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# Breaking the Wedding Vows: Woman-Centered Critiques of Marriage, 1963-1982

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BREAKING THE WEDDING VOWS: WOMAN-CENTERED CRITIQUES OF  
MARRIAGE, 1963-1982

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
History

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by  
John Henry Spiers III  
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Accepted by:  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores woman-centered critiques of marriage during the period of second-wave feminism from 1963 to 1982. It explores the social and cultural, economic, sexual, and legal critiques of marriage that feminists posed and the messages about marriage that filtered down into a collection of popular magazines geared specifically to a female audience. It argues that feminists, operating through intersecting and diverging motives, interests, and agendas, posed numerous and wide-ranging critiques of marriage as a personal relationship and politicized institution. It asserts that while popular women's magazines were affected by the claims of feminists, these magazines generally remained conservative in the content, form, and language of the articles on marriage that they featured. This thesis provides a much needed treatment of a topic important to many feminists and an issue central to understanding women's status in American society.



## DEDICATION

To Jennifer, who when I began this project was my fiancée and who, when I completed it, was my wife. The support, encouragement, and interest she shared as I pursued this subject inspired my own enthusiasm. She has helped to show me the promises, problems, and pitfalls of feminist analyses of marriage and reminded me of when my actions failed to match with my convictions. For the many ways she has made my life more interesting and fuller, I am forever grateful.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a thesis is a collective effort. Along the way, I have benefited from the guidance, expertise, and encouragement of outstanding faculty. My primary reason for coming to Clemson University was to work with Megan Taylor Shockley. During my time here, her insight and enthusiasm have provided me with a challenging example to follow. My appreciation, understanding, and contributions to the field of women's and gender history have grown by leaps and bounds under her tutelage. I am indebted to Abel Bartley, under whom I completed coursework that ignited my interests in African American and urban history. His sincere interest in my research and his confidence in me as a scholar have been vital to my success at Clemson. I am greatly appreciative of the keen mind and attention to detail that Joanna Grisinger has brought to shaping my conceptualization of legal history. Her ability to pull me in the right direction has proved imminently helpful.

Many other people have worked with me to make researching and writing this thesis much less difficult than it would have been without their aid. The interlibrary loan staff of Cooper Library simplified the hassles of borrowing research materials from other institutions. Conversations with my colleagues in the history department, particularly Reed Peebles and Carol Longenecker, provided me with delightful reprieves from academic work and fresh perspectives on my work. For the community of students and scholars that I found here, I am much obliged for their kindness, generosity, and insight.



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## INTRODUCTION

In a letter to *Time* printed in its March 20, 1972, issue, Virginia Hanson questioned both her own marriage and marriage as a societal institution: “I’d always accepted the role of wife and mother [... but now] [w]omen are at last emerging from their cocoon and saying ‘why?’”<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of Virginia Hanson’s reflection in the March 20, 1972 special issue of *Time* magazine focused on “The American Woman” suggested that women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s had provoked a strong gender consciousness and encouraged women in mainstream society to challenge traditional gender roles. In these years, marriage represented an important, though hotly contested, focal point for uncovering and analyzing the discrimination that women faced along the lines of gender, race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. In posing their critiques, feminists drew upon their own experiences with and their understanding of marriage as an institution with sociocultural, psychological, economic, sexual, and legal dimensions. In popular women’s periodicals, these feminist critiques were reworked in ways that retained an emphasis on personalizing women’s experiences but stripped away claims for sweeping societal change in response.

### **Framework**

This study explores ‘woman-centered critiques of marriage’ during the period from 1963-1982. By adopting a ‘woman-centered approach,’ this thesis examines how women specifically identified as gendered beings in posing

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<sup>1</sup> (Mrs.) Virginia Hanson, letter to *Time* (20 March 1972), 6.

critiques to marriage. While this study emphasizes the centrality of gender in informing feminist and popular critiques of marriage, it does so without narrowly confining itself to one facet of a woman's identity. Other social constructions including but not limited to race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation played important roles in qualifying critiques to marriage.<sup>2</sup> In employing the paradigm of woman-centered to frame the attention given to critiques and challenges to marriage, this thesis explores the claims and proposals of feminist activists and the messages that filtered into a collection of popular women's magazines geared specifically to a female audience.

The use of a woman-centered approach recognizes the importance of the dialogue between feminists and non-activists, what they shared and where they differed. While feminists provided important challenges to the institution of marriage, it remained the task of mainstream, non-feminist women, to negotiate what claims, critiques, and changes they embraced. Despite the prominence given to critiquing marriage in this era, no unified, consensus analysis of marriage as a personal relationship and politicized institution existed in feminist circles, much less in popular women's magazines. Instead, diverse groups of women, operating through intersecting and diverging motives, interests, and agendas, critiqued marriage from several perspectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy Cott makes the claim that marriage "is the vehicle through which the apparatus of state can shape the gender order." See Nancy F Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3.

## Scope and Focus

This thesis concentrates on the era from the debut of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 to the ultimate failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982. This period, considered by several scholars as that of 'second-wave feminism,' arose following the decline in sustained and organized women's activism after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. It represented an unprecedented level of organizing at the local, regional, and national levels to challenge a multitude of barriers to women's full participation in American society. While characterizing who and what precisely constituted 'second wave' feminism remains difficult, some general trends are evident. In comparison to earlier periods of women's activism, this era featured greater diversity in opinions and political actions. It challenged the alleged privileges given to women because of their gender. It emphasized the multiple and intersecting facets of sex discrimination in American society that involved sociocultural, economic, sexual, and legal issues. More than female activists in other periods, second wave feminists understood women's activism beyond the category of gender, and included race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation in their analyses of marriage, although not without disagreement over the implications and outcome.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On periodization issues, see e.g. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7-10; Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6-14. The latter two historians challenge the trope of middle-class white feminism examined in Echols' monograph and argue for expanding the definition of the second wave to include non-white women and lengthening the period of the second wave into the early 1980s.

A growing body of literature has emphasized the diversity of second wave feminism. These studies reassess the second-wave paradigm of “white middle-class, heterosexual feminism” in order to more fully incorporate the multifaceted and interstitial politics of women critiquing marriage not just from a gender lens but from racial, sexual orientation, and class lenses.<sup>4</sup> This literature reveals that white women and women of color worked within historical and contemporary social conditions that made uniting together to critique marriage considerably more difficult in light of intersecting and competing identities of race and class.<sup>5</sup> Homophobia within white women’s liberation groups and black women’s feminist organizations made lesbians uncomfortable and reluctant to organize with heterosexual women.<sup>6</sup> Only recently have lesbians consistently lobbied for recognition of their unions as legal marriages, having worked more concertedly during the “second wave” to tentatively secure individual rights first.<sup>7</sup> The centrality of gender in feminist critiques of marriage and consideration of the types of feminists who offered these critiques indicates that most of the feminist

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs*, Vol. 14 No. 1 (Autumn 1988), 119-157.

<sup>5</sup> A rich literature exists on the complex relationship between race and feminism. See e.g. Helen A. Neville and Jennifer Hamer, “‘We Make Freedom’: An Exploration of Revolutionary Black Feminism.” *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 31, No. 4 (March 2001), 437-461; Wini Breines, “What’s Love Got to Do with It? White Women, Black Women, and Feminism in the Movement Years.” *Signs*. Vol. 27, No. 4 (Summer 2002). 1095-1133; Roth, *Separate Rods to Feminism*; Springer, *Living for the Revolution*.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Ferguson defines a lesbian as “a woman who has sexual and erotic emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women; and who is herself a self-identified lesbian.” See Ann Ferguson, “Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution,” *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1981), 166.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Anne Case, “Couples and Coupling in the Public Sphere: A Comment on the Legal History of Litigating for Lesbian and Gay Rights,” *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 79 No. 7, Symposium on Sexual Orientation and the Law (October 1993), 1643-1694; Lilian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 4-5; George Chauncey, *Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 93-94.

challenges to marriage came from highly educated, white, heterosexual women. Nonetheless, feminists from diverse backgrounds critiqued marriage based on their own circumstances and agendas, which provided for an expansive challenge to this institution.

While critiques of marriage of the 1960s and 1970s occupied an important place in most late twentieth century feminisms, feminists espousing these critiques differed in their analysis of the multifaceted and complex relationship between marriage and the gender. For purposes of this thesis, I have identified three categories of feminist activism: liberal, radical, and diversified. Liberal feminists initiated second wave feminism in the early-1960s and after an interim from the late 1960s through the mid 1970s regained it. They focused primarily on the legal discrimination against married women and challenged coverture, or the sets of laws that presumed and subsumed married women's legal, economic, and sociocultural identities under that of their husbands.

Radical feminists, on the other hand, challenged the institution of marriage based on deeply entrenched sociocultural gender patterns that had defined women's values, needs, and identities as less important than men's and had used marriage to perpetuate women's second class status. The work of radical feminists represented an explosion in the depth of discussion and analysis of marriage. In the 1970s, feminists of color, lesbian feminists, and working class feminists subjected marriage to diversified critiques and reinterpreted earlier liberal and radical analyses. These critiques questioned the importance of marriage as a part of feminist agendas and promoted the serious consideration of

the intersection of marriage and gender with the multiple lived identities of race and ethnicity, sexuality, and class. From 1963 to 1975, liberal, radical, African American, lesbian, and working class feminists challenged marriage, critiqued the analysis of other feminists, and occasionally agreed on some basic features of a ‘woman-centered’ critique of marriage.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, marriage continued to serve as an important touchstone for explicitly feminist work, but especially after 1975, social debates on the issue shifted more heavily to other arenas such as popular women’s magazines. Women’s magazines from 1963 to 1982 incorporated feminist critiques of marriage from women of diverse ethnic and racial, class, and sexual identities and perspectives. These periodicals sanitized the debates found within women’s movements and radical periodicals to cater to their mainstream readership.<sup>8</sup> Their consistent presentation of articles throughout the 1960s and 1970s questioning, although not explicitly and holistically, traditional white middle-class marriage, nonetheless demonstrated that American society in the late twentieth century had experienced profound changes in the prevailing discourses and practices of marriage.

The topics of federal and state laws and judicial decisions during the late 1960s and 1970s indicated the prominence of debates surrounding women’s social status, economic purpose, sexual endeavors and legal rights. Legislation during this period, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Civil Rights Act of 1964 attempted to use legal equality to create equal outcomes for women in

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women’s Magazines in the United States, 1792-1995* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), xii-xiii, 236-237.

employment. Judicial decisions on contraceptive use and marital privacy, abortion, and divorce during this era challenged traditional marriage by expanding women's rights to make decisions regarding their own bodies, to leave a marriage without requiring proof of fault, and to earn their own wages. Nonetheless, courts circumscribed some of the more radical demands of second feminists by rejecting the use of law to create equality of outcome and remaining dependent on formal equality to restructure deeply entrenched and gendered sociocultural and economic patterns. In the 1970s, feminist critiques of marriage integrated themselves into broader social debates on women and changed the context, expectations, and terms of marriage. While they addressed fundamental problems, they also created new problems that women have struggled with since.

## Sources

My thesis source base is broad in order to integrate and evaluate diverse critiques of marriage within an interdisciplinary framework. One group of primary sources that I employ is a set of groundbreaking and foundational texts of 'second wave' feminism.<sup>9</sup> Although these sources have canonized a feminist intellectual tradition of the 1960s and 1970s, they alone do not explicate the full range of ideas of feminists regarding marriage. To provide a more comprehensive

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<sup>9</sup> These include: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated and Edited by H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books [1953], 1989); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company [1963], 2001); Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1970); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1970); Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), and Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976). Anthologized collections of primary sources include Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (eds.), *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called by Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983; and, more recently, Barbara Crow (ed), *Radical Feminism: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Rosalyn F. Baxandall and Linda Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

analysis, I rely upon a rich and varied collection of non-mainstream women's periodicals written by white, African American, lesbian, and other women. These periodicals served as one of the most important public representations of the ideas of the women's movements of this era and as a source of the most concentrated analyses of marriage as a public institution and private relationship in need of change. As much as these 'feminist' documents illuminate the intellectualizing of women's groups, their readership, admittedly, was confined in general to the membership of the various radical groups that produced them.

For the broader American public, exposure to feminist challenges to marriage during the period from 1963 to 1982 came from mainstream sources. My thesis uses popular women's magazines to examine what messages about marriage and women's social status within it emerged within popular discourses and for a specifically female audience. These magazines were affected by feminist activism but in many of their articles, the analyses of marriage resembled earlier messages of female deference and individual couple problem solving rather than reflected feminist advocacy for radical societal change through reform of marriage. Yet, what the articles in popular women's magazines reveal is that feminist activism had politicized consciousness of gender for many women and led these women to think more deliberately about their own marriages. At certain points, I include information from government reports, census and population data, and legislative and judicial decrees to provide a context for understanding the dialogue between feminists and non-activist women.

## History of the Period

In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote of the long simmering and deeply troubling *Feminine Mystique*: “The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States [...] [S]he was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’”<sup>10</sup> Born in Peoria, Illinois, Friedan attended the all-female Smith College, graduating in 1942. After a brief stint in graduate school, she worked as a journalist for union and leftist newspapers for nearly ten years until she was fired for being pregnant. In the late 1950s, she conducted a survey of fellow Smith College graduates about their quality of life and found that many of her classmates had become discontented housewives. After failing to have the results of her research published in popular women’s magazines, Friedan reworked the project into *The Feminine Mystique*, which premiered in 1963. The book focused on the lives of suburban housewives, who despite their middle-class status, were dissatisfied with their lives and deeply troubled with the lack of individuality and fulfilling purpose in their lives.

Friedan’s remarks on suburban married women’s lives in the early 1960s resonated with early second wave feminists but established early rifts over which of married women’s identities – psychological and social, economic, sexual, or legal – should receive the greatest attention. Nonetheless, evidence of demographic changes in the institution of marriage confirmed some of the

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<sup>10</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 15.

problems that Friedan posed - of the presence of psychological disarray, economic dependency, and social isolation - in married women's lives. In addition to ongoing demographic changes, the proliferation of social movements for equality in the 1960s, and the focus on formal equality as a means for validating activism and promoting social change provided early second wave feminists with the impetus for their work. The turbulent decade of the 1960s witnessed a series of important events, societal changes, and discourses that profoundly shaped the battleground over marriage.

### *Changes in the 1960s*

Demographic shifts in the Second World War portended impending changes to the contexts of marriage and opened up the avenues for feminist critiques and challenges to the institution. From 1960 to 1968, the median age at first marriage for women grew by nearly half a year, increasing from 20.3 to 20.8.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the birth rate of women in the 15 to 44 age cohort declined significantly, from 118 per thousand to 85.7 per thousand, with middle-class white women seeing the most substantial drop.<sup>12</sup> There were several reasons for this decline in birth rates. They included: the increase in women working and marrying later; resistance to marriage and having children because of other vocations; and the development and widespread access to effective birth control,

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<sup>11</sup> Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part I (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, September 1975), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 49; Susan Householder Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility, 1900-1986* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 157-158. The decline in fertility for women occurred most rapidly among educated middle-class women, the women that Betty Friedan, author of the *Feminine Mystique*, had argued in the 1950s suffered under the tremendous burdens of motherhood and subsequent domesticity.

especially in pill form.<sup>13</sup> During the 1960s, the connections between marriage and the traditional gender order were under increasing assault. While the expectations of women to be wives, mothers, and housekeepers remained in mainstream society, more women became further discontented with the fit between marriage and their own lives.

While marriage and domesticity had become centerpieces on the domestic scene in the 1950s and had been enshrined under a white middle-class nuclear family norm, the continued rise of married white women's employment into the 1960s challenged the ideology of the dutiful housewife.<sup>14</sup> As more women married earlier in the 1950s, the core of single women that employers had long relied upon to fill 'pink collar' service and secretarial jobs shrank and required businesses to reconsider how to fill positions in these industries. As a result, employers lobbied legislators to eliminate legal barriers to married women's employment and consequently integrated married women into their workforce.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the very middle-class women that Betty Friedan argued had suffered from the "Feminine Mystique" actually were more likely to be working than ever before. The breakdown of the single-income nuclear family in the 1960s due to married women entering the labor force, the rise in divorce, and the decline in

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<sup>13</sup> Blanche Linden - Ward and Carol Hurd Green, *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 340-343.

<sup>14</sup> Annegret S. Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 172-173; Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 18-21; Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 228-230.

<sup>15</sup> Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom & Social Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 52-54. Weiss argues that the mothers of the baby boom generation actually faced a double burden and transformed the American family and the workforce.

fertility, placed greater demands on men and especially women.<sup>16</sup> In addition, these causal factors provided feminists with ammunition to challenge marriage from 1963 to 1982.

One of the central issues of the 1963 to 1982 period became the “double burden,” in which a married woman was expected to be a child-management and domestic expert who also worked to provide income to feed the consumerism of a middle-class lifestyle.<sup>17</sup> This ‘double burden’ had distinctly racialized elements, as married women of color and working-class women had historically worked at much higher rates than married middle-class white women. The rise in employment of the latter group encouraged white middle-class liberal feminists to urge women in their socioeconomic category to seek employment as a means of breaking out of psychologically stifling and economically dependent marriages, rather than as economic necessity.<sup>18</sup> The issue of how to reconcile paid labor with unpaid domestic and reproductive labor and to how to reassign responsibilities for both became a serious one for many white feminists, although they differed in their solutions.

One of the growing features of marriage in the 1960s was an increase in the time and appeal given to extended singleness. Born in Green Forest,

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<sup>16</sup> Eve Merriam, *After Nora Slammed the Door: American Women in the 1960s, the Unfinished Revolution* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1964), 224-225; Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility*, 151-154, 179; Weiss, *To Have and To Hold*, 79-81. Van Horn argues that married women entering the workforce instead of devoting themselves to the role of housewife full-time was the key to the 1960-1980 period.

<sup>17</sup> Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 174-187; Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 223. A culture of consumerism fostered by technological invention and marketing made the baby-boom generation expensive and required that women enter the labor force to maintain a certain lifestyle. On this point, see Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility*, 164; Weiss, *To Have and To Hold*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility*, 194-199.

Arkansas, Helen Gurley Brown attended Texas State College for women before beginning work as a secretary at a prominent advertising agency and rising to become a prestigious ad copywriter in the early 1960s. In 1962, she wrote *Sex and the Single Girl*, in which she challenged the ever-present nature of marriage and the family in the 1950s: “I think a single woman’s biggest problem is coping with the people who are trying to marry her off.”<sup>19</sup> Becoming editor of *Cosmopolitan* in 1965 in her early 40s, Brown turned the news periodical into a glitzy magazine for young middle-class single women. While most women in the early 1960s were either married or intended to marry, Brown wrote for an audience of young women eager to explore their sexuality and keen to work jobs to provide themselves with support outside of marriage. She encouraged middle-class and educated women to hold out on marriage until they had indulged their hedonistic, sexual, and consumerist impulses. Despite her emphasis on sex and singleness, Brown expected that most single women would eventually leave the single life once they had enjoyed ‘freedom from marriage’ for a while. Brown’s advocacy of sexual liberation for young women provided an important primer for the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s represented an important redefinition of traditional marital standards. The connections between marriage and sexuality were made strongly by feminists and anti-feminists during the period of second wave feminism. In his twentieth century divorce in America, J. Herbie DiFonzo asserts, “Marital breakdown was the lightning rod in the sex-driven cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Random House, 1962), 4.

storm.”<sup>20</sup> Noticeably missing from feminists’ discussions of marital sexuality was an analysis of religion. While feminists had much to say about sexuality, they indicted marriage, implicitly condemning colluding religious mores, rather than explicitly lambasting religion.<sup>21</sup>

As feminists challenged marriage in the 1960s and 1970s, sexuality changed. The popular women’s magazine *Redbook* issued the results of a survey on marital sexuality in 1977. While their research suggested little in the way of changes in marital sexuality, one of its most revealing findings was that married women employed full-time were likely to have been approximately twice as likely to have extra-marital affairs as part-time or unemployed wives.<sup>22</sup> The real changes in marital sexuality were found somewhere between the claims of feminists and the messages in popular women’s magazine articles. While issues of domestic violence and rape gained the national spotlight in the 1970s, marital sexuality during the 1970s became a very hot topic for best-selling books that sold sex for pleasure rather than located sex as politics.

While some women praised the sexual revolution of the early to mid-1960s that provided reliable and readily available contraception and encouraged women to pursue their sexual interests outside of the confines of marriage, for many women, this situation proved hardly liberating.<sup>23</sup> Writing for the radical

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<sup>20</sup> J. Herbie DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line: The Popular and Legal Culture of Divorce in Twentieth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 111.

<sup>21</sup> Karen DeCrow is one of the few feminists who explicitly address the connections between religion and sexual relations. See Karen DeCrow, *Sexual Power* (New York: Random House, 1974), 173-174.

<sup>22</sup> Carol Tavris and Susan Sadd, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality: 100,000 Married Women Disclose the Good News About Sex* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977), 116.

<sup>23</sup> This applied in particular to young single women. See e.g., Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, 252-255.

feminist periodical *Second Coming*, an anonymous woman in December 1970 argued like most radical feminists that Free Love was not sexual liberation because it generally ended up creating a sense of male access without fear of consequences such as pregnancy.<sup>24</sup> Changing sociocultural values and economic circumstances in American society in the 1960s inspired calls for reexamining sexual politics during the era of second wave feminism.

Another changing dynamic of marriage in the 1960s and 1970s was the growth of divorce. In the first half of the twentieth century, women had led the way in challenging the permanency of marriage by exploiting the legal loopholes in divorce laws requiring proof of fault through collusion with their husbands to invent grounds for divorce.<sup>25</sup> From 1960 to 1970, the number of women over the age of fourteen who were divorced rose by more than one million, producing more than a 150,000 increase in the total number of divorces.<sup>26</sup> From 1970 to 1980, the number of divorced women per thousand married persons doubled from 60 to 120.<sup>27</sup> Despite the escalation of divorce in the 1960s, states' divorce laws remained relatively unaffected until the 1970s and the rise of no-fault divorce.<sup>28</sup>

With California leading the way in 1970, no fault divorce became possible as sociocultural and legal barriers eroded, although the process took a while to

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<sup>24</sup> "Free Love – Liberation?" *Second Coming*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (11 December 1970), 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence M. Friedman, *Private Lives: Families, Individuals, and the Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 60-69.

