuates not only the strength and authority of the church but also the strict social structure which dictated the lives of the French people. The Catholic manual makes a point of addressing barrenness in that children are a gift of God, withheld from some. A woman’s inability to have children meant that she was unable to fulfill her duty as a wife. A couple’s inability to conceive children was always thought to be the fault of the wife. In such a highly religious culture, a woman’s barrenness was often attributed to God’s disfavor with her in some way. It was thought that God withheld his blessings from the wife and that her inability to produce children was a type of earthly punishment. A childless couple defeated the purpose of marriage which was to produce legitimate heirs. Barrenness was a serious social stigma and could be grounds for a divorce. If a husband divorced his wife because she could not bear him children he would negate her purpose for existence in French society. She could no longer be classified in any of the

³³ Hufton, 177.

³⁴ Hufton, 177.

traditional assigned roles for women and would not have the financial means to support herself. Most likely, she would live out the rest of her life in a convent.

Enlightenment thinking during the Revolution challenged the concept that the prime purpose of marriage was to procreate. Mme Necker, an opponent of divorce, challenged the dissolution of marriage based on barrenness. She pronounced that “the principal goal of nature, in the institution of marriage, is the happiness of the two spouses, reproduction is but a secondary goal.”³⁵ She espouses the promotion of individual happiness which was a dominant philosophical thought during the French Revolution. Traditional bourgeois attitudes concerning the continuation of family lines, however, were still of the utmost importance.

After marriage the home became a woman’s sole domain; a separate sphere isolated from public life. The production of the market place, however, and its capitalist motives connected consumerism to the household. It was part of a wife’s duty to make the family home a haven, a refuge for her husband away from the business of the marketplace. A beautiful, well decorated home was the antithesis to filth of industry and the pursuit of capital. An attractive family and home provided the husband with some semblance of power and social standing.³⁶ In return, a husband would regard his wife with honor and “treat her with the most exquisite politeness.”³⁷ Balzac gives a fine example of the the bourgeoisie wife: “The married woman is a slave whom one must be able to set on a throne.”³⁸ Domesticity and the consumption of goods was a sign of prestige and family wealth.³⁹ The acquired goods, furnishings, and decorations in a home gave

³⁵ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

³⁶ Smith, 55.

³⁷ De Beauvoir, 111.

³⁸ De Beauvoir, 111.

³⁹ Smith, 54.

the impression of security and comfort. Above all a woman's most important duty was to perpetuate the family; to produce children to ensure the transmission of private wealth.⁴⁰

Motherhood:

Producing children was of the utmost importance for the bourgeois. "For economic and psychological reasons, if for nothing else, the cult of the heir glorified the woman who reproduced the father's image, the receptacle for his capital, his eternal life in a mortal world."⁴¹ Even though the birth of a child was a celebrated occasion, the experience of delivery was often fraught with anxiety. The risks involved in childbirth during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were high. If complications arose the likelihood of death was a great possibility. A birth could have four possible outcomes: "a living mother and child; a dead baby; a dead mother; a dead mother and child."⁴² This reality caused expectant mothers to often fear pregnancy and its consequences.⁴³ Loving husbands were also apprehensive of childbirth and believed "the dangers incurred by a beloved and loving wife are a high cost for the pleasure of seeing oneself reborn in one's children."⁴⁴ In the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for marriages to be broken by death. Conflict, disease, sickness, and complications during birth were the most frequent factors leading to the death of a spouse. The average length of first marriages lasted less than twenty years.⁴⁵ The surviving spouse would remarry rather quickly. The pressures of pregnancy and

⁴⁰ Smith, 57.

⁴¹ Smith, 63.

⁴² Hufton, 190.

⁴³ Christine There. "Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 32, Number 4, (Summer 1999).

⁴⁴ "Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France".

⁴⁵ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

childbirth weighed heavily on the minds of expectant mothers. “They must have strength to survive pregnancy, labor, and childbirth, produce healthy children, and to nourish them well.”⁴⁶

In the nineteenth century, advances in medicine and technology improved the condition of motherhood.⁴⁷ Doctors provided more care and attention to mothers during and after pregnancy. The field of obstetrics made strides in understanding the physiology of pregnancy through examinations of the uterus and by listening to the fetal heartbeat with a stethoscope.⁴⁸ With these advances midwives were elevated to the status of professionals and were more widely accepted in the obstetrics community. Although these scientific measures were progressive and aided in the understanding of labor and delivery, the results of obstetric practices actually caused the rate of infant mortality to rise.⁴⁹ Lack of measures to ensure sanitary conditions during childbirth contributed to this higher number of deaths.⁵⁰

Prior to the establishment of the nuclear family, hiring wet nurses to care for newborn babies was a common occurrence. Breastfeeding was not considered part of a mother’s duty. In fact, noble women had little interest in their newborns and relied on wet nurses to feed and care for their babies. Breastfeeding was discouraged in the upper-classes. Noble women were thought to produce inferior milk because living in the city made them unhealthy.⁵¹ This was one of the main reasons wet nurses were used. Also, having intercourse while lactating was considered taboo and thought to weaken the milk.⁵² Wet nurses were not always reliable and had been

⁴⁶ “Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France”.

⁴⁷ McMillan, James F. *Housewife or Harlot*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 33.

⁴⁸ McMillan, James F. *Housewife or Harlot*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 33.

⁴⁹ McMillan, James F. *Housewife or Harlot*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 33.

⁵⁰ McMillan, James F. *Housewife or Harlot*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 33.

⁵¹ Hufton, 198.

⁵² Hufton, 198.

known to have neglected children.⁵³ Knowledge that their children might be mistreated, along with the development and subsequent obsession with cleanliness and personal hygiene drove out the nobility's dependence on wet nurses.

