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**Abstract**

The nineteenth century movement to open higher education to women in England has been the subject of much scholarship in the last two decades. Studies of individual colleges have added to the corpus of research on how women were provided with formal higher education at this time. However, scholars offer differing theories as to why radical changes in the higher education of women took place when they did. This paper offers a synthesis of these various theories, and challenges the general perception that the opening of higher education to women was an 'unexpected revolution' (Bryant, 1987). (HRK / Abstract übernommen)