<sup>26</sup> According to Census records, in 1960 the number of females divorced was 1,855,098 while by 1970, it had reached 3,004,278. See Historical Statistics of the United States, 20. Total divorces from 1963 to 1968 rose from 428,000 to 584,000. See *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Statistical Abstract of the United States, (Lanham, MD, Bernan Press, 1992), 43.

<sup>28</sup> For example, by 1969, only seven states provided divorce on grounds of incompatibility while the majority of other states required other grounds and time and separation requirements to grant divorces. J. Herbie DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line: The Popular and Legal Culture of Divorce in Twentieth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 67-69, 75-81.

reach throughout the United States.<sup>29</sup> The intent of the law was to modernize the process for ending a marriage by removing fault in order to curb the adversarial nature of divorce proceedings and to provide for an equal distribution of property that was gender-neutral.<sup>30</sup> During the 1970s, several states embraced California's divorce law as a model for restructuring their own divorce laws. These laws rejected the traditional divorce laws' expectation of spouses' conventional gendered roles and responsibilities following the dissolution of marriage.<sup>31</sup>

While feminists did not successfully challenge divorce laws, and actually argued against liberalized divorce laws, the critiques they offered against marriage informed the adoption of no-fault divorce laws. The escalation in divorce rates during the period suggested a growing social question of the desirability and continued existence of marriage as a permanent relationship with prescribed gender roles.<sup>32</sup> Sociocultural attitudes regarding the viability of

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<sup>29</sup> Friedman, *Private Lives*, 73-75. Traditionally, divorce required grounds for dissolution of a marriage aside from incompatibility and presumed women to be unemployed in terms of property distribution, although by the first half of the twentieth century, spouses regularly conspired with one another to circumnavigate the legal barriers. On this period, see Friedman, *Private Lives*, 44-69; DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Traditionally, divorce required grounds aside from incompatibility and presumed women to be unemployed in terms of property distribution, although by the first half of the twentieth century, spouses regularly conspired with one another to circumnavigate the legal barriers. See Friedman, *Private Lives*, 44-69; DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, 1-2; Elizabeth S. Scott, "Social Norms and the Legal Regulation of Marriage," *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 86, No. 8, Symposium: The Legal Construction of Norms (November 2000), 1939-1942.

<sup>31</sup> Lenore Weitzman identifies six elements of the California divorce law: no grounds for divorce, neither spouse had to prove fault or guilt to gain a divorce, one spouse could obtain a divorce without the aid of the other, financial awards became based on need rather than fault, new standards for resource distribution defined women as equal in the share they received, and reduced the adversarial nature of the proceedings. See Lenore Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women and Children in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 15-16. By the end of 1972, nine states had established no-fault divorce: (Iowa in 1970, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, and Oregon in 1971, Kentucky and Nebraska in 1972, and Arizona and Washington in 1973). See Herma Hill Kay, "Making Marriage and Divorce Safe for Women," 60 *Calif.L.Rev.* (1972), 1698-1699.

<sup>32</sup> Merriam, *After Nora Slammed the Door*, 31-37; Francine S. Hall and Douglas T. Hall, *The Two-Career Couple* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 222-223. On

divorce as an option for ending marriages changed in the 1970s to accommodate evolutions in the necessity, grounds, and permanency of the institution. Karla B. Hackstaff identifies the 1970s as a ‘marital watershed’ in which marriage culture declined and divorce culture arose.<sup>33</sup> Her comparative study of couples married in the 1950s and the 1970s determined that the rhetoric of gender equality from woman-centered analysis of society had destabilized its basic institutions such as marriage and the family and shifted the discourse on marriage from a necessity with divorce as a last resort as an option with contingencies and divorce available.<sup>34</sup> Changes due to the sexual revolution of the 1960s, a growing ethos of expressive individualism that placed higher expectations and demands on marriage and undermined the value of permanency for the institution, the growing consciousness of power and gender relations within marriage, and the creation of open legal means to end marriages combined in a volatile mixture to push attitudes toward marriage in different directions.<sup>35</sup> In his study of divorce in California, Lenore Weitzman reached similar conclusions regarding the reasons for the growing legal and sociocultural permissibility of divorce.<sup>36</sup>

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sexuality in youth culture and media, see Linden-Ward and Green, *American Women in the 1960s*, 252-255, 369-377. On motivations for legal changes in divorce law, see Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution*, 15-16. DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, 91-96, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Karla B. Hackstaff, *Marriage in a Culture of Divorce* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 1-2. Hackstaff’s study of couples of the 1950s and 1970s found that a generational gap existed in terms of conceiving of relationships within the context of a marriage or divorce culture and determined that notions of gender equality informed the particulars of both.

<sup>34</sup> Hackstaff, *Marriage in a Culture of Divorce*, 1-4.

<sup>35</sup> Friedman, *Private Lives*, 73-79; Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution*, xv. Not all historians are in agreement as to whether twentieth century divorce reforms were attempts to liberalize laws and provide for greater opportunities for divorce. For an argument against the notion of liberalization as permissibility and a contention that no-fault divorce went to far, see DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*.

<sup>36</sup> Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution*, xvii-xviii.

No-fault divorce radically restructured the terms of marriage and proved to exert a substantial influence in increasing the number of divorced women in the United States. From 1970 to 1980, the number of divorced women per thousand married persons doubled from 60 to 120 as black women's divorced status more than doubled and white women's divorced status nearly doubled.<sup>37</sup> Female heads of household rose by 58.3% in the decade due primarily to escalating divorce rates.<sup>38</sup> Marriage remained a privileged legal, economic, and sociocultural status in the 1970s but more women increasingly rejected the notion that to remain in unfulfilling marriages was still a privilege. As divorce increased during the 1970s, however, the results for women confirmed the suspicions that many feminists had.

The work that feminists did to break down the institution of marriage manifested itself in numerous ways. While the sociocultural, economic, sexual, and legal discrimination that married women face was strongly challenged and partially redressed, several new issues emerged for which feminists were unable to offer workable solutions. The effects of feminist critiques of marriage made their way into mainstream society and have since the early 1980s served as the foundation for subsequent analyses of marriage.

### *Responses*

The 1960s witnessed a series of government responses to the changing situation of marriage that provided battlegrounds for a broader societal debate on marriage and women's place in America. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy

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<sup>37</sup> Statistical Abstract of the United States, 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

convened the President's Commission on the Status of Women at the behest of Esther Peterson and the Women's Bureau. Although it was the first official federal body to specifically examine women's place in society, the Commission's subsequent 1963 report offered little in the way of details and analysis challenging marriage and women's place within it. Instead, it asserted fears of the decline of the American family and a need for women to rededicate themselves to serving as wives and mothers rather than to join the workplace and shirk their marital and motherly responsibilities.<sup>39</sup> Despite the conservative nature of the report, the Commission spawned the creation of state commissions and inspired the consideration of hundreds of pieces of federal legislation in the first half of the 1960s on women's issues.<sup>40</sup>

Several important pieces of legislation passed in the 1960s reframed women's legal status in the United States by implicitly addressing coverture and marriage. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were two of the most noteworthy results of a burgeoning women's movement. The Equal Pay Act amended the Fair Labor Standards Act by prohibiting employers from discriminating in the payment of wages on account of sex. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in voting, employment, and public services based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Title VII specifically prohibited discrimination in employment and

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<sup>39</sup> June Sochen, *Movers and Shakers: American Women Thinkers and Activists, 1900-1970* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), 231-235; Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman*, 227-229; Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 166-174.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 65-70. Glenna Matthews argued that the most direct influence of the Commission was the creation of the National Organization of Women angered with the tepid findings of the Commission. See Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman*, 228-230.

retaliation against employees for bringing forward grievances. It also initiated the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which, in combination with the law, produced substantial changes in the workplace.<sup>41</sup>

Additional laws followed in the wake of the rise in married women's employment, divorce rates, and female-headed households gained state and national attention. In 1961, the national government expanded the criteria for its Aid to Families with Dependent Children program to allow single women without husbands to receive aid. At least until 1968 however, the program privileged these single and predominantly female households in awarding assistance and offered barely any aid to working-class two-parent families with dependent children. In 1967, the newly created Work Initiative Program began to register single and unemployed people for job training and placement but it had significant problems in failing to meet the specific needs of non-married women.

From 1960 to 1969, some poor and less educated women worked through the National Welfare Rights Organization to advocate for adequate jobs for those able to work and income for those unable to do so. Susan Hartmann asserts that the staff of the NWRO deemphasized the needs of welfare mothers and their attempts to challenge definitions of productive work and to balance employment and motherhood.<sup>42</sup> As the number of divorced women and female-headed households increased during the decade, federal aid programs failed to

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<sup>41</sup> Pub. L. No. 88-38, 77 Stat. 56, (June 10, 1963) codified at 29 U.S.C. § 206(d); Pub.L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, July 2, 1964) codified at Subchapter VI of Chapter 21, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e. On the Equal Pay Bill, see Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, 174-176. For the history of the Title VII portion of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination based on 'sex,' see *Ibid.*, 176-179; Susan Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream: American Women and Politics Since 1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 53-56.

<sup>42</sup> Hartmann, 36-38.

substantially address the socioeconomic burdens that not being married placed on non-married women.<sup>43</sup> While these laws provided for basic formal equality between the sexes, many subsequent topics of coverture and married women's disabilities remained.

Despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other legislation, the legal arena in the 1960s and 1970s inhibited married women's full equality with men. In *Law, Gender and Injustice*, Joan Hoff argues,

'strongholds of disability' for married women were formidable (to say the least), involving as they did everything from archaic marriage and divorce laws and inadequate access to contraception and abortion to almost nonexistent credit rights and literally no protection against husband battering of women and their children.<sup>44</sup>

Divorce laws continued to be an ever-present problem for women seeking to end their marriages even as the number of divorced women exploded during the decade. As late as 1965, only sixteen states granted divorce to men and women on the same grounds, while during the decade, the privileges and obligations assigned to husbands and wives following dissolution of their marriages varied widely by state.<sup>45</sup> While women seeking divorce had fundamental concerns about their welfare after divorce, the statutes in the various states existed with an uneasy and troublesome tension between making divorce easier to obtain and creating consequences for divorcees. Archaic coverture laws also remained. In December 1972, over two thirds of states still had a lower age of marital consent for women

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<sup>43</sup> Linden - Ward and Green, *American Women in the 1960s*, 402-405.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 277.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 281; Judith A. Baer, *Women in American Law, Vol. 2: The Struggle Toward Equality from the New Deal to the Present* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 131.

than for men, which suggested that men needed to be old enough to support a family before they married.<sup>46</sup> Despite the rise in married women's employment, the labor market of the 1960s was highly sex-segregated and paid married women badly because of traditional assumptions of marital obligations that assumed that they were working for 'pin money.'<sup>47</sup>

Sexual relations during the 1960s and 1970s were also included in feminist critiques of marriage. Prior to the Supreme Court's decisions in *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965 and *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, women's access to contraception and abortion were not legally sanctioned at the federal level. As *Griswold* struck down a Connecticut law that had made it a criminal offense to provide contraception to married couples and *Roe established* a framework for permitting women's access to abortion, both used the rhetoric of privacy to articulate women's individual right to bodily autonomy.<sup>48</sup> Since most women continued to have children within marriage, these laws had important implications in connecting legal definitions of motherhood and bodily autonomy with sociocultural values surrounding marriage. The subsequent history of implementing *Roe* in particular has been fraught with state and local attempts to undermine women's resolve to have an abortion. The perpetuation of the marital rape exemption, which defined rape as sexual activity outside of marriage and ignored sexual violence within marriages, remained legally unresolved during the

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<sup>46</sup> Herma Hill Kay, *Text, Cases and Materials on Sex-Based Discrimination in Family Law* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company, 1974), 120-121.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989), 135-138, 141.

<sup>48</sup> *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479 (1965). Rebecca M. Ryan, "The Sex Right: A Legal History of the Marital Rape Exemption," *Law & Social Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Autumn 1995), 965-967; Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 285; Case, "Couples and Coupling in the Public Sphere," 1654-1658.

entire era of second wave feminism.<sup>49</sup> While sexual mores changed during the 1960s and 1970s, evolution in law followed more slowly.

Government responses to the turbulent social situations of the country in the 1960s ignored and / or stereotyped the problems of families and married women. This response came from a noticeably white middle-class nuclear family perspective and valuation of family relations. For women of color and working-class women, the government problematized them for not conforming to a specific racial and class vision of the family. One of the government documents most widely criticized by African American and female social movement activists of the 1960s was the Moynihan Report. Black feminists lambasted the report as unsympathetic toward the economic plight of single Black female heads of household and demeaning in its portrayal of Black women as dominant matriarchs rather than dutiful, subservient housewives.<sup>50</sup> In the Moynihan report and other documents, government officials posited that the middle-class white nuclear family with a married couple provided the most stable and desirable family structure.

Other government reports provided a mixed bag of information and suggestions on how to legally redefine marriage and women's place within it. In particular, they focused on presenting information rather than suggesting solutions or reform. In the 1960s, the Women's Bureau published a number of reports for married and working women to inform them of their legal rights. While

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<sup>49</sup> *People v. Liberta*, 474 N.E. 2d 567 (N.Y. 1984) In Ryan, "The Sex Right," 988-990

<sup>50</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 325-334; Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*, 57; Lauri Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 78-82.

providing data on occupational trends for married women, these reports also explored causes for women's decisions to work, citing "compelling economic reasons" as the primary reason.<sup>51</sup> In its April 1968 Report of the Task Force on Family Law and Policy, the Citizens' Advisory Council to the Women's Bureau made several woman-focused recommendations on restructuring marriage laws: judicial discretion on setting the terms for awarding the amount and type of property following the end of a marriage, enforcement of court-mandated alimony payments by the relevant public assistance agencies or law enforcement if such groups were unable to negotiate support agreements outside of courts, protection of the rights of children, and reducing the stricture of grounds for divorce. One of its most noteworthy critiques was that laws penalizing abortion should be repealed to provide women with the right to reproductive choice.<sup>52</sup> Despite some initial steps toward understanding the relationship between women and marriage, national and state governments remained quite reluctant to redefine marriage.

### *Organizing and Disorganizing Feminist Movements*

Through participation in black civil rights and New Left activist organizations, feminists learned how to organize into collectives for activism and developed a basic platform for critiquing prevailing social conventions. In Black

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<sup>51</sup> See e.g. Women's Bureau, "Know Your Rights: What a Working Wife Should Know About Her Legal Rights," [1965?] 15p; Women's Bureau, 1965 Handbook on Women Workers, Bulletin No. 290 (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Labor, 1965); Women's Bureau, Negro Women: In the Population and in the Labor Force (Washington D.C.: Women's Bureau, December 1967); and Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Report of the Task Force on Family Law and Policy to the Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women (Washington D.C.: Women's Bureau, April 1968); On motives, see National Woman's Party, Reel 136, Employment Standards Administration, Why Women Work (Washington D.C.: Women's Bureau, 1970)

<sup>52</sup> Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Report of the Task Force on Family Law and Policy to the Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women (Washington D.C.: Women's Bureau, April 1968), 31.

civil rights groups, both black and white women challenged traditional notions of grassroots activism that expected women to continue to act in wifely and motherly roles in providing food and wifely support for male leadership.<sup>53</sup> In New Left organizations, such as SDS and SNCC, discussion surrounding women's issues and the interconnected oppressions of race and sex were not seen as significant issues.<sup>54</sup> By the early to mid-1960s, activist women had slowly carved out niches for themselves in male-dominated social movements in SNCC and SDS, though with little avail.<sup>55</sup> As they did, these women encountered heightened hostility from male leadership dedicated to political or racial justice and not gender equality. In *Personal Politics*, Sara Evans says of women's experiences in the New Left: "Feminism was nurtured in the contradiction that the intensification of sexual oppression occurred in the same places where women found new strength, new potential, and new self-confidence, where they learned to respect the rebellion of strong women."<sup>56</sup> As white women encountered increasing hostility for their racial privilege, many of these women had realized that their gender had become the basis for their discrimination. As a result they separated themselves from the African American civil rights movement.

In breaking apart from male-dominated rights movements centered on race, feminist women cultivated a space for their own activism in which they had

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<sup>53</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: the Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 14.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-47, 123-125.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155. Evans describes the Economic Research and Action Projects (ERAP) that fostered female leadership in SDS and created the seed for a new left radical feminism, although it did not emerge until a splintering of the organization. On the December 1965 SDS meeting that created an uproar among women over the aims of the organization, see *Ibid.*, 156-192. For an account of the 1963 to 1967 period, see Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 23-50.

<sup>56</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, 154. Other historians made a similar argument. See e.g. Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 109-114.

the privilege of critiquing and challenging issues from the lens of gender. Issues of marriage and the family occupied a prominent place in the agendas of these predominantly white, middle-class, professionally trained women who criticized these institutions as key sources of women's oppression.<sup>57</sup> While keyed into issues of gender, many of these white feminists neglected the issues of race to which they had dedicated their activism earlier. Additional tensions between Black and white women in the civil rights movement formed as a result of sexual relations between Black men and white women in movement circles.<sup>58</sup> These tensions continued as second wave feminism grew in intensity and manifested themselves in the differences in feminist analysis between Black and white middle-class, educated liberal and radical feminists. The women leaving the racial civil rights movements did not form a single bloc of feminists. Instead, a question emerged as to whether women's groups should be independent and autonomous of the New Left.

The question of connections to the New Left created a division in women's activism and further exacerbated differences between liberal and radical feminisms. Liberal female activists generally identified as *politicos*, who believed that they should retain some ties to New Left organizations, while radical women generally identified as feminists and argued that sex discrimination and gender bias prohibited unifying with the New Left.<sup>59</sup> This split between *politicos* and

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<sup>57</sup> Hole and Levine, 79-82; Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 21-23, 54-55; Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 21-27; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 28-29.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, 75, 79-82. Evans argues that older Black women were the most important role models for the younger white female volunteers but tensions regarding the balance between race and gender eroded these powerful relations.

<sup>59</sup> Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 114-122. According to Hole and Levine, the breaking point occurred Thanksgiving weekend 1967, when over two hundred women from thirty seven

feminists had strong implications for the organization and issues that various women's groups addressed. Although politico groups such as National Organization of Women (N.O.W.) and women's liberation groups were both composed of white middle and upper class educated women, the two groups differed in age and tactics. While the former, broadly classified as liberal feminists, focused on legislative agendas to create formal equality between the sexes, the latter, broadly grouped into women's liberation and radical groups, focused on issues of empowerment and gendered social and cultural values to attempt to radically reconstitute society on egalitarian grounds. While they sometimes saw themselves as opponents, often, they worked toward similar ends. Liberal feminists throughout the 1960s and 1970s achieved a series of great legal victories in the legislative and judicial branches. Yet, the sociocultural changes that facilitated these legal shifts came from the activism of radical and other feminists.<sup>60</sup> With marriage, liberal feminists promoted removing legal disabilities based on marital status while radical feminists advocated breaking down sociocultural patterns of gender.

By the late 1960s, however, the emergence of women's liberation as an organizational structure and philosophical orientation challenged both liberal feminism and its emphasis on formal equality, and societal conventions more generally. Marriage served as a hotly debated focal point for this activism

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states and Canada convened in Chicago for the first women's liberation conference. See *Ibid.*, 130-133.

<sup>60</sup> Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*, 62-66. On the liberal feminism of N.O.W. and other similar organizations, see Hartmann, 56-62; Rosen 74-81. For example, while N.O.W. and other liberal feminists secured Congressional passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, radical and other feminists had worked to explode gender conventions that had bolstered legal discrimination.

because of the complex and intersecting issues that encompassed it and extended its gendered reach to all women. One of the things that distinguished liberal from radical feminists was age. Liberal feminists tended to be middle-aged while radical feminists tended to be in their twenties and early thirties. Otherwise, they were predominantly white, highly educated, and heterosexual. Regarding what issues they addressed and the means they advocated, liberal and radical feminists had several fundamental differences.

### *Radical Feminism*

Radical feminist groups challenged the social and cultural underpinnings of marriage by breaking down sex roles. In an introduction to Alice Echols' study of radical feminism, Ellen Willis asserts that radical feminists believed "that sexuality, family life, and the relations between men and women were not simply matters of individual choice, or even of social custom, but involved the exercise of personal and institutional power and raised vital questions of public policy."<sup>61</sup> Despite some coherence in terms of the basis for critiquing marriage, radical feminists differed in the specific theoretical frameworks they used. Echols identified four groups that more or less typified the wide range of radical feminist activism. The gamut ranged from the Redstockings, who believed that marriage represented an important tool for women to use to wage a revolution in the family and were slow to criticize liberal feminists, to Cell 16, who advocated celibacy and separatism from a strong Marxist perspective and argued that women's behavior and decisions to enter marriage came from socialization rather than material conditions. In between were The Feminists, and New York Radical

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<sup>61</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, ix.