The Revolution, driven by Enlightenment thought, was an instrument for change concerning parenting styles and in redefining the role of motherhood. A new mode of parenthood emerged that involved focusing on caring for one's own children and providing for their needs. The bourgeoisie essentially encouraged the practice breastfeeding which perpetuated the shift to the nuclear family dynamic.⁵⁴ Breastfeeding one's own infant hastened the mother and child bond and laid the foundation for the more loving aspects of the nuclear family. Having strong emotional ties to children ensured that parents would be invested in their education, development, happiness, and futures.

Limiting Procreation:

The ideological consensus among the French people was to adhere to biblical principles concerning marriage and family. The imperative of Genesis, "be fruitful and multiply" encouraged high birth rates.⁵⁵ The political and cultural revolution in France brought about a contraceptive revolution as well. During the Revolutionary period and the subsequent years afterward, birth rates began to fall regularly. "The Western pattern of marriage (a late age at the first marriage), established in France since the sixteenth century, was almost entirely superseded by what was eventually to be called "birth control" or "family planning," that is, contraceptive behavior outside or within marriage."⁵⁶

⁵³ Hufton, 201.

⁵⁴ "Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth-Century France".

⁵⁵ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

⁵⁶ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

Late marriage played a threefold role within the middle class. Economically, it resulted in the constitution of a household, that is a unit of production and consumption. Demographically, it represented a “license to reproduce” granted to single people who lived until their wedding in a kind of “matrimonial purgatory” and whose stock represented a tremendous potentiality for demographic expansion.⁵⁷ The pattern of deliberate postponement of marriage played a major role in the flourishing economic developments of France in the early nineteenth century. By limiting family size in favor of securing financial means, the middle class “facilitated the advent of the Industrial Revolution, as well as the repression and sublimation of sexuality, contributing to the progress of Western civilization.”⁵⁸

French philosophers at the end of the eighteenth century recommended avoiding procreation by stating the “excessive multitude of men” was “an evil greater than war.”⁵⁹ This sentiment demonstrates the changing priorities in society that would ultimately give rise to the dominant middle class. The Enlightenment had inspired the restructuring of family dynamics which began during the Revolution. There was an obvious social shift away from the religious and moral motto of “be fruitful and multiply” to a more economically advantageous structure of family life.⁶⁰

The pattern of deliberate postponement of marriage played a major role in the flourishing economic developments of France in the early nineteenth century. “It is this progressive transformation of Enlightenment mentalities that explains the abrupt shift in behavior noticed during the Revolution.”⁶¹ Material happiness identified with welfare were essential ideas in the

⁵⁷ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

⁵⁸ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

⁵⁹ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

⁶⁰ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

⁶¹ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

Enlightenment. During the French Revolution, thoughts in favor of population growth were weighed against the condition of existence. Arguments about the well-being and happiness of those living in a state of poverty, especially children, were used to champion means of depopulation. Voltaire concluded that the principle point of a country's population was not to have a numerous people, but the least unhappy people possible.⁶² Birth control or contraceptive techniques were a way people could control their lives or obtain happiness. Condorcet, the French philosopher, believed that voluntary birth limitations were a path to happiness; "because the aim of humankind is not existence, but happiness, and not the childish idea of loading the earth with useless and unhappy beings."⁶³

The Catholic Church was intimately involved in all aspects of daily life; from birth, to death, and beyond. Religion, prayer, and church attendance was an essential and non-negotiable part of every Frenchman's life. A person was to not only worship God and abide by his laws but also by the laws of the Church. The Catholic Church condemned techniques, such as coitus interruptus, which would limit the number of births within a marriage. According to the author, Jean-Jacques, contraceptive techniques were "shameful means used to prevent the birth of men and to deceive nature."⁶⁴ In 1786, Maximilien-Francois de Robespierre denounced coitus interruptus as "the horrible secret means of thwarting Nature."⁶⁵ Despite the controversy surrounding this issue, it is obvious by the decline in birth rates that controlling fertility was practiced by married couples. Once a married couple reached the number of desired offspring, they might use the contraceptive means of having separate bedrooms. This voluntary abstinence

⁶² "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

⁶³ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

⁶⁴ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

⁶⁵ "From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning".

within a marriage would assure the couple that they would have no more children. This method of birth control was thought to disrupt the “natural order” of procreation. “The Catholic Church, by emphasizing the impure character of sexual relationships may have involuntarily encouraged matrimonial abstinence and even the practice of coitus interruptus.”⁶⁶ The Enlightenment caused people to adopt new attitudes towards sex and they began to separate pleasure from procreation. They were more concerned with mastering nature than upsetting the order of it. Consequently, knowledge of birth control methods were shared, not just among the upper classes, but throughout the population as a whole.

Conclusion:

The combined effect of these fundamental changes in family structure tempered by the expectations of religion, created a complex and difficult to traverse social minefield for women. The nature of the French Revolution was to ensure individual happiness and liberty, and the establishment of the nuclear family acted against these ideals. For married women and mothers the formation of the nuclear family confined them to their homes and forced them to adhere evermore stringently to social expectations. The continuing practice of arranged marriages, even in its altered Post-Revolutionary form, perpetuated the cycle of domesticity and servitude in the lives of women. A woman’s place was firmly established in the home, a separate sphere from the public realm of influence, idea, and individuality. She was socially isolated and charged with a clear purpose; to produce children and dedicate herself to raising them. The nuclear family, marriage, and subsequent motherhood will remain the primary purpose of a woman’s existence well into the twentieth century.

⁶⁶ “From Be Fruitful and Multiply to Family Planning”.

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