Feminists, the former adopting an elitist tone and social constructivism of sex roles to encourage women to avoid marriage and the latter similarly embracing a sex-role framework that later turned into cultural and ultimately liberal feminism.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the differences that radical feminist groups brought to analyzing marriage, they had some things in common. Collectively, they argued that women constituted a definable sex-class, politicized gender as a social construct amenable to change, expressed criticism toward liberal feminists for pursuing legal equality within a discriminatory society, and propounded the most forceful critiques of marriage, the family, and sexuality.<sup>63</sup> Critiques and challenges to the institution of marriage were a central feature of nearly all radical feminist organizations. Radical feminists took their analysis of marriage farther than that of liberal feminists to explore the underlying social, cultural, and material distinctions that created disparities between the sexes and received official legal sanction within marriage. They challenged the values and worth of the marriage structure. While women continued to marry throughout the period when radical feminism garnered its highest societal attention, they did so more attuned to sexual politics. Radical feminists played an integral role in changing the terms of debate within heterosexual relationships, promoting female sexuality, and challenging the validity and universality of the nuclear family and marriage.<sup>64</sup> By the early

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<sup>62</sup> Echols' study, despite the white-centric nature of its subject, provides the most comprehensive analysis of the varieties of radical feminism. On Redstockings, see Ibid., 139-158; On Cell 16, Ibid., 158-166; On The Feminists, Ibid., 167-185; and on New York Radical Feminists, Ibid., 186-197.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 3-4. On the emergence of radical feminism, see Hartmann, *From Margin to Center*, 62-66 and above on differences between liberal feminism and radical feminism.

<sup>64</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 285-286.

1970s, the brief apex of radical feminism waned as liberal feminism, cultural feminism, and other forms of female activism gained greater prominence. The 'rise of difference' within and between feminist movements portended important changes in the critiques and challenges levied against marriage.

The analysis of marriage by liberal and radical feminists brought up many complex issues connected to marriage. As a result, the issue of privilege became a hotly debated one among feminist organizations. For the white, middle-aged, middle-class, heterosexual women who filled the ranks of liberal feminism, marriage served as a focal point for unraveling the discrimination and subordination that women faced in American society. For the similar, but younger, radical feminists, marriage provided a nexus for challenging the prevailing sexist attitudes of American society. For women not identifying with these two theoretical and activist paradigms, other considerations problematized these earlier critiques of marriage. These included matters of sexuality, employment, domestic labor, double burden, monogamy, and personal identity, among others. They connected other categories of analysis to marriage besides gender, including race, class, and sexual orientation. In the 1970s, the emphasis on additional aspects of women's identities promoted a greater diversity of women, including African American women, lesbian women, single women, and working class women.

*Feminists of Color, Lesbian Feminists, Working Class Feminists*

The issues that these feminists brought to critiquing and challenging marriage extended beyond strong theoretical indictments of marriage as an institution. Instead their analysis focused more on personalizing and qualifying their analysis along other identities of women including racial and ethnic, class, and sexual orientation. Women of color, lesbians, and working class women made important criticisms and waged worthwhile challenges to marriage while also contending with the premises of other feminists. Yet, criticism of marriage declined within these camps relative to liberal and radical feminisms. In an anonymous letter to the Midwestern radical feminist periodical *Ain't I a Woman?* a member of the communist Red Women's Detachment wrote that comprehensive feminist analysis involved a great deal more than doing away with or drastically redefining marriage in practice. The writer asserted that so-called male feminists would go along with liberal and radical proposals on marriage if it silenced broader appeals based on other women's issues.<sup>65</sup> Difficulties in reconciling the conflicting interest of diverse groups of women created problems in feminist organizing but also compelled feminists to more deeply consider the multiple layers of discrimination that women faced.

One of the difficulties that kept women of color from organizing with white-feminist organizations to critique and challenge marriage was complications surrounding the integration of race/ethnicity and class with gender analysis. In *Separate Roads to Feminism*, Benita Roth argues that the 'second wave' was a "group of feminisms, movements made by activist women that were

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<sup>65</sup> "Untitled," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 1, No. 4 (21 August 1970), 10.

largely organizationally distinct from one another, and from the beginning, largely organized along racial/ethnic lines.”<sup>66</sup> For women of color, structural inequalities such as race and class differentiated their perspectives from what Roth identified as “gender universalism” of white-feminist groups.<sup>67</sup> For these women, ending sexism could not be separated from activist projects addressing issues of race/ethnicity and class.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, women of color in the 1970s identified as feminists and were not only sympathetic to woman-centered causes but were also active in taking leadership roles and developing philosophies to provide their own analysis that incorporated angles of analysis in addition to gender.<sup>69</sup> Black feminist organizations of the 1970s became an increasingly visible feature of woman-centered social movements and critiques and challenges to marriage. In *Living for the Revolution*, Kimberly Springer studied five Black women’s groups that she argued “explicitly claimed feminism and defined a collective claim based on their race, gender, class, and sexual orientation claims.”<sup>70</sup> Other categories of analysis aside from gender mattered for the women in Springer’s and Roth’s studies and this shaped the tendencies in their analysis of marriage.

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<sup>66</sup> Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 181-188. Roth identifies this conflict as the “competitive social movement sector.”

<sup>68</sup> Frances Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 154-162; Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Springer, *Living for the Revolution*. Springer labels this as interstitial politics in which black women’s gender-focused activism fit in with their work on other arenas and provided connections between civil rights and women’s movement. See Ibid., 2-4. See also Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 11-14; Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 356-368.

<sup>70</sup> Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 1-2. The organizations were the Third-World Women’s Alliance (1968-1979), the National Black Feminist Organization (1973-1975), the National Alliance of Black Feminists (1976-1980), the Combahee River Collective (1975-1980), and Black Women Organized for Action (1973-1980). Springer’s book focuses on the local activists

Race remained an important determinant in shaping woman-centered views on marriage. In a history of feminism and the family in America, Carolyn Johnston argues: “When African-American women have perceived feminist goals as supportive of the family and the race in its entirety, they have embraced them. When they perceived the movement as antimale, antifamily, or racist, they have refused to identify with the movement or to participate.”<sup>71</sup> While white middle-class feminist women issued general indictments against the institution of marriage, African-American women remained hesitant to denounce marriage. As a result, feminist critiques of marriage only occasionally featured the voices of feminists of color. Black women embraced some general theoretical positions of white-dominated feminist groups and rejected others.<sup>72</sup> When Black women’s feminist periodicals discussed marriage, they often framed their analysis within the context of concerns about their families’ and their own economic security.<sup>73</sup> Also, Black women scorned liberal and radical feminists’ critiques of marriage that held the role of housewife in contempt because they felt that the analysis failed to consider class privilege.<sup>74</sup>

In addition, only African American feminists during the period addressed interracial marriage. In 1967, the United States of Supreme Court held in *Loving v. Virginia* that marital freedom, including the right to marry a person regardless

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<sup>71</sup> Carolyn Johnston, *Sexual Power: Feminism and the Family in America* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1992), 264. See also Breines, “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” 1095-1133.

<sup>72</sup> Toni Morrison, “What the Black Woman Thinks about Women’s Lib,” In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 453-459; Ware, “The Relationship of Black Women to the Women’s Liberation Movement,” In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 98-112.

<sup>73</sup> Johnston, *Sexual Power*, 264-265.

<sup>74</sup> Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 115-119.

of race was a central tenet of the institution of marriage.<sup>75</sup> The fallout from *Loving* had implications not only for race relations but also for sexual relations. In the decade following *Loving* and the dismantling of antimiscegenation laws, social disapproval of interracial marriage strongly persisted despite legal change.<sup>76</sup>

In the early 1970s, privilege became a hot button topic for women involved in feminist movements and one of the resulting issues to emerge alongside gender was that of class. While African American feminists challenged the premises and values of liberal and radical feminists, including their analyses of marriage, working-class women and other feminists concerned with class brought their critiques of marriage to the table. In some instances, the deliberate integration of class reasserted themes from other feminist literature, such as the drudgery of housework and difficulties of full-time reproductive labor. At other times, working-class feminists asserted that previous proposals regarding married women's employment, housework, and childcare were inadequate. Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the category of class became vitally important to shaping woman-centered critiques of marriage.

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<sup>75</sup> Analysis of interracial marriage in American history has suffered from a *Loving*-centric perspective that treats the 1967 case as the final, conclusive, and inviolable statement on interracial marriage. See e.g. Peter Wallenstein, *Tell the Court I Love My Wife: Race, Marriage and Law – An American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Renee C. Romano, *Race Mixing: Black-White Inter-marriage in Postwar America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). For an account that blends issues of sex and gender with race, see Moran, *Interracial Intimacy*, 76-100. In a series of decisions of the mid-1960s, including *Loving*, arguing that marriage involved a certain right to privacy, the Supreme Court established a precedent which curbed the state's ability to specify a choice of marital partners and to otherwise regulate domestic relations.

<sup>76</sup> Moran, *Interracial Intimacy*, 101-111.

The rise of a lesbian-feminist consciousness in the 1970s offered new challenges to the traditional white middle-class heterosexist paradigm for critiquing and challenging marriage. In the early 1970s, radical feminists' activism against marriage, the family, and sex roles had inspired misguided arguments that feminism was man-hating lesbianism in disguise.<sup>77</sup> The growth of lesbian feminism in the early 1970s represented not simply a reaction to the heterocentric nature of liberal and radical feminists but a combination of personal and political concerns for which separatist activism appeared to be more appropriate.<sup>78</sup> The rise of lesbian activists who identified gender as an important category of analysis in the 1970s exerted a powerful influence on gendered critiques of society. In particular, they challenged sex roles and the heterosexist nature of marriage, argued for legal recognition for their unions, critiqued the place of monogamy in structuring their relationships, and claimed marital terminology to cultivate a sense of identity. Lesbian feminism's focus on female counterculture, separatism, and sexual orientation essentialism provided important contributions to feminist critiques of marriage and encouraged the creation of a new brand of feminism – cultural feminism.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, lesbian feminists played a limited role in critiquing marriage during second wave feminism as they

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<sup>77</sup> See e.g. Martha Shelley, "Lesbianism and the Women's Liberation Movement," In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 305-309, esp. Ibid., 308-309 on man-hating. Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, "Is Women's Liberation a Lesbian Plot?" In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 310-324.

<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, liberal and radical feminist groups had their own difficulties in bringing lesbian feminists into their movements. On the relationship between N.O.W. and lesbians, particularly Betty Friedan's characterization of lesbians as "The Lavender Menace" see Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 49-53; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 212-213. Jackie Anderson argues convincingly that these other concerns stressed focusing on the safety of lesbians. See Jackie Anderson, "Separatism, Feminism, and the Betrayal of Reform," *Signs*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Winter 1994), 437.

<sup>79</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 241-244. On lesbian feminism generally, see Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave*: 142-158.

chose to focus on agitating for individual civil rights and liberties that their homosexuality denied them.

### *Cultural Feminism*

Cultural feminism redirected the trajectory of liberal, radical, and lesbian critiques of marriage, the family, and heterosexuality to focus more fully on female counterculture and motherhood as important subjects for examining marriage. Alice Echols asserts that earlier liberal, radical, and lesbian feminist values shaped second wave feminism more generally in the mid 1970s: “The characterization of ‘woman’ as a unitary category, the depiction of men as irrevocably sexist and women as powerless victims, and the conviction that feminism was the single transformative theory – all helped to pave the way for cultural feminism.”<sup>80</sup>

The decline of radical feminism in the early 1970s occurred as a result of the retooling of liberal feminism to expand beyond a narrow legalistic approach and the rise of previously absent or unheard voices from women of color, lesbians, working class women, and white cultural feminists. An important debate over the extent to which the rise of lesbian feminism and cultural feminism represented a ‘decline’ in feminist activism generally and critiques of marriage and the family more specifically has divided scholars.<sup>81</sup> Rather than spelling the decline of a ‘true’ challenge to marriage, some cultural feminists took cues from

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<sup>80</sup> Echols, 201.

<sup>81</sup> On one side of this is Alice Echols, who argues that the decline of radical feminism was to the detriment of the feminist movement generally. On the other side is Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, among others, who contend that the rise of new types of feminism did not create the ‘death knell’ of radical feminism or feminism in general but instead redirected the focus to previously under-discussed issues. See Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 203-241, 284-285; Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, “Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism,” *Signs*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Autumn 1993), 32-34.

lesbian feminism, radical feminism, and occasionally liberal feminism in re-centering critiques and challenges to marriage to address issues surrounding motherhood and alternative perspectives on motherhood and housework, among other issues.<sup>82</sup> Lesbian feminism since the late 1970s, rather than removing attention from marriage, actually formed the foundation for contemporary critiques of the institution.

## **Conclusion**

The thesis contains five chapters for exploring and evaluating feminist and mainstream critiques of marriage. The first chapter explores the psychological and sociocultural critiques of marriage that feminists posed. It suggests that collectively feminists challenged the major and fundamental sociocultural constructs underlying marriage but that their analyses differed on which issues they deemed most important and what solutions they presented. The second chapter addresses economic critiques of marriage primarily through consideration of critiques of housework, married women's employment, and the double burden. It argues that although most feminists agreed with married women's employment, they all struggled with how to reshape the traditional gender imbalance of domestic labor. The third chapter explores sexual critiques of marriage. It asserts

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<sup>82</sup> The cultural feminist focus on motherhood is outside of the purview of this study. For examples of early proto-cultural feminist literature, see "A Million Memories that Make Me Sick," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 2, No. 3 (February 1973), 3; "Untitled" *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 3, No. 4 (22 June 1973), 4. One of the most important studies on motherhood is Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976 [1986]), 13. Rich contended that patriarchy could be changed, but to do so by annihilating women's traditional roles would be ineffective since it implied that women had to become men to overcome gender discrimination. The ties between womanhood and motherhood intersected for most women within marriage and consequently, Rich's revisionism of motherhood held several implications for marriage. For a general survey, see Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 82-92, 103-131; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 243-284.

that while radical feminists played the most substantial role in this arena, the contributions of lesbian feminists and the issue of the marital rape exemption offered more feminists opportunities to challenge marriage. The fourth chapter briefly traces the evolution in law during the second wave of feminism. It explains how a move toward gender-neutral laws affected married women's lives. The fifth chapter examines the impact of feminist critiques of marriage in society through an analysis of women's mainstream magazines. During this period, feminist and mainstream women negotiated for social, political, legal, and cultural changes to marriage as an institution. Mainstream media reluctantly and in limited ways embraced calls for making marriage more egalitarian and less gender-biased. In the conclusion, I locate women's critiques of marriage within the broader context of the historical period and explore new resulting problems.

## CHAPTER 1

One of the first and most vocal feminist critiques of marriage focused on the psychological, social, and cultural attitudes, practices, and role expectations that impaired married women's abilities to enjoy full parity with men. The feminists dedicated to uncovering, challenging and critiquing, and reforming the values underlying marriage were generally white, educated, middle-class heterosexual women. They included theorists and activists ranging from Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan to Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone, along with radical feminist groups, and shared a concern for how institutions and values worked together to construct married women's multiple identities. Feminists differed, however, in which social and cultural issues they addressed and the solutions that they advocated.

### **Psychological and Social Isolationism and Dependency**

Two of the most prominent feminist treatises of the mid twentieth century, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, argued that women suffered under psychological and social isolation and dependency, particularly within marriage. They shared a conviction that the adoption of Freudian psychoanalysis by clinical professionals and the absorption of its tenets on gender role socialization into mainstream culture justified a second-class status for women, especially within marriage. De Beauvoir and Friedan offered profound insights into the sexual politics undergirding Freud's theories and expounded on the problems associated with how psychoanalysis had

been appropriated to structure marital relations hierarchically.<sup>1</sup> By explicitly focusing on political concerns regarding women's status, they challenged marriage as an institution immune from wide ranging criticism and shifted the terms of debate from status quo to reform.

*Simone de Beauvoir*

Translated into an English language edition in 1953, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* remained unread by women of the 1950s. But by the early 1960s, it gained popularity and subsequently became the foundation for many second wave liberal and radical feminists' critiques of marriage.<sup>2</sup> Born in Paris, France, in 1908, Simone de Beauvoir studied at several colleges, arriving at the Sorbonne in 1929, where she met her lifelong companion Jean-Paul Sartre. Over the course of her lifetime, she wrote a number of important novels and existentialist works, the most important for feminists being *The Second Sex*, originally published in French in 1949. Central to *The Second Sex* is the supposition that women are socially constructed rather than biologically predestined to a place and status in society.

De Beauvoir identified women's relationship to men and society as 'the Other' and argued that over the course of history, men had perpetuated themselves as the 'One' through socioeconomic, political, and psychological

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'sexual politics' comes from Kate Millett's book of the same title.

<sup>2</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 295-304; Donald L. Hatcher, *Understanding the Second Sex*; American University Studies Series V Vol. 8 (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 63-64; Sochen, *Movers and Shakers*, 200-203. Hatcher's research underscores the theoretical problems that de Beauvoir held regarding its analysis of the institution of marriage while Mitchell's extends De Beauvoir's influence to other second wave feminist writers. De Beauvoir's book did not become widely read until women of the mid-1960s read it and incorporated its ideas into their activism. See Sochen, *Movers and Shakers*, 200-203.

hegemony that defined women as a helpmate to their interests.<sup>3</sup> According to de Beauvoir, marriage served as the focal point of sexual oppression and gender-specific role determination. She argued, “Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge.”<sup>4</sup> Like liberal feminists throughout the 1960s, de Beauvoir saw marriage as necessary for both men and women, although for markedly different reasons. From childhood, de Beauvoir noted, young girls trained for roles as wives and mothers by dedicating themselves to appear attractive for prospective husbands; boys did not do such work since a wife would be only a part of their lives.<sup>5</sup> The critiques that de Beauvoir offered of gender-specific roles within marriage hinged to a substantial degree on her condemnation of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Underlying the legal and social prescriptions for the institution of marriage, the white, middle-class oppressive domesticity of the 1950s, and the limitations for outside endeavors, according to de Beauvoir, was psychoanalysis. She opposed Freudian psychoanalysis, which she alleged helped to maintain marriage as an institution predicated on female subordination.<sup>6</sup> Her attempt to unyoke women from legal, economic, and other discrimination presumed to be natural led her to identify gender as a social construct built in part upon Freudian

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<sup>3</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxiii; Mitchell *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 306-307. This basic theoretical foundation appeared in other works of the early 1960s including Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and Eve Merriam, *After Nora Slammed the Door*.

<sup>4</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 444; See also Hatcher, *Understanding the Second Sex*, 84-85.

<sup>5</sup> De Beauvoir, 328-329; Hatcher, 81-83.

<sup>6</sup> De Beauvoir argued that psychoanalysis rejected individual choice as a tool for social change and instead erected a deterministic model of marital relations from which women could not escape. See De Beauvoir, 41, 45.

psychoanalysis.<sup>7</sup> This position held important implications for marriage in particular, since it suggested that women's motives to enter marriage and to stay within it might change as social conditions changed. De Beauvoir upheld the notion that the marital relationship was devoid of love, and that marriage and prostitution differed in name only.<sup>8</sup> Her contempt for the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis led de Beauvoir to pose a redefinition of marriage that stressed "mutual relations" as a complete love relationship sharing psychological, social, sexual, and economic harmony, rather than the primarily sexually fulfilling relationship that formed the basis for Freud's vision of harmonious marriage.<sup>9</sup> Throughout her analysis of the place of women in society and her critique of marriage, Simone de Beauvoir stressed that the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis denigrated women.

Although she spoke briefly on the duties expected of women, primarily housework and motherhood, De Beauvoir clearly asserted that these tasks left women exhausted, unfulfilled, and at times psychologically damaged. For example, she rebuked housework as a series of never-fully-completed tasks or "minor holocausts."<sup>10</sup> In order to decry the role of housewife and to call for equality in marital relations, de Beauvoir drew upon women's traditional role as

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 38, 267.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 619; Hatcher, *Understanding the Second Sex*, 221. On the idea of prostitution as a marital safety valve, see John D' Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 140-145.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, de Beauvoir failed to define the specific partner relationship that would fit with her ideal of equality. In *Understanding the Second Sex*, Donald L. Hatcher proposed a definition of relationship based on love with which de Beauvoir would likely concur: "Love is an emotional relation with another person such that the other is seen as a friend and is also erotically desired." Hatcher, 223.

<sup>10</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 451-456; Hatcher, *Understanding the Second Sex*, 101-109.

mothers to posit that helpless mothers made for ineffective parents.<sup>11</sup> Such a proclamation in the 1950s resonated with many middle-class white women, for whom coping with, rather than dispensing with motherhood, was the only plausible opportunity. Yet, since few American women read de Beauvoir's book until the feminists did so in the mid 1960s, the false romanticism of role of housewife and mother and the drudgery of housework De Beauvoir described remained hidden until much later.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless it remained a powerful influence on liberal and radical feminists in providing a basis for analyzing the sociocultural gender patterns that prevailed in Western societies.

### *Betty Friedan*

When liberal feminists generally emphasized formal equality through legal advocacy, they began their activism having already, in their minds, unpacked the social and cultural attributes of marriage. In *The Feminine Mystique*, former labor union activist and mainstream women's magazine writer Betty Friedan provided the foundation for liberal feminists socio-cultural perspective when she announced that married American women struggled with the "Feminine Mystique," or the question of the suburban housewife and mother – "Is this all?" According to Friedan, American women faced an identity crisis, what she termed "a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique."<sup>13</sup> Through interviews with her classmates from Smith College, Friedan determined that a number of the women who had pursued college education traded it in before

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<sup>11</sup> De Beauvoir, 513.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 425-427.

<sup>13</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 77.

graduation for life as a suburban housewife.<sup>14</sup> She attributed their troubled lives and problematic psychosocial development to the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis in the post World War II period that had constructed sexual and marital relations within the context of male-centered values.<sup>15</sup> She argued that a process of progressive dehumanization that began during childhood had socialized married suburban women into conforming to the gender prescriptions of Freudian psychoanalysis, consumerism, and marriage that pervaded American society and culture.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, Friedan reiterated the problems that de Beauvoir posed regarding the determinism of psychoanalysis but did so more concretely, contending that Freudian thought condoned outright women's place in society and provided the intellectual justification for curtailing women's expressions of individuality.<sup>17</sup> Also like de Beauvoir, Friedan identified motherhood as a total way of life for women in which the domestic labor that wives performed stripped away their individuality.<sup>18</sup> This 'progressive

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 320-323.

<sup>16</sup> The four parts were: Encouraging girls to evade living in reality by fostering in them mystical notions of marriage as a status of complete fulfillment; Inspiring behaviors of infantilism whereby girls and women seek protection and care in return for serving dutifully as wives and mothers; Pathologizing the role of housewife by linking marital and domestic satisfaction to consumerism; and, Harboring expectations that boy children should grow into contributing members within public arenas while girl children should passively suffer as housewives. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 290. Other writers of the early 1960s, such as Eve Merriam, also criticized the ways in which psychoanalysis and consumerism had united to create the myth of the necessity of a full-time housewife that had the conflicting position of having time-saving technology and higher standards. See Merriam, *After Nora Slammed the Door*, 140-156.

<sup>17</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 103, 114. Friedan, like feminists before and after her, neglected to mention that Sigmund Freud openly criticized the ability of marriage to provide for fulfilling relations between men and women; see Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920-1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 87-91.

<sup>18</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 305-309. Both De Beauvoir and Friedan employed the symbol of Nazi concentration camps to decry the plight of housework. See De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 455.

dehumanization' fell especially hard on the many young white women from middle class families who married in greater numbers during the 1950s.

One of Friedan's sharpest critiques of marriage was directed at the postwar trend of women marrying young and foregoing other economic, educational, and social opportunities.<sup>19</sup> One of the most important types of evidence that Friedan used to support her argument about a 'feminine mystique' was mainstream women's magazines. Having worked as a writer for women's periodicals, Friedan indicted these magazines for promoting a uniform message regarding sex-specific roles and attributes that discouraged women from exploring their identities outside of the domestic sphere. Recent historians of women and magazine culture of the 1950s, however, have rebuked Friedan's assessment of women's magazines. They have shown that although her analyses of the psychological dilemmas within marriage perpetuated in women's magazines seemed relevant to middle-class white women, it was less so to women of color, lesbians, and working-class women. Friedan was neglectful of the inherent conservatism, middle-class white readership, and need for advertisers, that drove the content found in the mainstream women's magazine industry.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Friedan, 276.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), x. In an analysis of women's magazines from 1940 to 1960, Nancy Walker argues that these cultural artifacts did not convey a coherent, unified, and singular message upholding gender discrimination and women's place and status within the household; instead, Walker contended that women's magazines offered several voices on the domestic world in a post-War period in which domesticity was being challenged and negotiated. In addition, Walker mentioned a number of salient features of the relationship between the magazine industry and society that Friedan neglected including the industry's primacy as a business operation, the expansion of the industry beyond service magazines, and the diverse exploration of women of roles beyond domestic stereotypes. Other historians of women's magazines are less pessimistic than Friedan but emphasize the prescriptive nature of these magazines. See e.g. Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines*, xv-xvi; Helen Rosen Woodward, *The Lady Persuaders* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc., 1960).

Friedan's focus on middle-class older white women's experiences made attempts to apply her critiques of the marital relationship to a broader female audience difficult. For example, the women she interviewed living in de-facto segregated suburbs in which they had the privilege of not having to work out of economic necessity.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Friedan displayed an open homophobia. In one passage, she characterized homosexuality as "spreading like a murky smog over the American scene."<sup>22</sup> Friedan's contempt for homosexuality also informed her opposition to legal recognition of same-sex unions as marriages.

By ignoring analysis of marital sexual relations, positing that domestic drudgery could be solved relatively easily through married women's paid employment, and rejecting a broad based social revolution, Friedan distinguished herself as a liberal feminist.<sup>23</sup> Her attempts to break down the psychological and social prescriptions of married women's lives contrasted with Simone de Beauvoir's and with how radical feminists used de Beauvoir's to challenge the foundations of marriage and its gendered roles. By the mid 1960s, the traditional family had already been challenged through married white women's rising employment numbers, increases in divorce, and the sexual revolution. The emergence of New Left student organizations and the black civil rights movement and the concerns of women within these organizations opened up opportunities for feminist critiques of marriage.

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<sup>21</sup> Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 276.

<sup>23</sup> Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* 213-215; Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 68-69.

## *Psychological Issues*

While challenging the social strictures of marriage, feminists also addressed the psychological issues of marriage. One of the common critiques of marriage that radical feminists borrowed from the early liberal feminism of Betty Friedan was a challenge to the ways in which marriage created psychological problems for married women forced to subsume their individual identities under those of their husbands. In a West Coast radical feminist periodical, Beverly Jones used the metaphor of a ‘Doll’s House’ to explore how married women sacrificed their own personal and professional development to enable their husbands to achieve economic and social success at their expense.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, other West Coast feminists in San Diego and Berkeley criticized the notion that married women were expected to identify their ambitions and successes based on someone else and to abandon female companionship that might encourage subversion.<sup>25</sup> These feminists implicated the nuclear family as a key element in creating psychological trauma within marriage on their husbands. Radical feminists held that consumerism held deep and troublesome implications for women’s identity, particularly in maintaining the nuclear family and perpetuating the myth of the family wage ideal.<sup>26</sup> In one article on psychological oppression of married women, an anonymous feminist wrote of the paradox of housewives, “She resigns herself or even happily chooses the oppression of the

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<sup>24</sup> Beverly Jones, “The Doll’s House, Part I,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (Venice, CA), 31 July 1970, 12; *Ibid.*, “The Doll’s House, Part II,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (21 August 1970), 6.

<sup>25</sup> “Psychological Oppression,” *Goodbye to All That*, No. 6 (March 1971), 4-5; “Psychological Oppression, Part II,” *Goodbye to All That*, No. 7 (April 1971), 4-5; “Primer on Being Somebody,” *The Common Woman is the Revolution*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Berkeley, CA), 1-14 April 1971, 7.

<sup>26</sup> “Untitled,” *Ain’t I a Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (21 August 1970), 8-11.

American family as opposed to that oppression available in the business world. This oppression in the family is easier for her to handle, because she is trained in this kind of servitude.”<sup>27</sup> These articles confirmed Friedan’s basic contempt for psychological troubles of wives that lulled women into a marriage that forced her to abandon her own personal identity.

One of the obstacles that women faced in challenging the psychological baggage of their marriages was seeking out someone to mediate their concerns with their husbands. Women seeking professional counsel faced a therapy profession rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis and dedicated to perpetuating the status quo within marriages.<sup>28</sup> Radical feminists advocated a redefinition of marriage to challenge the traditional expectations that women subsume their identities under those of their husbands. An article in the Venice, California based *Everywoman* feminist periodical asked its predominantly white educated suburbanites if they had an onesome, twosome, or threesome marriage. While a ‘onesome’ marriage upheld the traditional ideal of a merged marriage in which two became one with complementary roles and power under the husband and a ‘twosome’ marriage represented an emotionally and psychologically divorced couple pursuing their own interests, the threesome marriage represented a truer

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<sup>27</sup> “Psychological Oppression,” *Goodbye to All That*, No. 6 (March 1971), 5. In an analysis of women in comic book culture, one feminist asserted that female characters overwhelming sought marriage, which for them was equated with being a housewife and enjoying a comfortable lifestyle. See “America’s comic culture,” *Off Our Backs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (25 April 1970), 7.

<sup>28</sup> One of the most insightful articles on radical feminism and its assessment of psychology as a field is Naomi Weisstein, “Psychology Constructs the Female,” In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism* 183-197. See also “The Search for the Liberated Therapist,” *Through the Looking Glass*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1971), 6. The woman in this second article went to therapy to seek help in deciding whether to marry or continue her graduate education determined, after seeking out the aid of a more compassionate therapist, to seek her personal fulfillment and pursue her education. See also, “Marriage in Amerika,” *Hysteria*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (9 April 1971), 13. The woman in this article separated from her husband and pursued life as a single woman. After joining a women’s liberation group, she reported feeling better about herself.

and equal ideal. In the threesome marriage, the partners in such a marriage maintained their separate identities while they also formed another identity together through much work.<sup>29</sup> The issue of psychological identity, while an important feature of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, was nonetheless a relatively minor concern to liberal feminism and its focus on formal equality.

### **Breaking with the Left**

One of the earliest feminist statements in challenging the inclusion of women's issues in the African American civil rights movement was Casey Hayden and Mary King's "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo." Disseminated in civil rights and women's rights circles, the 1965 statement offered an important early analysis of the interconnected dynamics of race and class and the barriers surrounding women's participation in social movements. In addition, it also provided an early, albeit brief, mention of the confining attributes of marriage. Hayden and King located marriage as an institution under question and challenge, although they found trouble with the lack of critical analysis. To rectify this situation, they encouraged more dialogue beyond that of white middle-class liberal feminists encouraging married women to pursue paid employment to challenge traditional duties of wife and mother. While their statement remained firmly grounded in exploring the oft-ignored interconnectedness between race and sex and spoke very broadly about women's participation in the New Left, it hinted at a need for consciousness-raising about women's issues, including marriage.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Is Your Marriage a Onesome Twosome or Threesome?" *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (29 May 1970), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Casey Hayden and Mary King, "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo from Casey Hayden and Mary King to a Number of Other Women in the Peace and Freedom Movements," (1965).

In 1965, Beverly Jones and Judith Brown wrote one of the most influential essays of early second wave feminism. While their participation in the African American civil rights movement in Gainesville, Florida had provided an arena for their activism, these two white middle-class women felt that women's concerns were missing. In their 1965 essay, which was later copied and distributed in feminist circles, Jones and Brown wrote more directly than Hayden and King about the psychological and social difficulties of wifehood. Jones and Brown said of the wife: "What she does not understand is that she cannot go on thinking coherently without expressing those thoughts and having them accepted, rejected, or qualified in some manner."<sup>31</sup> Jones and Brown identified "Tired Mother Syndrome" as a psychological phenomenon of wives, even those who did not have children. They critiqued the marital expectations of wives to constantly perform unappreciated domestic labor and advocated a more balanced sharing between spouses of this work.<sup>32</sup> Although they did break with the sociocultural analysis that liberal feminist Betty Friedan offered, unlike Friedan, Jones and Brown's posed that the best way to challenge the psychological and sociocultural dilemmas that married women faced was through an organizational space separate from New Left groups.

In 1967, the Women of Students for a Democratic Society issued a letter to activist women that challenged the position of women in New Left movements. Their statement featured some basic critiques of women's place in society. These

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Available from: <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/memo.html>. See also Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-35.

critiques implicated marriage and the family as social institutions impairing women's full participation in society. The Women of SDS asserted,

The structure of the family unit in our society must be reconsidered and the following institutional changes be incorporated (restructuring marriage, divorce, and property laws; sharing domestic work and raising children; creating child care center; creating kitchens).<sup>33</sup>

Although not specific about what explicit problems they had with marriage, their statement indicated that institutional power had been wielded through marriage, divorce, and domestic labor. The women of SDS, embracing the claims of Betty Friedan, declared that mass media, particularly women's magazines, were responsible for creating a feminine mystique upheld within marriage. They condemned "the mass media for perpetuating the stereotype of women as always in an auxiliary position to men, being no more than mothers, wives or sexual objects" and called for a boycott of mainstream women's magazines.<sup>34</sup> The wide ranging critiques of marriage that the women of SDS offered, the split between politicians and feminists over connections with the New Left, and the growing emphasis on feminist organizing, collided to inspire new sociocultural critiques of marriage.

### **Radical Feminism**

By the late 1960s, radical feminists, women of color, lesbians, and working-class women increasingly shaped the debate on marriage within feminist circles. A mid-1960s split between liberal feminists, who saw marriage as a partnership in need of predominantly legal reform, and radical feminists, who

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<sup>33</sup> SDS Women, "To the Women of the Left," *New Left Notes* (November 13, 1967), In Baxandall and Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

identified marriage as a socioculturally, economically, and legally oppressive institution in the late 1960s created sharp differences in rhetoric and activist style.<sup>35</sup> For example, the headline on the cover of the December 22, 1970, issue of *Goodbye to All That*, a radical feminist magazine published in San Francisco read, “We wish you an end to a Married X-Mas and a Martyred New Year.”<sup>36</sup> This jolting headline suggested that unlike liberal feminist critiques of marriage, radical feminist critiques challenged the viability of the institution of marriage rather than advocated for reform. The multifaceted radical feminist critiques offered against marriage from 1968 to 1973 posited that the institution of marriage had fundamental and serious social and cultural flaws unable to be remedied by law and formal equality alone.<sup>37</sup> An explosion of radical feminist periodical literature discussing the problems of marriage to American women expounded the centrality of critiques of marriage within radical circles in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>38</sup> In this period, the place of marriage on the agendas of American feminisms reached its zenith in both breadth and depth.

### *Sex Roles*

Radical feminists generally agreed that prescriptive sex roles needed to be abolished and that this required drastically redefining or eliminating marriage.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 213-215; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 15, 103-137; Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 68-69. Davis argues that women’s liberation developed independently from liberal feminism but her argument appears problematic in light of the contempt that radical feminists showed liberal feminists.

<sup>36</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, No. 6 (22 December 1970), Cover page.

<sup>37</sup> Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 204-205.

<sup>38</sup> Historians of the “second wave” of feminism have done a wonderful job of examining the explosion of woman-centered cells of activism throughout the United States from 1968 to 1972. See e.g. Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 65-131; Johnston, *Sexual Power*, 243-255.

<sup>39</sup> This was due in part to the introduction of Consciousness Raising, or rap-sessions, which women used to explore their personal and theoretical assessments on a number of issues. See

In January 1968, the Jeanette Rankin Brigade, a small group of politico feminist women from New York, traveled to Washington D.C. to conduct a march in protest of the Vietnam War. At the march, the Brigade delivered a “Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood.” The Brigade identified several distinctions between men and women that pitted the former as human and the latter as limited to their biological functioning. They buried “Traditional Womanhood” for creating separate spheres of operation delineated by sex and forced women’s dependence on men. The Brigade shirked the notion that women held power as wives and mothers, asserting, “And so traditional Womanhood, even if she was unhappy with her lot, believed that there was nothing she could do about it.”<sup>40</sup> Subsequent radical feminists picked up this basic idea regarding gender roles and applied it more directly to their critiques of marriage.

### *The Role of Marriage in Creating Sex Roles*

Radical feminists agreed that traditional gender roles sanctioned the exploitation of women and argued that marriage played an important part.<sup>41</sup> Formerly a feminist sociology professor at the University of Chicago until being fired in 1969, New Left veteran and Marxist radical feminist Marlene Dixon wrote an essay answering the question of what purpose women’s liberation served. The Chicago feminist asserted: “The institution of marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women; it is through the role of

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Alix Kates Shulman, “Sex and Power: Sexual Bases of Radical Feminism,” *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality (Summer 1980), 592-596.

<sup>40</sup> Jeanette Rankin Brigade, “Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood,” (January 1968). Available from: <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUARChive/Rankin2.html>

<sup>41</sup> See The Feminists, “A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles,” In Koedt, Levine, and Rapone (eds.), *Radical Feminism*, 368-378; “Redstockings Manifesto,” (1969), In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 223-225.

wife that the subjugation of women is maintained.”<sup>42</sup> She added that as wives and mothers, women endured a perpetual lack of economic and social autonomy, and incurred economic exploitation and psychological damage.<sup>43</sup> In an essay titled “Marriage,” radical feminist Sheila Cronan, a member of the New York City group The Feminists, discredited the assumption that marriage afforded women protection from a cruel world. Like her colleague Ti-Grace Atkinson had argued earlier in 1968, Cronan asserted that marriage protected women as slavery had protected African Americans. Cronan contended that if a husband had to hire a domestic worker, he would have to compensate her at a respectable wage; however, because of marriage, husbands enjoyed the labor for their wives at minimal cost.<sup>44</sup>

Both Dixon and Cronan argued that the institutionalization of marriage and its multiple layers of prescriptive gender roles severely inhibited women’s ability to break free of patriarchy. They also agreed that by proposing to shield women from the world through the intermediary of a husband, marriage served to sanction wives’ dependency and to compel from them economically useful, sexually beneficial, and socially uplifting service. Yet, they differed in how they approached intersecting issues of gender, race, and class. While Cronan mistakenly compared marriage to slavery and ignored the highly racialized domestic service industry, Dixon qualified her statements about the effects of

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<sup>42</sup> Marlene Dixon, “Why Women’s Liberation,” *Ramparts*, Vol 8 No. 6 (1969), 58-63, In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-81.

<sup>44</sup> Sheila Cronan, “Marriage,” (1970), In Koedt, Levine, and Rapone (eds.), *Radical Feminism*, 214, 217. Ti Grace Atkinson made a similar comparison between marriage and slavery in a speech and suggested that marriage violated the Thirteenth Amendment. See Ti-Grace Atkinson, “University of Rhode Island: Movement Politics and Other Sleights of Hand,” 4 March 1970, In *Ibid.*, *Amazon Odyssey* (1974), 105-106.

marriage on women depending on their other identities, particularly labor force participation.<sup>45</sup> The failure to carefully consider identities and issues intersecting with marriage presented radical feminism with many problems later.

### *Protest*

Radical feminists also challenged the personal and socially sanctioned bondage of marriage before possibly entering into it. On September 23, 1969, a New York City group of radical feminists, called simply The Feminists, protested marriage at the New York City Building Marriage Licensure Bureau. The leader of the group was Ti-Grace Atkinson, a divorced woman and former president of the New York chapter of the liberal feminist group N.O.W. who left the group after her disillusionment with its structure and tactics. At the marriage protest, Atkinson, Sheila Cronan, and other members of The Feminists handed out a brochure to female passerbys entitled “Women – Do You Know the Facts about Marriage?” The brochure asked women:

DO YOU KNOW THAT RAPE IS LEGAL IN MARRIAGE, DO YOU KNOW THAT LOVE AND AFFECTION ARE NOT REQUIRED IN MARRIAGE, DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE YOUR HUSBAND’S PRISONER?, DO YOU KNOW THAT, ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS, MARRIAGE IS A ‘SLAVERY-LIKE PRACTICE? SO WHY AREN’T YOU GETTING PAID? DO YOU RESENT THIS FRAUD?<sup>46</sup>

The forcefulness with which The Feminists critiqued the institution of marriage reflected the idea that gender role analysis had become a central feature of feminist analysis. The Feminists in particular emphasized that socially

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<sup>45</sup> See in particular Dixon’s analysis of women’s employment. Dixon, “Why Women’s Liberation, 77-80.

<sup>46</sup> Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 144-145. Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 90.

constructed sex roles had to be shed and that refusing to marry or leaving a marriage was an important start.

### *Solutions – Singleness and Separatism*

One of the more direct challenges to marital roles to emerge from the early 1970s came from Jo Freeman. Jo Freeman was the editor of the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, one of the earliest national women's liberation periodicals and a member of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. Known as Joreen, one of Freeman's most famous tracts was "The Bitch Manifesto." In this document, she defined the 'bitch' as a woman in opposition to marriage: "Bitches seek their identity strictly through themselves and what they do. They are subjects, not objects. They may have a relationship with a person or organization, but they never *marry* anyone or anything: man, mansion, or movement."<sup>47</sup> In calling women to reject traditional gender roles and refuse marriage, Joreen espoused sociocultural challenges to the permanency of marriage that stood in sharp contrast with reformist and formal equality approaches of liberal feminists.

An important question to consider in challenging marriage as an institution was whether the grass was greener on the other side. With marriage and the white middle-class nuclear family as the expected norm, single women encountered severe economic and social discrimination. A few feminists asserted that marriage oppressed not only married women but single women too. One January 1971 article from the Midwestern radical-lesbian feminist periodical *Ain't I a Woman?* asked if marriage was so horrible, "[W]hy do we attack women who are not married and why do we work on reforming the institution of marriage to make

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<sup>47</sup> Joreen, "Bitch Manifesto," (1970), In Koedt, Levine, and Rapone (eds.), *Radical Feminism*, 52.

it more bearable?<sup>48</sup> Articles in West Coast white feminist periodicals explored the difficulties of single women conducting financial transactions, finding employment, and securing housing for rent or purchase.<sup>49</sup> One single woman trying to go to graduate school with children and earning her own income experienced strong disadvantages because she was “competing with men who had wives taking care of their housework and children- while I worked, studied, and was father and mother to my child.”<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact that single women encountered economic, sociocultural, and legal challenges that married women did not, radical feminists generally ignored this group and continued to critique marriage since the majority of adult American women were married.

Although radical feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s encouraged women to redefine and challenge their place within marriage, a growing number of radical or lesbian feminist groups advocated women’s separation from marriage. An early precedent for this separatism was Joreen’s “Bitch Manifesto” that loudly and proudly proclaimed that bitches challenged marriage and the expectation to serve a husband by “refus[ing] to serve, honor or obey anyone.”<sup>51</sup> Radical feminist groups such as The Feminists and Cell 16 advocated female separatism and divorce as important elements in their personal lives and political activism.<sup>52</sup> An anonymous writer for *Ain’t I a Woman?* expressed outrage at men

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<sup>48</sup> “Developing Our Theory and Our Practice,” *Ain’t I a Woman?* Vol. 1, No. 11 (Iowa City, IA: 19 January 1971), 7.

<sup>49</sup> “Unwed Motherhood,” *Women’s Press*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Eugene, OR: April 1971), 9; “Letter,” *Goodbye to All That*, Issue 11, No. 7 (San Diego, 1971), n.p.

<sup>50</sup> “Unwed Motherhood,” 9.

<sup>51</sup> Joreen, “The Bitch Manifesto,” In Koedt, Levine, and Rapone (eds.), *Radical Feminism*, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 158-166, 177.

who left their wives and declared “I want a revolution of women leaving their men, of women loving other women, of women really castrating their men.”<sup>53</sup>

### *Is Marriage Worth the Effort?*

Other feminists challenged the value of focusing energy on reforming marriage at all. One communist woman with the Red Woman’s Detachment asserted, “If the essence of feminism can be gotten to by being against marriage, there are plenty of male feminists around.”<sup>54</sup> With the rise of lesbian feminism and the ascendancy of white heterosexual cultural feminism in the early to mid 1970s, female separatism grew increasingly popular in feminist circles for a brief time. Nonetheless, separatism remained a little-used tool in the feminist arsenal in critiquing marriage.

### **Monogamy**

Radical, lesbian, and working-class feminists united in critiquing the monogamy of marriage. This social critique was represented in the assessment of a radical feminist writer for *Rat* who said in the periodical’s February 1970 issue: “THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO RELATION BETWEEN MONOGAMY AND MARRIAGE [capitalization in original].”<sup>55</sup> Some radical feminists, embracing anthropology as a tool of analysis into marriage patterns, asserted findings that humans, and especially women, were not biologically or sexually inclined to monogamous marriages and family structures and that specific and chronic suppression of female sexuality became necessary to create a monogamous,

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<sup>53</sup> “Untitled,” *Ain’t I a Women?* Vol. 1 No. 11 19 January 1971, 3.

<sup>54</sup> “Untitled,” *Ain’t I a Woman*, Vol. 1 No. 4 21 August 1970, 10.

<sup>55</sup> “Male MASTERbation,” *Rat* (24 February 1970), 26-27, see also Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 251.

patrilineal family.<sup>56</sup> Other feminists argued that monogamy was a central component in the bondage of marriage because it compelled women's socioeconomic dependency. Some feminists also argued that monogamy seemed unnatural for them despite the societal presumption toward it. One lesbian feminist, who said she had never been in a monogamous relationship, stated, "I am usually disturbed by the limited thinking of people who do not question the Great Big Monogamous Assumption."<sup>57</sup> For many radical feminists, monogamy represented one of the most detrimental features of marriage and one of the central ways in which the institution confined women.

### *Lesbian Feminism and Monogamy*

Many lesbian feminists argued that monogamous marriage remained intimately connected with patriarchal gender conventions and capitalist-based nuclear family structures and that it detracted from political work.<sup>58</sup> The lesbian subculture of the era looked down upon monogamy based on that culture's values including an emphasis on the continuation of a relationship only if founded on equality, fears of being exposed as a lesbian by a long-term partner, and cultural socialization toward economic self-sufficiency.<sup>59</sup> Like other feminists, many lesbians asserted that monogamy was not a primary concern or even desirable element of their relationships; others, however, believed that monogamy was important for promoting female consciousness or creating an emotional

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<sup>56</sup> "Female Sexuality and the Family," *Wildflowers*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring 1971), 11, 26; Firestone, 251.

<sup>57</sup> "Dialogue," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 2, No. 2 (27 August 1971), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 232-234; Macho and Monogamy," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 17 (Date?), 10-11; also printed in *Ibid.*, *Lesbian Vision*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1970), 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 167-173; 191.

equilibrium.<sup>60</sup> Lesbian feminists found that when lesbian life appeared most akin to heterosexual relationships, including a clear division of gender roles within a monogamous relationship that embraced mainstream values, heterosexuals felt threatened that feminist critiques of marriage might reshape the economic, social, and cultural attributes of marriage in general.<sup>61</sup>

### *Working Class Feminism and Monogamy*

As Marxism grew in favor with working-class feminists, several appropriated it as a theoretical framework for critiquing monogamous marriage. These feminists examined monogamous marriage as a problem of private property and concluded that capitalism, combined with monogamy, made women especially vulnerable in surviving outside of marriage.<sup>62</sup> While their analysis appeared clear, reconciling theory with reality, as with most feminists' analysis, proved difficult. In an internal dialogue found in the pages of *Ain't I a Woman?* one feminist explained her confusion with monogamy: "I operate monogamously on an emotional level despite my theory or even practice. I *do* cling to a 'happily ever after' ideal, even with enormous change staring me in the face."<sup>63</sup> While some working-class feminists attacked monogamy, they represented a relatively small number. Instead, radical feminist formed the majority of women who attacked monogamy.

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<sup>60</sup> "Monogamy," *The Lesbian Tide* (May 1972), 4-5.

<sup>61</sup> Abbott and Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman*, 89.

<sup>62</sup> "Struggle Against Monogamy or – a case for female gangs," *It Ain't Me Babe*, Vol. 1, No. 13 (4 September 1970), 17; "Untitled," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 2, No. 1 (30 July 1971), 7.

<sup>63</sup> "Dialogue," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 2, No. 2 (27 August 1971), 3.

## **African American Feminists and Issues of Race**

In light of liberal and radical feminist critiques of marriage, the connections that African American feminists made between race and sex provided for important critiques of marriage removed from a purely gender-based analysis. One of the motivations for Black women to critique the institution of marriage was to redefine how white people described their families. A series of research, investigative and social commentary literature of the late 1960s had identified black matriarchy as a characteristic feature and substantial cause of the ‘pathology of the black family.’<sup>64</sup> As African American civil rights and Black power movements declined in the early 1970s, women involved in these struggles transitioned to women-centered activist groups. While they posed several problems with the white women’s liberation movement, especially in liberation group’s insularity toward gender and neglect of race and class, Black feminists with rare exceptions avoided critiques of marriage or the family.<sup>65</sup>

One of the few social issues of marriage that Black feminists addressed was interracial unions. Existing bans on interracial marriage during the 1960s were not only pieces of racial legislation but attempts to regulate intimacy and to create hierarchies and norms for sexual and marital practices and child-rearing centered on white, middle-class love and marriage.<sup>66</sup> Drawing upon the long and troubled history of interracial couplings that stretched back into the antebellum and slavery period, a number of Black feminists had asserted that race and gender

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<sup>64</sup> See e.g. *Moynihan Report*; Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 37-44.

<sup>65</sup> Toni Morrison, “What the Black Woman Thinks about Women’s Lib,” In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 453-459; Ware, “The Relationship of Black Women to the Women’s Liberation Movement,” In Crow (ed.), 98-112; Johnston, 262-265.

<sup>66</sup> Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy*, 5, 11, 75; Romano, *Race Mixing*, 5.

collided within interracial marriages. While a number of Black feminists expressed contempt for what they argued was a black hegemonic masculinity, many also argued that Black women marrying White men was not a solution either. Since White men traditionally had access to better educational, employment, and social opportunities than Black women, Black women lost much of their bargaining power on power issues. Despite attempts by Black feminists to offer critiques of marriage to balance out the dominance of race in discussions of interracial or black marriages, race continued to trump gender in mainstream analysis.

Other feminists of color had important critiques of marriage that broke away from the gender-centric analysis of most liberal and radical feminists to stress cultural values more deeply. For example, a women's contingent of the Young Lords Party, a group of Puerto Rican youth that provided community services for Hispanics in New York, issued a strong feminist critique of gendered sociocultural values. Later joining with other women of color to form the Third World Women's Alliance, their early writing implicated marriage as an important element of female discrimination. They asserted that marriage was an institution of oppression in which a wife, *la corteja*, suffered tremendously in the home: "The wife was there to be a homemaker, to have children and to maintain the family name and honor. She had to be sure to be a virgin and remain pure for the rest of her life [...] *La corteja* became his [husband's] sexual instrument."<sup>67</sup> The women of the Young Lords Party identified Hispanic culture as built upon

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<sup>67</sup> Young Lords Party, "Position Paper on Women," *Palante*, New York, n.d., In Baxandall and Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters*, 38.

specific gender roles and reinforced through marriage that limited women's opportunities to gain social status.<sup>68</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Feminist critiques of the sociocultural values and patterns underlying marriage represented one of the long standing and most contentious set of challenges to marriage. Radical feminists in particular took the lead in breaking down prescriptive gender roles and institutions built up to compel married women's subjugation. Other feminists made important contributions to second wave sociocultural critiques of marriage that widened the scope of analysis. Measuring the effectiveness of psychological, social and cultural critiques of marriage was fuzzy at best; nonetheless, some of the results could be found in other critiques and mainstream sources.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 38-39.



## CHAPTER 2

In an assessment of how feminism had altered women's lives, Judith Barker contends, "The most psychologically significant as well as widespread change in marriage has been the increase in dual-career marriages."<sup>1</sup> The relationship between marriage, women, and work changed during the 1960s and 1970s with growing expectations and necessity of a two-income household. Feminists had much to say about married women's employment and traditionally gendered obligations of unpaid domestic labor. With married women's changing economic roles, particularly among white middle-class women, power relations in marriages faced new tensions.

### **Married Women's Employment**

One of the most noticeable and profound societal circumstances affecting the institution of marriage in the 1960s and 1970s was a rise in married white women's employment. Married women's employment rose for all cohorts of women of ages sixteen to forty four.<sup>2</sup> During the 1970s, married women surpassed single women as the greatest percentage of the female labor force.<sup>3</sup> Non-white married women still had higher rates of labor force participation than white women; however, both married white and black women experienced

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<sup>1</sup> Judith M. Bardwick, *In Transition: How Feminism, Sexual Liberation, and the Search for Self-Fulfillment Have Altered Our Lives* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical Handbook on Women in America, Edited by Cynthia Taeuber (Phoenix, AZ: Oryz Press, 1996), 103. In the sixteen to nineteen age cohort, married women's labor force participation rose from 36% to 51.4%; in the twenty to twenty-four age cohort, from 47.4 to 61.5%; in the twenty five to thirty four age cohort, from 39.3% to 57%; and in the thirty five to forty four age cohort, from 47.2% to 60.2%.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104; Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 289.

substantial increases in the decade, with married white women seeing greater gains.<sup>4</sup> Another notable change in the composition of the labor force involved participation rates of married women with children. From 1970 to 1980, while an increase of 4% of married women with no children entered the labor force, 13% of married women with children under the age of six and 10% of married women with children aged six to seventeen entered the labor force.<sup>5</sup> Although raw statistical data fails to qualify the motivations, benefits, and problems of married women's growing labor force participation in the 1970s, it does confirm that several reasons existed for the majority of married women by 1980 to be employed.<sup>6</sup>

While they were the fastest growing demographic of employees, married women received much less pay and worse jobs than their married male colleagues. Commentary on women's labor participation routinely cited marriage, both as a possibility for single women and as reality for wedded wives, as detriments to women's full and equal employment with men. According to this literature, marriage inhibited women's employment on several grounds. One of the most emphasized was the supposition that women should not be employed in positions of significant responsibility or importance because their husbands or children would (and allegedly should) represent their first obligations.<sup>7</sup> Another

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical Handbook on Women in America., 105. Married white women's employment rose from 39.7% to 48.3% while non-white married women's employment rose from 52.5% to 59.8%.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>6</sup> Secondary source analysis of married women's participation abound. For the noticeable rise in married mother's employment, see, e.g. Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility*, 166-179; Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 187-190.

<sup>7</sup> "Job Discrimination in a Sexist Society," *Goodbye to All That*, Issue 2 (29 September 1970), 6; "Commentary: Women in Labor," Vol. 1, No. 2 (19 March 1970), 8; "Woman=Profit," *Womankind*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (20 April 1971), 7-9, 22.

argument traditionally mustered to oppose married women's full employment, which feminists in this period rejected, was the idea that women worked to earn pin money or to provide some recreational break from working in the home; in others words, women were seen as surplus labor.<sup>8</sup> A third reason marshaled against married women's employment was the notion that women could not perform tasks as well or as dependably as men.<sup>9</sup> Feminist writers assailed these entrenched positions with particular venom in the late 1960s and early 1970s with some success.

### **Choosing to Work**

Liberal feminists such as the National Organization of Women critiqued marriage by encouraging married women to secure paid employment. In its 1966 statement of purpose, N.O.W. argued for women's full and equal participation in mainstream American society and emphasized married women's paid public labor as a vital component. The statement highlighted the problems of gender discrimination in the workplace perpetuated by the "traditional assumption that a woman has to choose between marriage and motherhood, on the one hand, and serious participation in industry or the professions on the other."<sup>10</sup> Rather than challenging women to abandon marriage in order to have their own career and be self-sustaining, as some radical feminists advocated, the liberal feminists in N.O.W. suggested that women should continue to marry but insisted on an equitable sharing of labor responsibilities inside and outside of the home. They

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<sup>8</sup> "Job Discrimination in a Sexist Society," *Goodbye to All That*, Issue 2 (29 September 1970), 6; "Woman=Profit," *Womankind*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (20 April 1971), 7-9, 22.

<sup>9</sup> "Job Discrimination in a Sexist Society," *Goodbye to All That*, Issue 2 (29 September 1970), 6.

<sup>10</sup> National Organization of Women, "Statement of Purpose," 29 October 1966. Available at: <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/now.html>

declared, “We believe that a true partnership between the sexes demands a different concept of marriage as an equitable sharing of the responsibilities of home and children and of the economic burdens of their support.”<sup>11</sup> The women of N.O.W. rejected sex-specific roles of provider and domestic and believed in the power of law to effect change.<sup>12</sup>

Although N.O.W. attacked some social and cultural patterns within marriage, they upheld a position of reconciliation between husbands and wives. Instead they focused on law as a tool for effecting societal change. They expressed for marriage and divorce laws that justified women’s second class legal status and subsequent economic and social confinement in marriage. To rectify these issues, N.O.W. declared “[W]e will seek to open a reexamination of laws and mores governing marriage and divorce, for we believe that the current state of ‘half-equality’ between the sexes discriminates against both men and women, and is the cause of much unnecessary hostility between the sexes.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, their legal advocacy failed to address directly the social and cultural resistance and discrimination against married women.

Liberal feminists advocated economic changes to the institution of marriage, like they did with other issues, through law. They argued that more efficacious enforcement of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 through greater empowerment of its enforcement arm, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, would allow married women to work outside of the home and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, 18-21.

<sup>13</sup> National Organization of Women, “Statement of Purpose.”

reduce their economic dependency on their husbands' incomes.<sup>14</sup> They also contended that holding paid employment provided women with a sense of self-worth that being a housewife did not; in addition, growing social acceptance of married women's employment supported such notions.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to 1970, married women without paid employment were not considered 'unemployed' due to the rhetorical encouragement of feminists and growing opportunities, married women broke down the sex-based distinction.<sup>16</sup> In a study of two income households, Carolina Bird, an investigative reporter in New York State interested in women and business issues, discovered that a positive correlation existed between married women's employment, the amount of money she made, and rates of separation or divorce.<sup>17</sup> In studies of "the two-career couple" conducted at the end of the 1970s, Caroline Bird and Francine S. and Douglas T. Hall found that two income households were an increasing reality for many families, growing particularly in middle-class white households. These studies found that more couples over the 1970s had adopted a couple-directed approach to their marriage in which decisions were based on negotiation rather than gendered divisions of labor.<sup>18</sup> Put another way, money talked, and when married women earned it, they more fully participated in decision making.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hartmann, *From Margin to Center*, 59-61; In an article in *Rat*, the author noted forty two percent of women in the United States served as both a wife and a worker . See "International Sisterhood," *Rat* (January 1971), 9.

<sup>15</sup> "Woman=Profit," *Womankind*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (20 April 1971), 7-9, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Caroline Bird, *The Two Paycheck Marriage*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Hall and Hall, *The Two-Career Couple*, 15-19, 22-26; Bird, *The Two Paycheck Marriage*, 83-84.

<sup>19</sup> Bird, 83-84. Nonetheless, how couples combined their two incomes spoke volumes about marital relations. Bird identified four patterns for how married women's money was used: pin money, earmark (designated for a specific obligation or cost), pooling, and bargaining. The last

Nonetheless, the characteristics of married women's employment in the 1970s depended not only on the socioeconomic characteristics of the women and their families but also on the support that husbands offered.<sup>20</sup> As more married women and women with children entered the labor force, feminists advocated for laws to facilitate women's full participation.

### *Married Women Working*

While single, divorced, or widowed women continued to be more likely to work than married women, this latter group represented the single largest increase in labor force employment during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the distribution of married women within specific industries, the difference in pay that they received versus men, and the inability of women to remain long term in the labor force due to domestic and reproductive obligations confirmed the gender distinctions that made married women's labor force participation in aid to husbands and secondary to their roles as mothers.<sup>22</sup>

Liberal feminists wrote extensively about the importance of married women's wages to their families and concluded that this 'assistance' kept millions of families out of poverty and bankruptcy.<sup>23</sup> As millions more wives entered the

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one occurred only occasionally and represented instances when women specifically delegated their own money for costs or used their income to receive power benefits. See *Ibid.*, 156-164.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. Nonetheless, by the latter part of the 1970s, the issue of husbands rejecting their wives' push to work was not a matter of permission; instead, it became an issue of what means a wife used to challenge her husband. See *Ibid.*, 74-79.

<sup>21</sup> Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 289.

<sup>22</sup> Simmons, Freedman, Dunkle, and Blau, "Exploitation from 9 to 5" *Background Paper for the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Women and Employment, ch. 1* (1974) In Barbara Allen Babcock, Ann E. Freedman, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and Susan C. Cross, eds. *Sex Discrimination and the Law: Causes and Remedies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 192-202; Carolyn Shaw Bell, "Age Sex, Marriage and Jobs" *The Public Interest*, 76-84 (Winter 1973) In Babcock, Freedman, Norton, and Cross, eds., *Sex Discrimination and the Law*, 214-216.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

labor force in the 1970s, particularly among women, liberal feminists advocated that wage labor provided several important benefits, including self-actualization, more equal power relations within households, and partial economic autonomy.<sup>24</sup> Yet, strong barriers to women's equal labor participation with men remained. These included how to reconcile married women's employment with traditional obligations placed upon women to perform domestic labor and how to make housework more equitably distributed and tolerable.

### **Housework**

While liberal feminists such as Betty Friedan and radical feminists such as Kate Millett and Ti-Grace Atkinson had discussed housework, working-class feminists challenged the middle-class biases of these positions. Responding to Friedan, one feminist writer, indicated that while she related to the "middle-class-bored-oppressed-psychically-repressed-unfulfilled-American-consumer-housewife," she and her other revolutionary feminists also understood the "economically, socially, and racially oppressed."<sup>25</sup> Unlike Friedan's mere chronicling of the psychological damages of full time housework, working class feminists of the late 1960s and early 1970s encouraged married women to liberate themselves from undertaking housework at all and relinquish the privileges of middle-class status.<sup>26</sup> These indictments of middle-class white heterosexual

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<sup>24</sup> Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Getting Yours: How to Make the System Work for the Working Woman* (New York: Avon, 1975); Caroline Bird, *The Two Paycheck Marriage: How Women at Work are Changing Life in America* (New York: Pocket Books, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> "The Sharks are coming with Betty Friedan as Pilot Fish," *It Ain't Me Babe*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (6 August 1970), 12.

<sup>26</sup> "Liberation Begins at Home," *Goodbye to All That*, Vol. 1, No. 15 (September 1970), 6.; Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 209.

married women's privilege occurred as race and class became central ingredients in recasting woman-centered critiques of marriage.<sup>27</sup>

### *Betsy Warrior*

One of the most memorable economic critiques of housework was radical feminist and anarchist Betsy Warrior's "Housework: Slavery or Labor of Love?" Warrior was a member of the Boston-based Female Liberation Front, which in 1968 became Cell 16, and established itself in opposition to the New Left and its sexism. Married when she was seventeen, Warrior's husband physically and psychologically assaulted her until she was able to leave him seven years later. It was as a divorced single mother that Warrior wrote about the demeaning nature of housework and later was a pioneer in the Battered Women's Movement.<sup>28</sup>

Like Betty Friedan, Warrior argued that economic and political power brokers ignored the contributions that women offered to the economy through their domestic labor.<sup>29</sup> She insisted "The failure of men to use their power to improve the situation of the houseworker is also due to the fact that they rightly feel that any major changes in this area would undermine male supremacy."<sup>30</sup> She went further, however, in using Marxist language to characterize women as commodities of husbands and the economy and to assert that housework subjugated women as a class by limiting their access to the means of production.

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<sup>27</sup> On the issue of race, see Johnston, *Sexual Power*, 264-265.

<sup>28</sup> "Betsy Warrior," *Cambridge Women's Heritage Project*. Available from: <http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/historic/pullman5.html>

<sup>29</sup> Betsy Warrior (1971), "Housework: Slavery or Labor of Love," In Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (eds.), *Radical Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 208-212; In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 530.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

Unlike Friedan, Warrior recognized that the lack of childcare facilities for women ended up giving women employed in the labor a double burden of paid and domestic labor. Because women with children were ‘doubly burdened,’ they were unable to “give their full attention to the roles of mother, wife, and housekeeper.”<sup>31</sup> Only through a broad based indictment of the economy and sex roles would the situation improve. According to Warrior, this required the abolition of housework and domestic service and the collectivization of these tasks into paid jobs. Rather than advocating paid employment of married women first like liberal feminists, Warrior challenged marriage by arguing for women to be freed from domestic labor.<sup>32</sup> Radical feminists’ indictments of housework encouraged women to challenge marriage directly and by making the personal political, rather than waiting on and relying upon legal equality.

#### *Additional Critiques of Marriage and Housework*

Other articles from radical and working-class feminist periodicals explored the demeaning and uncompensated nature of domestic labor expected of women to perform but emphasized the economic dependency that it placed women under.<sup>33</sup> One unmarried and childless twenty-two year old woman, who decided to assume the burden of being a live-in-maid, attested that her experiment as a housewife turned into a psychological trial of her feminist pedigree that exploded her assumptions about the ease of housework. She declared that the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 531.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 533.

<sup>33</sup> “From the Heart of the Monster,” *Ain’t I a Woman?*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (24 July 1970), 4-5; “Battle on the Home Front,” *A Change is Gonna Come*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1971), 3; “Understanding Feminism,” *Second Coming*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (30 August 1971), 4-7; “International Sisterhood,” *Rat*, (January 1971), 9. Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 205-207.

Women's Liberation Movement had to be predominantly young, childless, white middle class women since "[no one] else has the time and energy available to do the work involved in building a grassroots movement."<sup>34</sup> When working class feminists lambasted the plight of the housewife, they did so with increasing attention to politicizing and theorizing the sex-specific nature of homemaking and its importance to the functioning of society. To this end, an anonymous working-class feminist writing for *Ain't I a Woman?* argued: "tremendous amounts of socially necessary labor is performed free by women who are unpaid and unrecognized."<sup>35</sup> Because wives' unpaid housework fostered their economic dependence on their husbands' incomes, they were, according to many class-focused feminists, alienated from their labor.

#### *Marxism and Housework*

Working class feminists writing about the class based element to housework often adopted a Marxist orientation to frame their analysis. A writer for *Ain't I a Woman* asserted the basic tenet of the new discourse on housework in August 1970: while most husbands generally possessed a relationship to the means of production, many wives had none since their domestic labor does not provide direct compensation. This feminist asserted "there is material basis for saying that the husband wields power over the wife, is master to her as she is slave to him, and thus they consequently have a relationship – he being in a class over her."<sup>36</sup> In a popular article that appeared in both *Off Our Backs* and *Rat*, an

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<sup>34</sup> "Instant Housewife," *Off Our Backs*, Vol. 1, No. 12 (25 October 1970), 14.

<sup>35</sup> "From the Heart of the Monster," *Ain't I a Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (24 July 1970), 4.

<sup>36</sup> "Untitled," *Ain't I a Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (21 August 1970), 9.

unidentified feminist condemned the unpaid nature of women's housework that supported the capitalist system. She argued:

Women make enormous profits for the men who run the corporations. As housewives we provide free labor in the home – up to 100 hours a week of cooking, cleaning and child care. This leaves our husbands free to compete in the job market; bosses are actually getting two workers for the price of one.<sup>37</sup>

While some feminists sympathized with the difficulties of husbands to provide a steady income for their families, many stressed that men were not really victims.<sup>38</sup>

One of the things that made the working class feminist women of the late 1960s and early 1970s different from liberal feminists was how they applied their critiques of marriage. One feminist, taking Friedan's basic critique of consumerism and housework further, declared that she refused to get married again until she found a husband willing to take on an equitable share of housework.<sup>39</sup> Working-class feminists stressed making housework more visible as economic work by restructuring the traditional housework isolation imposed by marriage to socialize domestic labor and create alternative institutions to the nuclear family with traditional marriage.<sup>40</sup> This idea received more concerted attention in the mid-1970s as separatist organizations fostered greater appreciation for alternatives. When working class feminists lambasted the plight of the

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<sup>37</sup> International Sisterhood," *Rat* (January 1971), 9.

<sup>38</sup> On the first side, see "From the Heart of the Monster," 5. On the other side, see "Untitled," *Ain't I a Woman*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (21 August 1970), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Renee Carolyndaughter Chatsworth, "Letter," *Everywoman*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (26 March 1971), 3

<sup>40</sup> "Women's Revolutionary Manifesto," *Women and Revolution* (May-June 1971), 1. This article, like numerous others, lambasted the family wage ideal that had historically and contemporarily compelled women's economic dependence on a husband.

housewife, they did so with increasing attention to politicizing the relationship between unwaged and waged labor and the sex-specific nature of homemaking.<sup>41</sup>

### *Wages for Housework*

By the 1970s, the indictments against the drudgery and demeaning nature of housework, its sex-specific assignation, and its unpaid nature, grew in their diversity. One method included proposals for wages for housework. Women leading the campaign for wages for housework served notice to state and federal governments that women sought compensation for the domestic and reproductive labor. They demanded the right to decide the terms of their work and indicated that, since many of them also worked for wages outside of the home, their decision to potentially cease performing their paid and domestic obligations would have profound implications for society.<sup>42</sup> The notion of wages for housework, at least in the 1970s, specifically came from married women performing domestic labor and rarely from single women forced to endure a double burden of daily work.

Despite the resonance of the idea of wages for previously unpaid and socially useful labor, some feminist women rejected the notion. Feminist activist Sylvia Federici indicted the calls for wages for housework based on the discrimination and built-in gender discrimination of capitalism.<sup>43</sup> Federici noted that while the unwaged nature of housework had reinforced the notion that it was

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<sup>41</sup> See e.g. "Job Discrimination in a Sexist Society," *Goodbye to All That*, Issue 3 (13 October 1970), 9, 13.

<sup>42</sup> "Wages for Housework," leaflet, n.d., Northwestern University Archives, In Baxandall and Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters*, 258.

<sup>43</sup> Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," (1975), Sheila Rowbotham personal collection, In Baxandall and Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters*, 259.

not productive labor, providing wages merely created the illusion that the highly gendered nature of housework could be placed on an equitable economic field with other paid employment.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike several other feminists writing about economic issues, Federici clearly connected domestic labor with marriage. She argued, “It is not an accident that most men start thinking of getting married as soon as they can get their first job.”<sup>45</sup> For Federici, the housewife was in a very vulnerable and undesirable position because of a long history of conditioning and sex-specific assigning of domestic labor, all sanctioned under marriage. To that end, she declared, “This fraud that goes under the name of love and marriage affects all of us, even if we are not married, because *once housework was totally naturalized and sexualized*, once it became a feminine attribute, all of us as females are characterized by it.”<sup>46</sup> To stop the cycle, women had to break down capitalism’s gendered division of labor by seeking wages for housework and using this position to restructure marriage and society.<sup>47</sup> Although ‘wages for housework’ did not catch on in the 1970s, particularly as more married women entered the labor force, it played an important role in bringing to the fore “the power of the purse.” Nevertheless, as more married women entered the labor force, whether out of necessity, personal fulfillment, or to support a higher standard of living, they generally retained their prior domestic expectations.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 260.

## Double Burden

In the 1970s, a double burden of paid employment and unpaid domestic labor increasingly fell upon married white women, which confounded liberal feminists' calls for paid employment as a critique of marriage. Numerous articles in radical feminist publications at various turns lamented, lambasted, and critiqued the effects of women working full time jobs and remaining predominantly responsible for housekeeping and childcare.<sup>48</sup>

Collectively these articles asserted four problematic features of married women's employment. First, married women generally earned less than men, either through outright sex-based wage disparities or a glass-ceiling that limited women's employment options. Second, since social and cultural messages dissuaded married female employees from thinking of themselves as workers and husbands in nearly all cases earned more income than their wives, husbands continued to be able to exploit their material advantage to perpetuate status quo power politics within marriage. Third, if married women worked, husbands expected that their wives would continue to handle the responsibilities of housework and childcare since they had traditionally done so. Fourth, husbands in general severely underestimated the physical and emotional burden required to perform two jobs. These discourses on the double burdens of married women

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<sup>48</sup> See e.g. "To Meet the Needs of Women," *Ain't I a Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (10 July 1970), 2; "From the Heart of the Monster," *Ain't I a Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (24 July 1970), 4; "Women's Rights," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (21 August 1970), 6-7; "International Sisterhood," *Rat* (January 1971), 9; "Women's Rights," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (21 August 1970), 7.

challenged the rhetoric and calls of liberal feminists for married women to seek employment as a way to escape the drudgeries of domesticity.<sup>49</sup>

### *Unidirectional Gender Roles*

While liberal feminists touted married women's employment as a solution to the drudgeries of domestic labor, unequal pay between women and men and women's tendencies to think of themselves as wives and mothers first created new problems for feminists to critique. Most feminists agreed with calls for equal pay for equal work.<sup>50</sup> But because married women earned less than men and still did the great majority of the household labor, waged work often times brought more tasks than equality.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, fluidity in traditional gender roles became unidirectional – with married women assuming work in predominantly men's sphere – while married men did not take on the burden of housework.

Despite the greater autonomy and influence that married women had within their marriages by being employed for wages, housework remained within their hands. The 'double burden,' which more white middle-class women assumed and with which women of color and working-class women had already been familiar, became a distinguishing feature of married life in the 1970s.

Women across race and class boundaries continued to do the domestic chores, to provide childcare, and to maintain the home.<sup>52</sup> Feminist proposals that

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<sup>49</sup> Peggy, "On a Clear Day," *It Ain't Me Babe*, Vol., No. 4 (15 March 1970), 6; T.P., "Class Will Tell," *Off Our Backs*, Issue 20 (15 April 1971), 7.

<sup>50</sup> "Women's Rights," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1 No. 6 (21 August 1970), 6-7; "International Sisterhood," *Rat* (January 1971), 9; "Job Discrimination in a Sexist Society," "Goodbye to All That," Issue 2 (29 September 1970), 6; "Job Discrimination in a Sexist Society," "Goodbye to All That," Issue 3 (13 October 1970), 9, 13; "Woman = Profit," *Womankind*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (20 April 1971), 7-9, 22.

<sup>51</sup> "To Meet the Needs of Women," *Ain't I a Woman*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 10 July 1970, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 153-155.

housework be compensated received attention during the 1970s but nothing resembling a move to adoption to any degree.<sup>53</sup> As married women tried to balance work and home and the number of female-headed households increased through non-marriage or divorce, one glaring result was the rise in ‘latchkey’ children. Studies of ‘latchkey children,’ or those whose parents’ employment caused them to regularly not be at home revealed that the real issues of child welfare suggested a need to increase women’s wages and provide inexpensive child care services.<sup>54</sup>

### *Lack of Available Institutions*

The lack of available alternative institutions to accommodate women’s employment meant that women, particularly married women, continued to retain the expectations of their domestic labor. One feminist in *Everywoman* put the dilemma between waged work, domestic work, and marriage this way:

Women continue to perform and be responsible for the private, individual tasks each in her own home [...] Women often contribute to the family income and husbands help their wives around the home, but each has a sphere for which he or she is held responsible. The material basis for the inferior status of women, therefore, is that in a society in which money determined value, women are a group who do their important work outside the money economy.<sup>55</sup>

While married women increasingly entered the labor force, they returned home to continue to be responsible for domestic labor. For women of color and working-class women, this transition into the paid labor force had taken place prior to the 1960s and 1970s. However, as more married white and middle-class women

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<sup>53</sup> See earlier feminist calls for wages for housework; Bird, *The Two Paycheck Couple*, 113-115.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-149.

<sup>55</sup> “Women’s Rights,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (21 August 1970), 7.

began to work for wages, the calls for redressing the double burden grew. One angle for this was for working-class feminists to stress the economic difficulties that the lack of collectivized childcare or domestic service brought.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, the problem of the double burden became during the 1960s and 1970s an issue affecting the majority of American women.

Despite the growing conflicts between work and home that occurred as more married women entered the labor force, people continued to marry. In this new economic and family environment, when roles and responsibilities within marriage increasingly broke away from being sex-specific a number of women suggested that a family-centered orientation needed to replace the marital structure.<sup>57</sup> The rise in married women's employment changed marriage not only through a restructuring of the basis for power but also in the permanency of marriage.

### *Qualifying the Double Burden*

One of the great anticipated problems that liberal feminists failed to account for in their critiques of marriage and the role of housewife was to become an ever-present dilemma for feminist activism since the early 1970s: the double burden. N.O.W.'s advocacy neglected the lives of most women of color and working-class women, who did not have the privilege to choose between motherhood and career and who most frequently faced this double burden.

Despite bringing class analysis to the issue of the double burden, working-class

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<sup>56</sup> "From the Heart of the Monster," 4.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Anticaglia, *A Housewife's Guide to Women's Liberation* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1972), 112-115; Bardwick, *In Transition*, 101-110, 132

feminists at times also overlooked the connections between class and race and the expectations of married women.

T.P., writing in to *Off Our Backs*, declared that after becoming pregnant at age seventeen, she decided to have the child and marry rather than have an abortion and remain single. According to T.P., this decision produced a situation in which she “had cut almost all the options I had left as a white woman in America.” Upon making this choice, her life became quite worse. She wrote that she “filled his [her husband’s] needs like a slave, taking care of my daughter, and working full time in a factory. We lived together for a year and a half before I had to leave for physical and mental survival.”<sup>58</sup> T.P. lamented that her middle-class married female friends did not understand her particular difficulties because of their class privilege and their assumption that other working-class women had chosen to be failures.

The problem with her analysis was that, while she thought she had cut her options as a white woman, shedding the privilege of race was not that easy. White feminists’ favoring of gender as a category of analysis and elision of other considerations, especially race or sexual orientation, biased their critiques of marriage. Married white women enjoyed better employment opportunities and generally better-off husbands thanks to higher levels of education and institutionalized racism while married women of color and their husbands fared worse in the job market. Yet, for single women, marriage proved to be a barrier to their own economic viability since tax incentives benefited married women’s

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<sup>58</sup> T.P., “Class Will Tell,” *Off Our Backs*, Issue 20 (15 April 1971), 7.

employment and full time employment for single women rarely afforded an adequate standard of living.<sup>59</sup> The complexity of the double burden provoked the ire of many feminists unable to achieve resolution of this conundrum.

## **Conclusion**

Feminists' critiques of marriage and economics stressed married women's employment but differed on their analysis of the results. While liberal feminists generally upheld employment as an opportunity for married women to gain power in their households and to break with domestic drudgery, radical feminists, feminists of color, and working-class feminists emphasized the prevailing economic conditions that expected women's domestic labor and was unable or unwilling to replace it with alternative institutional structures. The difficulty of reconciling domestic labor with labor force employment, determining how to lend economic support to housework, and encouraging men to assume more fully the tasks of unpaid labor became some of the most trying challenges of feminists.

Despite the inability of feminists to offer widespread and workable solutions, they created greater consciousness of married women's economic impairments. This inspiration of consciousness manifested itself not only in articles in popular women's magazines on married women's employment and the two-income household that middle-class white women read but also, and more substantially, in actual demographic changes during the 1960s and 1970s. helped legal and social challenges to married women's waged work

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<sup>59</sup> "Starting to Think about Class," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 1, No. 17 (2 July 1971), 3; "To Meet the Needs of Women," *Ain't I a Woman?* Vol. 1, No. 2 (10 July 1970), 2.



### CHAPTER 3

One of the most pointed criticisms of marriage that feminists waged was the relationship between sex and marriage. Unlike first wave feminists who examined the subjugation of women and male sexuality, the radical women activists of this era explored women's sexuality, particularly within, but also outside of, marriage.<sup>1</sup> A substantial amount of radical feminist periodical literature implicated Freud's ignorance of female sexuality and the sexual liberation of the 1960s that hypersexualized women's sexuality yet confined it within marriage and to the benefit of husbands.<sup>2</sup>

In *Sexual Politics*, radical feminist Kate Millett provided a stirring interpretation of the place of patriarchy in Western societies and literature. Born in Minnesota, Millett earned degrees from the University of Minnesota and Oxford before marrying in 1965. *Sexual Politics* was the published version of Millett's dissertation from Columbia University. Although she published subsequent works on prostitution, her affairs with women, and other personal issues, *Sexual Politics* established Millett as one of the most important theoretical feminists in second wave feminism.

In *Sexual Politics*, Millett challenged the sexism of male literature writers and critiqued the sexual politics of patriarchy. Much of her analysis hinged on

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<sup>1</sup> Shulman, "Sex and Power," 590-591.

<sup>2</sup> "Female Sexuality and the Family," *Wildflowers*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring 1971), 11, 26; "Free Love-Liberation?," *Second Coming*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (11 December 1970), 4-5; "Sex: An Open Letter from a Sister," *It Ain't Me Babe*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (29 January 1970), 8; Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 46-80; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 176-189, 190-203.

her assessment of Freudian psychoanalysis and its relationship to women, marriage, and patriarchy. She alleged Freudian psychoanalysis had three dubious implications for women: “to rationalize the invidious relationship between the sexes, to ratify traditional roles, and to validate temperamental differences.”<sup>3</sup> Millett found the foundations for patriarchy in the family, but she was more specific in her analysis of ‘sexual politics,’ which connected sex and marriage as creators of female subjugated status involving power relations with political implications.<sup>4</sup> For radical feminists, challenging sexual politics, in Kate Millett’s words, was of the utmost importance.

### **Failure of the Sexual Revolution**

Feminists writing about sexual relations also criticized the failure of the sexual revolution to improve marital relations. In the Kansas City feminist paper *Liberation*, Linda Phelps pronounced the sexual revolution a tremendous failure when she critiqued the redefined prescriptive ideals of female sexuality that encouraged women to indulge their sexuality. She identified women as ‘sexually schizophrenic’ because they were alienated from initiating and partaking in sexual activities on their own terms.<sup>5</sup> The difference now was that sexual liberation for women “has meant more opportunity for men, not a new kind of experience for women.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Millett, 178. While clear in her contempt for psychoanalysis, Millett shared the opinions of other second wave feminists who alleged Freud’s ignorance of the multifaceted ways in which social conditions fostered women’s discontent, particularly within marriage. See Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 351-35; Gerhard, *Desiring the Revolution*, 91-95.

<sup>4</sup> Millett., 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Phelps, “Death in the Spectacle,” *Liberation*, (Kansas City: May 1971), In Baxandall and Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters*, 177.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

A veteran of New Left movements, Ellis Willis, wrote a “Letter to the Left” in 1969 in which she challenged the hypocrisy of young male activists who fought for political and social change yet indulged in sexual escapades with women other than their wives or companions. Willis was a founding member of the New York City feminist group Redstockings and one of the few nationally known female music critics of the 1960s and 1970s. In her 1969 “Letter,” she lambasted the sexual politics of men of the New Left: “I see men who consider themselves dedicated revolutionaries, yet exploit their wives and girl friends shamefully without ever noticing a contradiction.”<sup>7</sup> The sexual chauvinism of men in the New Left infuriated Willis and other radical feminists, who challenged the sexual double standards culturally condoned within marriage. The sexual revolution of the early to mid 1960s had offered great promise for women but hardly touched marital sexual relations; instead, it emphasized that single women gratify sexual desires hedonistically. Feminists addressing sexual relations frequently indicted marriage as an institution that perpetuated sexual strictures for women and sexual liberalness for men.

### **Sexual Bondage**

Feminists went to great lengths to argue that married women incurred sexual bondage within marriage justified under social, cultural, psychological, and even legal conditions. According to many radical feminists, sexual liberation had furthered the sexual bondage within marriage, failed to significantly challenge the

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen Willis, “Letter to the Left,” 1969 unpublished personal letter to the *Guardian*, author’s personal collection, In Baxandall and Gordon (eds.), *Dear Sisters*, 51.

traditional heterosexual male primacy of intercourse, and continued to close off legal recognition of unions outside of monogamous marriage.<sup>8</sup>

In a November 1968 speech, radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson, who had left a leadership position with the New York branch of the liberal feminist group N.O.W. politicized the relationship between contemporary sexual relations and marriage by concluding that both supported male hegemony.<sup>9</sup> She declared “It used to be that the construct of marriage guaranteed the institution of sexual intercourse” and that this was still true when marriage was entered into with traditional constructs.<sup>10</sup> Like earlier feminists who rebuked the social and cultural attitudes that stigmatized sexual relations outside of marriage, Atkinson cited Freud as the primary contributor to bulwark of psychological theory that espoused marriage as woman’s highest calling.<sup>11</sup> In addition, she spurned Freud’s emphasis on vaginal orgasm but more directly connected it to marriage: “The substitute theoretical construct of vaginal orgasm is necessary only when marriage is threatened.”<sup>12</sup> Her specific critique stressed the corruptness of current sexual relations in relation to marriage. The implications of early radical feminist challenges to marriage suggested that more critiques followed.

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<sup>8</sup> Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson, “The Institution of Sexual Intercourse,” (November 1968) In *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), 13-23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-19. Earlier in 1968, Anne Koedt’s essay on “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm” had reopened a discussion on current mainstream female sexuality. See Anne Koedt, “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” *Notes from the First Year*, 11, 26-27 New York, 1968, In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 371-377. For its impact on feminism, see Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 149-151.

<sup>12</sup> Atkinson, “The Institution of Sexual Intercourse,” 13.

## **Wives and Prostitutes**

One way in which radical feminists attempted to demonstrate the sexual bondage of marriage was to connect the identities and lives of wives and prostitutes. In A “Prostitution Forum” in *Rat*, one writer argued:

Both wives and prostitutes have the job of providing sexual services for men. The wife, in addition, is required to perform innumerable other tasks [...] In return for all of this, instead of pay, she gets a certain amount of social respectability. The prostitute, on the other hand, in many cases is actually freer than the wife, in that she is not dependent on one man for survival.”<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, identifying prostitutes as more liberated than wives produced gross errors of analysis. Despite the fact that the “Prostitution Forum” acknowledged that prostitutes were socially outcast and subject to injustices, issues of class and race that shaped the demographics of prostitution went ignored in many middle-class white women’s commentary.<sup>14</sup>

## **Redefining Marital Sexuality**

Shaped by their theoretical perspective on sex and marriage, some radical feminist women advocated a redefinition of sexuality within marriage that deemphasized sexual intercourse specifically and stressed sensuality and relationship building.<sup>15</sup> Other feminists advocated more stringent measures such

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<sup>13</sup> “Prostitution Forum, *Rat*, Issue 24 ,No.11 n.d. A rather innovative article attempting to compare public school teachers, who were mostly female, with members of a harem, appeared in the pages of *Everywoman* in 1970. See “The Harem on Your Block,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (8 May 1970), 1, 6-8.

<sup>14</sup> In 1971 feminists organized a conference on prostitution in New York City with proceedings in Kate Millett’s *The Prostitution Papers* (1971). The conference confirmed differences between prostitutes and radical feminists. On this and the general disconnect between these two groups, see Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 188-191.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. “Sensuous Woman,” *Rat*, (January 1971), 8; “Free Love-Liberation?,” *Second Coming*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (11 December 1970), 4-5. Not all of the criticism of sex fell upon marriage. In “Beyond Orgasm,” Brenda Star argued, “even if we eliminated marriage and had perfect birth control, the present ways of making love are in no way human.” See Brenda Star, “Beyond Orgasm,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (5 March 1971), 12.

as celibacy as a means for women to challenge not only the sexual revolution of the 1960s that had glorified heterosexual expression but also to critique the sexual expectations built up around marriage. Both Cell 16 and The Feminists suggested that women maintain celibate heterosexual relations.<sup>16</sup> The relationship between sex and marriage proved a constant source of criticism from radical feminists.<sup>17</sup>

### *Heterosexuality*

The most consistent critique of marriage that lesbians leveled against marriage was its institutionalization of heterosexuality. Lesbians challenged the traditional sex roles common within heterosexual couples by remaining cognizant and actively working to restructure power relations that did not maintain unequal divisions.<sup>18</sup> While a number of lesbians wrote about their experiences with women to affirm their value, other lesbian feminists challenged marriage more specifically through their attacks on heterosexuality and sex roles. For example, lesbian feminist Betsy Jane wrote that while she did not identify heterosexuality as universally worse than lesbian sexuality, she noted that her friends found heterosexuality to be unfulfilling.<sup>19</sup> On the other side, groups such as the Killer Dykes waged a vigorous campaign for the “Abolition of ‘womanhood’ and ‘manhood’ as manufactured by sexist society; abolition of ‘homosexuality,’

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<sup>16</sup> Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 151-152; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 158-166, 177. Arguably the most famous early essay on this topic was Dana Densmore, “On Celibacy,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* (Cambridge, MA: Cell 16, October 1968) In Documents from the Women’s Liberation Movement: An On-line Archival Collection, Duke University Available from <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/fun-games1/>

<sup>17</sup> Rosen 151-157.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-209. “Roles, and a Woman’s Strength,” *Ain’t I a Woman*, Vol. 2 No. 7 (30 March 1972), 3, In Herstory supplement; “What’s Going on Here??!” *The Lesbian Tide*, (April 1972), 2-3. Reel 6 Herstory supplement. Nonetheless, lesbian feminists continued to have to ‘play straight’ when in heterosexual company. See Martha Shelley, “When the in-laws come to dinner, everybody grab a role!” *Focus* Vol. II, No. 10 (October/November 1972), 2.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Betsy Jane, “Me, a Lesbian?,” *The Ladder* (August/September 1972), p. 31.

‘heterosexuality,’ ‘bisexuality,’ and the substitution of a free, natural pansexuality.’<sup>20</sup> Their critique of sexuality implicated monogamous marriage as creating sexual strictures.

Debates over the extent to which heterosexuality was the primary culprit in unequal power relations within marriage proved a hot topic in lesbian feminist circles.<sup>21</sup> Many lesbian feminists challenged marriage through their critiques of women’s roles. Adopting the identities of butch/femme provide opportunities for lesbians to rework conventional sex roles that made their relationships resemble heterosexual relationships and to suggest an absence of traditional sexual and power politics.<sup>22</sup> Alison J. Laurie asked ‘Who’s a Pervert?’ as a way of questioning that lesbians were more harmful to society than heterosexual male sexual predators. Laurie also encouraged lesbians to lead the way in breaking down sex roles.<sup>23</sup> Lesbian feminists disagreed with feminists who suggested that some lesbians, by acting macho or butch, were imitating heterosexual behavior and reproducing the conditions for monogamy.<sup>24</sup> Discriminated against and judged solely based on their sexual orientation, lesbian feminists identified problems of heterosexuality at the bedrock of marriage.

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<sup>20</sup> Killer Dykes, “Killer Dyke: Flippies’ Platform,” Vol. 2 No. 2 (July 1972), np. In Herstory supplement, Reel 6

<sup>21</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs*, Vol. 5 No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality (Summer 1980), 631-660. Rich argued that heterosexuality has played a central role in crafting patriarchy. Ann Ferguson challenged Rich’s analysis of heterosexuality in male dominance and the presumption that all heterosexual relationships are coercive. See Ferguson, “Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution,” 170.

<sup>22</sup> Abbott and Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Alison J. Laurie, “Who’s a Pervert?” *The Lesbian Trap* (May 1972), 14

<sup>24</sup> “Macho and Monogamy,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 17 (1971), 10-11; also printed in *Ibid.*, *Lesbian Vision*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1970), 12-13; Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 233-237.

## Marital Rape and Domestic Violence

The marital rape exemption was an arena in which feminist activism also played a central role in creating a woman-centered reform of the institution of marriage. In a history of the marital rape exemption, Rebecca Ryan asserted the feminist movement discredited the marital rape exemption by bringing into popular and legal discourses an analysis of male sex right that struck away at the theoretical foundations of the rape exemption.<sup>25</sup> Until the early 1980s, state laws defined rape as sexual acts occurring outside of marriage. As a result, a husband could not rape his own wife even though she might not consent to sexual involvement.<sup>26</sup> The continued moral differentiation between sex inside and outside of marriage allowed the marital rape exemption to continue as legislation in other arenas removed the gender discrimination that women faced.

Feminist critiques of the marital rape exemption in the 1970s provided an important challenge to the institution of marriage and to discrediting marital rape. Due to the dedication and analysis of sexual politics on the part of radical feminists and a growing emphasis from liberal feminists on using the legal system as an avenue for social change, women were able to expose the archaic nature of the exemption. The widely acclaimed success of Kate Millett's 1970 work *Sexual Politics*, the writings of women in radical periodicals whose ideas slowly filtered into mainstream media, the work of the National Organization of Women, the

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<sup>25</sup> Ryan, "The Sex Right," 941-1001.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 958. The American Law Institute had created a Model Penal Code in 1962 that proposed decriminalizing adultery and sexual activity and to protect sex outside marriage as a legal right. Although it did not become law, it helped discredit one of the origins of the exemption – the notion that a husband had rights to his wife as property and that she had responsibilities to him. See Ibid., 944, 958-962; Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 423; 427-429.

largest women's activist group in the country, and the creation in 1973 of the first rape crisis center in the United States provided an important beginning to eliminating the marital rape exemption.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most noteworthy theoretical challenges to the marital rape exemption was Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. A member of civil rights groups such as the Congress of Racial Equality and a participant in Freedom Summer, Brownmiller became involved in the women's liberation movement of the mid to late 1960s in New York City. She was a member of the New York Radical Feminists and became interested on the issue of rape after her feminist group spoke out on the issue. In 1979, Brownmiller co-founded Women Against Pornography in advancing her radical feminist concerns about rape and violence.

Brownmiller's analysis of rape in *Against Our Will* went beyond critiquing the various facets of the institution of marriage common among other radical feminist literature to argue more holistically that rape existed as a threat for all women and as a more profound problem than the other inequalities of marriage. She boldly tore open the silence in mainstream society surrounding a long prevailing problem:

Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination toward monogamy, motherhood, or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of women by men, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 974-977.

<sup>28</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 6.

Brownmiller concluded men's historic and chronic efforts to possess women, to mandate their subservience through dependence, and to take control over the terms for reproduction and inheritance, led to the creation of marriage as an institution to enshrine these aspirations.<sup>29</sup> She also asserted that since marriage historically involved a husband having sexual intercourse with a virgin wife, rape became a criminal act of sexual intercourse outside of marriage committed against unmarried women or other men's wives.<sup>30</sup> While suggesting that all women were potential rape victims, Brownmiller failed to provide adequate attention to various factors that increased the likelihood of rape. Nonetheless, she politicized rape to connect it to problems of female oppression and implicated marriage in condoning rape.

Brownmiller took strong issue with the legal definition of rape and argued in *Against Our Will* that a broader understanding of rape that addressed other assault of a sexual nature between married couples and rape between non-married heterosexual and homosexual couples was immediately needed.<sup>31</sup> While her analysis of rape drew upon the radical feminist critiques of sexual politics, Brownmiller's attention to the issue of rape distinguished her.

In a 1977 sociological analysis of marital violence, Murray Straus asserted of the lack of enforcement of crimes against spousal abuse: "the failure to invoke criminal penalties reflects the historical continuities in the cultural norms which make the marriage license a hitting license." He found a number of excuses

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 423; 427-429

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 424-425.

marshaled to justify or at least discourage prosecution. They ranged from the defense of masculinity and male authority to economic discrimination to cultural emphasis on women as dependent and submissive wives.<sup>32</sup> Although much research on rape and domestic violence, and marital rape and violence in particular, was to be completed after the era of second wave feminism, social critics understood that sexual violence was not just an issue of sex but of power. While states increasingly passed laws penalizing domestic violence, none passed laws criminalizing marital rape until the mid 1980s. Even then, it was difficult to determine if the laws had an effect.

Feminists wrote about the difficulties of prosecuting rape, particularly marital rape and the cultural values that condoned sexual violence. According to an early 1970s tract on the prevalence of rape written by Kay Potter, a member of Women Against Rape, which was widely distributed within feminist circles, one rape was reported every fourteen minutes. Potter asserted “Rape could happen to you, no matter your age, color, wealth or marital status.”<sup>33</sup> This last element of rape, marital status, played an important role in making the prevention and prosecution of rape. Shirley Green was a full-time member of the Toledo Police Department from the mid 1970s until the early 1990s. Green found her experiences with marital rape frustrating because she could not offer adequate protection to women. Following passage of a state law in Ohio in 1979, Green felt better able to help prosecute domestic violence but was uncertain about the impact

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<sup>32</sup> Murray A. Straus, “Sexual Inequality, Cultural Norms, and Wife-Beating,” In Jane Roberts Chapman and Margaret Gates, eds. *Women into Wives: the Legal and Economic Impact of Marriage* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977), 66, 68-72.

<sup>33</sup> Kay Potter, “Rape Means Never Having to Say You’re Sorry,” *Chicago Women’s Liberation Union*. Available from: <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/saysorry.html>

of the law on actually curbing marital violence. After one incident, she reported, “she never received another domestic violence complaint from that residence. I don't know if the husband stopped abusing -not likely---or that the wife just stopped calling.”<sup>34</sup>

During the 1970s, as a result of the work of liberal and radical feminists and the Battered Women's Movement, women achieved a notable success in their challenges to marriage with the eradication of the marital rape exemption by the early 1980s.<sup>35</sup> Liberal and radical feminists challenged the legal and sociocultural and sexual barriers and mores that sanctioned marital rape. The Battered Women's Movement worked in the second half of the 1970s picking up with the work of the feminist movement to eliminate the distinctions between nonmarital and marital sexual relations and force discussions of marital inequality into legal discourses. In her biography of the Battered Women's Movement, Susan Schechter tied together feminist campaigns against rape with battered women's criticism of marriage and doctrines of marital privacy that had allowed the marital rape exemption to continue.<sup>36</sup> By changing the priority of rape laws from protecting women's chastity to ensuring the bodily integrity of persons regardless of marital status, both the feminist movement and the battered women's

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<sup>34</sup> Shirley Green, “Criminalizing Domestic Violence from a Police Officer's Point of View,” In *The “Second Wave” and Beyond: Primary Sources of the Women's Movement, 1960 to the Present*. Available from: <http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com/display/WASM/MEMOIR++Shirley+Green%2C+Criminalizing+Domestic+Violence+from+a+Police+Officer%27s+Point+of+View>

<sup>35</sup> *People v. Liberta*, 474 N.E. 2d 567 (N.Y. 1984) In Ryan, “The Sex Right,” 988-990.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Schechter, *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement 1* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), In Ryan, “The Sex Right,” 982.

movement affected a powerful and firmly woman-centered challenge to marriage.<sup>37</sup>

The Battered Women's Movement identified spousal abuse not as an individualized problem of marriage but as a societal problem fundamental to women's oppression in society. Feminists such as Betsy Warrior played vital roles in establishing domestic violence shelters and educating policymakers and women about rape and domestic violence. The growth of investigative research into family and domestic life that characterized the 1970s exposed the hidden troubles of married life provided several sobering and contentious findings regarding the presence of rape within marriage.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, powerful legal barriers stood in the way of the feminist movement and the battered women's movement in eliminating the marital rape exemption.

## **Conclusion**

Feminists made important critiques to the sexual politics underlying marriage. Radical feminists expressed contempt for the sexual liberation of the 1960s that broke down the connections between sex and marriage yet left many women, including married women, in an undesirable position of having little apparent reason to decline sex. As a result, some radical feminists saw little difference between marriage and prostitution. Lesbian feminists challenged the heterosexuality of marriage but since they focused primarily on issues of individual rights during the 'second wave,' most left marriage alone. In spite of

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<sup>37</sup> Ryan, "The Sex Right," 979-981.

<sup>38</sup> Women's Rural Advocacy Programs, "Battered Women's Groups," *Let's WRAP*, Vol 2 No. 3 Available from: <http://www.letswrap.com/LetsWRAP/Spring97/groups.htm>; SafeNETWORK, "Herstory of Domestic Violence: A Timeline of the Battered Women's Movement" (September 1999). Available from: <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/herstory/herstory.html>

the successes of radical feminists in critiquing sexual relations within marriage and the work of liberal feminists in promoting legal sexual equality, marital rape remained an unresolved issue by the end of 1982.

Despite critiquing ‘sexual bondage’ within marriage, second wave feminists exhibited noticeable shortcomings in how they connected sex and marriage. Radical feminists by far represented the majority of feminists directly challenging sexual politics. Their white heterosexist perspective often obscured the interconnected issues of race, class, and sexual orientation that complicated analysis of sexual relations within marriage. While radical feminists posited that issues such as marital rape affected women across all demographic lines, their solutions to restructuring sexual relations on an egalitarian basis resonated little with the great majority of American women.

Feminists’ sexual critiques of marriage provided valuable, though contentious, analyses of women’s subordinate place in American society. The expectation of sexual availability, the possibility of pregnancy, and the threat of rape all served as focal points for feminist analysis of the sexual disabilities of married women. While obscured in mainstream publications throughout the 1960s and 1970s, sexual critiques of marriage played an essential part in radical feminists’ agendas and established an important framework for later changes in discourses on sexuality, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.

## CHAPTER 4

Legal changes abounded as a result of feminist critiques of marriage during the 1960s and 1970s. One of the fundamental theoretical questions that feminists posed was the extent to which marriage existed as a contract. Issues such as the expectations of the participants, the remedies for disputes, and the grounds for dissolving the contract suggested that marriage resembled a contract. Nonetheless, marriage has never existed as a simple contract devoid of economic, social, and cultural influences. As Elizabeth Scott's study of the social regulation of marriage reveals, "In the domain of marriage, however, law and social norms have been intricately interwoven to form a complex scheme of social regulation." Extra-legal elements, such as social and cultural beliefs, have shaped the marital regime, and for feminists, have been the most difficult attributes to successfully challenge.

During the era of second wave feminism, feminists exhibited contradictory tendencies regarding the relationship between law and society. While some feminists sought to deregulate marriage by eliminating vestiges of coverture, other feminists supported the use of law to restructure marriage. Although laws pertaining to marriage have increasingly emphasized equality of opportunity, state regulation of marriage still remains ever-present. It is clear that social change, here second wave feminism altered laws and that laws reshaped society – thus the relationship between law and society is mutually constitutive. The work of second wave feminists focused on what legal decisions to make, how to

implement new laws, and which modifications to existing laws were necessary.<sup>1</sup> American women's historian Linda Kerber argues that women have suffered from disabilities of citizenship, which has assigned rights based on the performance of obligations required only of men. She asserts that underlying definitions of citizenship are gender-biased understandings of men and women that discriminate against women.<sup>2</sup> While feminists differed on their reliance on the law as a tool for social change, they understood the connection between obligations and rights of which Kerber speaks.<sup>3</sup> The court system served as an important locus for examining the disconnections between marriages as they were and marriage as feminists envisioned it.

A number of important judicial decisions in the 1960s and 1970s stripped away a significant amount of the legal foundation for women's second class status within marriage. These decisions reached into numerous arenas of marriage, including employment, taxation, domicile, divorce, social welfare provisions, and employment. In addition, since most adult women were married, judicial decisions not directly pertaining to married women or marriage, on topics such as abortion and jury service, also impacted the legal face of marriage. Collectively, while a variety of court cases from several states helped to undermine the sex-based legal distinctions of marriage, much of the legacy of these cases involves

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, "Social Norms and the Legal Regulation of Marriage," 1901-1970 [1904]; Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 281; Friedman, *Private Lives*, 56; DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, 2. DiFonzo offers a solid analysis of the mutually constitutive relationship between law and society regarding the evolution of divorce laws in the twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 36-37.

how political actors subverted judicial mandates to reconstitute marriage in new and continually discriminatory ways.

### **Equal Rights Amendment**

The Equal Rights Amendment was a proposal to the United States Constitution to guarantee equal rights regardless of sex. Passed by Congress in 1972, the Amendment was unable to secure passage from three fourths of the states and ultimately failed in 1982. The potential implications of the ERA were incredibly wide ranging. In a 1977 report from the Commission on Civil Rights, feminist lawyer Ruth Bader Ginsburg and a collection of other authors analyzed the U.S. Code to identify federal laws that condoned sex discrimination. In her 1974 treatise *Sexist Justice*, liberal feminist and N.O.W. member Karen DeCrow argued in favor of the ERA by asserting a need for a constitutional amendment that protected private actions. She asserted that the Equal Protection Clause protected against state action and not solely private action; in addition, she found that the EPC had a history of legitimizing sex discrimination.<sup>4</sup> Despite the efforts of liberal feminist and pro-ERA groups, the Equal Rights Amendment failed to become law.<sup>5</sup>

Feminist advocates of the ERA asserted that the Amendment would create substantial changes for marriage and married women. In a mid-1970s analysis of the effects of the ERA on marriage, a group of liberal feminists asserted, “the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 37-39.

<sup>5</sup> On the history of the ERA, see e.g. Susan Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: Feminism Between the Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Janet K. Boles, *The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment: Conflict and Decision Process* (New York: Longman, 1979); Jane J Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Sex Bias in the U.S. Code: A Report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights* (Washington: GPO, 1977)

Equal Rights Amendment would prohibit enforcement of the sex-based definitions of conjugal function” although it would “*not* require mathematically equal contributions to family support from husband and wife.”<sup>6</sup> Rather than expecting equal contributions to family support, advocates of the ERA declared that the Amendment would challenge traditional gender roles by breaking down the (white middle-class) male breadwinner hegemony. The ability of the ERA to actually restructure economic relations in marriage was, however, seen as more of an opportunity than direct outcome.<sup>7</sup> In order for the economics of marriage to change, the prevailing sociocultural and sexual beliefs and attitudes, which radical feminists emphasized as central critiques of marriage, had to change to facilitate the work of law. Feminists asserted that the ERA would create a gender-neutral basis for determining domicile, including for children, which would permit married women to have an equal and independent choice with their husbands in deciding the place of their legal residence. Also, the Amendment would directly prohibit a sex-based difference in age of consent for marriage, which were present in over 2/3 of states in the early 1970s, and legal requirements for married women to relinquish their ‘maiden’ names and use their husbands’ last name.<sup>8</sup>

Liberal feminists also positioned the Equal Rights Amendment as a challenge to marriage by supporting its impact on divorce and child custody

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara A. Brown, Thomas I. Emerson, Gail Falk, and Ann E. Freedman, “The Equal Rights Amendment: A Constitutional Basis for Equal Rights for Women,” 80 *Yale L.J.* (1971), 871, In 888-920 (1971), 732-733; DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 275.

<sup>7</sup> DeCrow, 275.

<sup>8</sup> Herma Hill Kay, *Text, Cases and Materials on Sex-Based Discrimination in Family Law*, 120-121; Brown, Emerson, Falk, and Freedman, “The Equal Rights Amendment, In Babcock et al., *Sex Discrimination and the Law*, 729-730. On age and names, see DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 274, 250-251.

issues. Karen DeCrow argued that the ERA, rather than weakening a husband's obligation to support his family following a divorce, would protect women by requiring judges to take into consideration the tendency toward more severe economic hardship for wives. Advocates of the ERA stressed that rather than promoting naked equality, the Amendment would create equity and parity. The ERA would "prohibit both statutory and common law presumptions about which parent was the proper guardian based on the [parent's] sex."<sup>9</sup> Also, liberal feminists argued that the ERA would establish a sex-neutral basis for determining custody in the best interests of the child.<sup>10</sup>

Advocates of the Equal Rights Amendment argued that their proposal coincided with social, cultural, and demographic changes already under way in society.<sup>11</sup> Instead of providing for state sanction of domestic relations, as common law had, the Amendment proposed to place women and men on an equal footing for bargaining and to remove the state from sanctioning a sex-specific division of labor and obligations. While law and society have a mutually constitutive relationship, the ability of law to change society depends greatly on prevailing societal conditions. While feminists made admirable strides in deconstructing marriage and illustrating its multifaceted features of sex discrimination, the changes of the 1960s and 1970s heavily sided toward women assuming the obligations of men rather than a sharing of tasks and rights. In

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, Emerson, Falk, and Freedman, 736.

<sup>10</sup> DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 271-278.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 936.

addition, historians have noted the limited ability of law to shape intimate and intricate relationships such as marriage.<sup>12</sup>

Not all feminists agreed with legal critiques of marriage. For example, while the National Organization for Women passed a March 1970 resolution outlining thirteen changes to marriage focused on promoting legal equality, radical feminists argued that such reforms did not go far enough to address the deeply embedded social and cultural sexism that undergirded marriage.<sup>13</sup>

According to radical and other feminists, it was these very societal conditions that needed changing before something like the ERA could be effective. Although it proposed to place women and men on a legally level playing field, the Equal Rights Amendment's gender-neutral language neglected the multiple and pronounced disabilities that women faced because of marriage.

### **Elements of Coverture**

#### *Name*

Liberal feminists argued that laws requiring a married woman to drop her 'maiden' name for her husband's surname represented a form of legal and social subordination. One feminist addressed some of the basic issues of identity when she commented, "“We should want our own identification. A married name certainly doesn't prevent this, but more than often it presents one more impediment to deal with daily and to overcome socially and professionally.”<sup>14</sup>

This writer attempted to change her name and, while she did not find it a difficult

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<sup>12</sup> For a short but solid overview of some of the implications of the ERA for married women, see Brown et al. "The Equal Rights Amendment," 936-954. On the limiting power of the law see *Ibid.*, 937.

<sup>13</sup> Hole and Levine, 213-215; Davis, 104; Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*, 62-66.

<sup>14</sup> "What's Law in a Name?" *Second Coming*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (4 March 1971), 11.

process, she discovered that it created some hostility. Other married women wishing to change their names encountered legal and social problems. In 1974, the Center for a Woman's Own Name authored a booklet that provided legal information for women interested in no longer using their husband's name, explained how to navigate court procedures and judges resistant to hearing and favorably adjudicating these cases, and articulated the importance of a women's own name.<sup>15</sup> State courts differed in their response to cases in which married women wished to decline their assumption of their husbands' names.<sup>16</sup>

For radical feminists, who emphasized sociocultural, psychological, and sexual issues pertaining to marriage, and for feminists of color, lesbian and working-class feminists, a married woman's assumption of her husband's surname was considered a minor issue. Nonetheless, a married woman who used her husband's surname or the title "Mrs." did indicate her marital status in a way not expected of her husband. One liberal feminist writing for *Second Coming* asserted that the title of "Mrs." "establishes a presumption of your sex life, your maternal expectations, your purposes for working (support him now, be a mother later), and your social responsibilities."<sup>17</sup> Although a small feature of second wave feminist analysis, the name that a married woman used served as a battleground for redefining women's marital identities.

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<sup>15</sup> Center for a Woman's Own Name, "Booklet for Women Who Wish to Determine Their Own Names After Marriage," (Berkeley, CA: Center for a Woman's Own Name, 1974). One of the keys for women to obtain their own names was to put as many identifying documents into the name they wished to have as possible.

<sup>16</sup> In favor of a woman reverting to her birth name, consult *Petition of Hauptly* (312 N.E. 2d 857 Sup. Ct. Ind. 1974), In Cary and Peratis, *Women and the Law*, 149-150. In opposition to a married woman changing her name because of convenience, see *Stuart v. Board of Supervisors* 266 Md. 440, 295 A.2d 223 (1972), In *Ibid.*, 149-150; DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 250-257.

<sup>17</sup> "What's in a Name.", 11.

## *Marriage Age*

Other liberal feminists asserted that the marriage age for women and men should be the same in order to eliminate both the sexual inequality and presumption that went with the age distinction in the first place – that men should marry later in order to prepare to support a family.<sup>18</sup> In *Friedrich v. Katz*, the Supreme Court of New York found that the age difference in New York’s age of consent to marry was based on the assumption of “the primary obligation of a husband or father to support his wife and children.” Nonetheless, the court upheld a lower court decision regarding the minimum age distinction because the state had a legitimate interest in marriage relation and did not consider sex a suspect classification. Had the court found sex a suspect classification in this case, it would have required that the government shoulder the responsibility for justifying sex distinction where it existed. While sex became a suspect category during the early 1970s, its applicability remained circumscribed.<sup>19</sup>

## **Marriage Contracts**

One of the solutions offered by radical feminists to the gendered problems of marriage was the creation of marriage contracts that required sharing obligations and upholding equality in the household. The most prominent example of a ‘marriage contract’ that circulated in feminist circles was Alix Shulman’s “A Marriage Agreement.” In it, Shulman and her husband established a set of principles that rejected the primacy of income earning for making

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<sup>18</sup> Kay, *Discrimination in Marriage*, 120-121.

<sup>19</sup> *Friedrich v. Katz* (73 Misc. 2d 663 Sup. Ct. N.Y. 1973), In Cary and Peratis, *Women and the Law*, 146; DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 54, 274.

decisions and established an equitable breakdown in childcare and domestic tasks.<sup>20</sup> Shulman's contract was not an isolated occurrence. A number of couples established contracts relating to housework and childcare, financial arrangements, termination of marriage, and sexual relations.<sup>21</sup>

There were several problems with marriage contracts. Rather than allow for organic gender role fluidity, which might have helped to break down the gender-specific assignment of roles, these contracts replaced gender role prescriptions with rigid responsibilities. One of the problems with these contracts, despite their intentions to replace a patriarchal marriage contract, was that states refused to recognize them.<sup>22</sup> Feminists attacked the problems of the patriarchal model of the marriage contract because it imposed legal obligations on married women that had to be performed, despite the inequality or exploitation inherent in them, and ignored the lack of recourse to redressing grievances.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, "feminist marriage contracts" were relatively incomplete and inconsiderate of the needs and interests of most women. In addition, they presumed that husbands and wives would uphold them without legal compulsion. Women's legal historian Joan Hoff argues that challenging the marriage contract was much easier than actually generating solutions. Nonetheless, feminist inspired marriage contracts

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<sup>20</sup> Alix Shulman, "A Marriage Agreement," In Crow (ed.), *Radical Feminism*, 391-394.

<sup>21</sup> See the variety of contracts found in Babcock et. al, "Current Approaches to Contract During Marriage," 648-656.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 657-658; Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 289-290.

<sup>23</sup> On contract, see Morton J. Horowitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 161. Horowitz identifies this legal principle as the will theory of contract in connection to the rise of a market economy in the early nineteenth century. While marriage has many sociocultural values attached to it, the freedom to contract and the expectation to perform a contract despite its burden remained.

reflected a heightened gender consciousness regarding the performance of roles, expectations, and power dynamics within marriages.<sup>24</sup>

### **Heterosexuality and Same Sex Marriages**

During the 1960s and 1970s, lesbian feminists rarely challenged the heterosexist nature of marriage through legal advocacy and instead focused on securing individual civil rights and liberties.<sup>25</sup> When they did challenge the illegality of same-sex marriage, they stressed their critiques of traditional gender roles that clashed with their lifestyles and convictions. Some lesbians expressed strong interests in the ability to marry. Many lesbians used heterosexual terms such as marriage and husband or wife to describe their relationships.<sup>26</sup> In an article entitled “Manglish,” an anonymous writer maligned the current lack of language to positively describe homosexual unions and the heterosexist legacy of the terms husband/wife. To combat this history, she advocated new, standardized language for heterosexual and homosexual couples.<sup>27</sup>

Lesbian feminist periodicals reported news of lesbian couples united in public ceremonies and provided listings of seminars on legal issues surrounding same sex unions. In one account, two black lesbians, Donna Burkett and Mononia Evans exchanged vows in an Eastern Orthodox ceremony in Milwaukee

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<sup>24</sup> Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 279-280.

<sup>25</sup> Two of the most notable challenges by gay couples that went to the United States Supreme Court include the case of Mike McConnell and Jack Baker and Tony Sullivan and Richard Adams. In the former, the Supreme Court ruled that a ban on same-sex unions did not violate First Amendment protections while in the second case, the Court denied certiorari. On the background, issues, and results of the first case, see Joyce Murdoch and Deb Price, *Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. The Supreme Court* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 163-173, 219-225 and Chauncey, *Why Marriage?* 89-92.

<sup>26</sup> Abbott and Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman*, 90.

<sup>27</sup> “Manglish,” *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (19 June 1970), 2. The writer

after being unable to obtain a marriage license from the county clerk. This couple immediately following the ceremony moved to sue the county clerk because the law did not specifically prohibit same sex unions.<sup>28</sup> Despite the desirability of legal recognition of their unions, lesbians and feminists suffered as a result of the institution of marriage. Abbott and Love asserted: “The sum total of stresses involved in a monogamous, marriagelike relationship attempted outside any area of support as the heterosexual couple receives [...] sooner or later catches up with the lesbian couple.”<sup>29</sup> Occasionally, lesbian feminists provided opportunities for women to learn more about the legal issues surrounding gay marriage, child custody, employment discrimination, and adoption.<sup>30</sup> While some lesbian feminists critiqued marriage, the majority chose to focus on issues aside from marriage during the period of second wave feminism.

### **Economics and Marriage**

Married women’s employment was a thorny issue for second wave feminists to challenge. As discussed earlier, liberal feminists and working-class feminists uneasily united to advocate for married women’s employment outside of the home. Nonetheless, numerous complications and discrimination remained. In a contemporary account of sex discrimination in laws, Karen DeCrow summarized women’s employment dilemmas: “Not only do women earn less money, and find it more difficult to find employment, they have the primary responsibility for children.”<sup>31</sup> Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of

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<sup>28</sup> “Gay Women United in Public Ceremony,” *Focus* Vol. II, No. 11 (March-April 1972), n.p.

<sup>29</sup> Abbott and Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman*, 46, 55.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Daughters of Bilitis (San Francisco), *Sisters*, Vol. 2 No. 10 (October 1971), 9.

<sup>31</sup> DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 48.

the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the mid 1960s, wage disparities between women and men continued because of the failure of law to stifle employers' efforts to discriminate against women on the basis of conflicting childcare obligations, pregnancy possibilities, and sex specific employment decisions. Only in March 1972 did the EEOC receive sufficient powers to enforce Title VII by bringing legal charges for clients and, at the same time, become applicable to federal employers.<sup>32</sup> The continued existence of wage disparities for women was predicated on sociocultural beliefs of the middle-class white male breadwinner that ascribed married women's employment as temporary or supplemental to their husbands' wages, unless that woman was single and/or receiving welfare.<sup>33</sup> Marriage played a preeminent role in sex-based wage disparities while racial and class biases presumed that 'respectable' middle-class white wives did not work. One arena in which marriage, and also the lack of marriage, discriminated against women was in regards to social welfare programs.

#### *Welfare Provisions and Married Women's Employment*

Welfare programs discriminated against married women on several grounds at both the state level. In a 1973 Congressional hearing, C.S. Bell argued that government response to women's issues with Social Security had utilized two perspectives: "The first [...] has been to define the problem of poverty in terms of the absence of male breadwinners, and then to attempt to replace the breadwinner

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 48. DeCrow makes the argument that the only married women and mothers who were supposed to work are women on welfare.

[...] The second approach [...] has been to discount the AFDC mother's role as child caretaker and encourage her or force her to shoulder the breadwinning responsibility herself."<sup>34</sup> With paid labor participation and welfare, married women suffered under a white middle-class male breadwinner ideology that treated their concerns as secondary to maintaining a nuclear family. Most women received Social Security benefits primarily as dependents of some other earner due to the presumption that most families were single income households. The lack of economic value attached to work performed at home meant that for single or divorced women, they had to work, while for married women, it meant that their earnings were still viewed as an addition to the primary income of a household.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Judicial Rulings on Social Welfare and Marriage*

One particularly contentious legal battleground involving economic issues within marriage involved welfare provisions. Several rulings redefined the privileged legal status of marriage in providing for efficient distribution of social welfare benefits. For example in the 1972 case *Weber v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, the Supreme Court ruled that Louisiana did not have a legitimate state interest in impairing dependent illegitimate children's ability to receive worker's compensation benefits equal to those that their deceased father's dependent legitimate children recovered.<sup>36</sup> A decision issued in the same year by the District

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<sup>34</sup> Carolyn Shaw Bell, Women and Social Security: Contributions and Benefits," *Paper Prepared for Hearings on Economic Problems of Women, Joint Economic Committee* (July 25, 1973), In Babcock, Freedman, Norton, and Cross, eds., *Sex Discrimination and the Law*, 748-753.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 752-753.

<sup>36</sup> *Weber v. Aetna Cas. & Sur. Co.*, 406 U.S. 164 (1972), In Kay, *Text, Cases and Materials on Sex-Based Discrimination in Family Law*, 280-288.

Court of Connecticut in *Davis v. Richardson* extended this protection to children, regardless of the marital status of their parents, to receipt of Social Security death benefits.<sup>37</sup> In a case from 1973, the Supreme Court declared that New Jersey's Assistance to the Families of the Working Poor program violated the Equal Protection Clause because it unjustly discriminated against children of non-married couples in awarding aid.<sup>38</sup>

These and other court decisions collectively represented examples in which the legal distinctions between marriage and non-marriage had broken down due to the social and cultural critiques and challenges of liberal and radical feminists. Not all feminist demands, however, were embraced regarding welfare programs, particularly regarding the level of benefits. For example, in a 1970 ruling, the Supreme Court declared Maryland's Aid to Families with Dependant Children program to not be a violation of the Equal Protection Clause because the legislation sought to encourage employment and to discourage benefiting welfare families over working poor families.<sup>39</sup> Many judicial decisions, often from federal courts, adjudicated issues pertaining to distribution of welfare provisions during the 1970s. Nonetheless, because marriage has historically been the legal province of states, the federal judiciary had a very limited role on redefining marriage.

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<sup>37</sup> *Davis v. Richardson*, 342 F.Supp. 588 [three-judge court], (D.Conn, 1972), aff'd mem. 409 U.S. 1069, In Kay, *Text, Cases and Materials on Sex-Based Discrimination in Family Law*, 293-295.

<sup>38</sup> *New Jersey Welfare Rights Organization v. Cahill*, 411 U.S. 619 (1973), In *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>39</sup> *Dandridge v. Williams* 297 U.S. 471, 90 S. Ct. 1153, 25 L. Ed. 2d 491 (1970), In Babcock et. al, *Sex Discrimination and the Law*, 79-81

## Divorce

Divorce laws during the 1960s and 1970s changed in many states due to social outcry that they imposed too heavy a burden on parties no longer interested in remaining married. Historians have posed several reasons for the move to less strict divorce laws centering on a growing sense of individualism and co-related gender consciousness that has encouraged women to challenge marriage through dissolution. Although several state divorce laws by the end of the 1970s had embraced no-fault principles and gender-neutral language, their results were hardly an improvement for women. Feminists soon understood and explained the reasons why.<sup>40</sup>

### *Critiques*

As divorce laws changed during the 1960s and 1970s to remove the barriers to dissolving marriage, many feminists found divorce to be against the interests of women. While leaving a psychologically or physically abusive marriage received support in feminist circles, many feminists argued that marriage, despite its numerous flaws and substantial discrimination, afforded women protection. A writer for the radical feminist publication *Rat* argued in 1970 that critiquing the family without challenging its underlying material foundations of the family provoked problems for divorced women. She asserted,

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<sup>40</sup> On the growing discontent with legal barriers to divorce, see Merriam, *After Nora Slammed the Door*, 31-37; Hall and Hall, *The Two-Career Couple*, 222-223. Historians have also written about social changes that have inspired divorce. On sexuality in youth culture and media, see Linden-Ward and Green, *American Women in the 1960s*, 252-255, 369-377. On motivations for legal changes in divorce law, see Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution*, 15-16; DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, 91-96, 111; Friedman, *Private Lives*, 73-79.

While for instance divorce can be an important step in woman's personal emancipation for which they need all the support and help they can get – it is still irresponsible to push (or strongly advocate) women into it as long as we live in this society that is unable to offer viable alternatives to the majority of women especially those with children.<sup>41</sup>

Another woman, having grown weary of the theoretical gymnastics that radical and lesbian feminists wielded to critique heterosexuality and the monogamous family in the late 1960s, asserted that while divorce might represent an important step for women to exercise individual freedom and experience liberation, material and societal conditions mitigated the benefits, particularly for women with children.<sup>42</sup>

While divorce laws made breaking away from marriage easier, it also made women more vulnerable. Beverly Jones asserted that the threat of divorce with or without accompanying psychological and physical force by husbands led many women to accept their marital roles.<sup>43</sup> In addition, despite the creation and acceptance of no-fault divorce, it remained a threat that husbands wielded to suggest their economic and physical power in the household.<sup>44</sup>

As an ever growing number of women decided to pursue divorce as a way to challenge marriage, the results revealed several problems. Weitzman's study of no-fault divorce in California confirmed that gender neutral rules pertaining to the allocation of resources and property had been detrimental to women's socioeconomic well-being after the dissolution of marriage.<sup>45</sup> While divorce laws

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<sup>41</sup> "Reflections," *Rat*, June/July 1970, 7.

<sup>42</sup> "Reflections," *Rat*, (June/July 1970), 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, "The Doll's House," 12.

<sup>44</sup> Beverly Jones, "The Doll's House," *Everywoman*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (31 July 1970), 12.

<sup>45</sup> Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution*, xi-xiv; Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 286-291.

provided for equal distribution of property such as houses and saved financial assets, they failed to be able to provide equitable distribution of future income, which depended on the job skills and employability of the litigants. As a result, husbands left marriages in much better shape than their wives. In one of his most profound findings, Weitzman discovered that “divorced men experience an average 42 percent rise in their standard of living in the first year after the divorce, while divorced women (and their children) experience a 73% decline.”<sup>46</sup> Subsequent studies have found that divorced women made at least a partial economic recovery. Although divorced women fared better in the labor market than married women because of their greater availability, the former group of women had a lower standard of living than married women because of husbands’ incomes; the key asset for divorced women trying to operate a female-headed household was connection labor market during and prior to marriage.<sup>47</sup> For young mothers, older housewives, and women with few job skills, divorce may have relieved them of stressful and physically and emotionally scarring marriages, but it presented them with new and unanticipated challenges.

Feminists recognized that divorced women fared substantially worse than their former husbands in income levels and faced numerous troubles in balancing childcare with paid employment. Sheila Cronan identified this dilemma in her

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 323. Weitzman attributed a number of reasons for this gender disparity: inadequate alimony and other court-awarded decisions, the stress on a wife’s resources, and the reduced burden’s on a husband’s income; see Ibid., 340. See also Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 286-291; Okin, 160-167.

<sup>47</sup> For one of the most intricate, see Richard R. Peterson, *Women, Work, and Divorce* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1-21. Peterson’s research revealed that divorced and never-married women benefited in the job market because of their availability but had low earning power because of past family responsibilities that kept them out of the market and inhibited development of job skills and present children. See Ibid., 105-106.

early essay on marriage when she wrote about how divorce shattered married women's expectations of security. Since marriage had placed many middle-class women in the role of full time housewives and bestowed husband with the expectation of full employment, to break with these roles created insecurity. According to Cronan, this "divorce is against the interests of women."<sup>48</sup> In the early 1970s, N.O.W. published a Divorce Reform Bill that posed economic equality for divorced women through affirmative action empowerment programs, compulsory collection of alimony, and equal division of property.<sup>49</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Important legal changes to the institution of marriage occurred during the second wave of feminism, predominantly in the 1970s. The variety of issues that state and federal courts addressed in this decade had noticeable implications on the way that marriage appeared to and addressed women. Nevertheless, the fact that the marital regime is predominantly state-based meant that, while some states made substantial strides in tearing away remaining elements of coverture, providing for easier divorce, improving married women's employment opportunities and rights, and facilitating women's access to social welfare programs, other states were more reluctant to change their laws or adjudicate disputes. By the end of the 1970s, much progress had been made in redefining the relationship of women to marriage. By the end of second wave feminism, sex became a suspect category of discrimination. In spite of this, new problems arose

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<sup>48</sup> Cronan, "Marriage," 218.

<sup>49</sup> DeCrow, *Sexist Justice*, 178.

in how to reconcile gender-neutral laws with the distinctly gendered nature of power, authority, and resources.



## CHAPTER 5

Feminist critiques of marriage in the 1960s and 1970s provoked questions in popular women's periodicals of the extent to which marriage in subsequent years might change and whether these changes were good or bad. Popular women's magazines represented an important source in which non-activist women during the 1960s and 1970s could read about the various societal debates surrounding marriage. Geared toward a different audience than that of the feminist periodicals, popular women's magazines sanitized many of the more radical claims and indictments found in these polemical tracts. Because more Americans encountered feminist critiques of marriage within popular magazines and other mainstream mass media than in feminist periodicals, the messages that filtered into broader society through mainstream outlets were arguably more influential.

The lines of discourse that feminists had opened about women's status within marriage influenced what appeared in women's magazines. Since the high point of focused feminist attention to marriage had been reached by 1972, the balance of the decade served as a period of consolidation for feminist critiques of marriage. Popular women's periodicals embraced similar topics for discussion but elided the more radical positions and broader applicability of feminists. For example, these magazines examined critiques and challenges to traditional marriage that had existed for some time. Some of the most featured topics included articles on communication between spouses, interracial marriages, the

rise of two-income households and domesticity. Articles examining the politics of marriage, the desirability of the permanence of marriage in a rapidly changing world, and the possibility of the institution of marriage ending with the current generation suggested that the institution of marriage was under serious attack.<sup>1</sup> Popular women's magazines across the period of second wave feminism increasingly recognized that the state of marriage had changed in several ways.

Occasionally, women's magazines directly addressed feminist critiques and challenges to marriage but did so in an isolated, individual couple manner that modified the applicability of the claims and avoided controversial discussions.<sup>2</sup> Popular women's periodicals failed to present articles endorsing many of the tenets of feminist critiques of marriage: family wage ideal, domesticity, childrearing responsibilities, and sexual availability. Popular women's magazines remained more conservative in the critiques of marriage they presented than women in mainstream society.<sup>3</sup> These magazines remained distant from the rhetoric, claims, and arguments of feminists, particularly radical feminists. In toeing a thin line between acknowledging the need to reform the institution of

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<sup>1</sup> Vivian Cadden, "The Politics of Marriage: A Delicate Balance," *Redbook* (July 1971), 55+; Dorothy Barclay Thompson, "Happy Marriage: Is It Real?" *Vogue*, (1 November 1971), 117+; Harriet Van Horne, "Are We the Last Married Generation?" *McCall's*, Vol. 96 (May 1969), 69+

<sup>2</sup> Sally Chew, "Printing Political Patterns" Inside Views on Today's Woman's Presses," *WOMANEWS* 5, No. 6 (July 1984), 3 In Nancy K. Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines: An Annotated Historical Guide* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1989), 21; "Liberating Magazines," *Newsweek* Vol. 77 (8 February 1971), 101-102, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 158; Rosemary Benedetta Corsiglia, "A Content Analysis of Three Women's Magazines from 1960-1970." Master's thesis. Iowa State University, 1971, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 128.

<sup>3</sup> Weiss, *To Have and To Hold*, 204-207. Some critics have argued that popular women's magazines actually offered coverage of important social and other issues. For this perspective, see e.g. Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, "Should a Woman's Magazine Be More Like a Man's?" *Mademoiselle*, Vol. 88 (December 1982), 186, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 146.

marriage and upholding traditional gender values, these magazines opened subtle but limited avenues for opportunities to redefine marriage.<sup>4</sup>

### **Staying in Marriages**

Mainstream women's magazines conferred little legitimacy to feminist claims that married women suffered under a myriad of legal, economic, and sociocultural discriminations based on their gender. Despite offering a number of articles about married women's unhappiness, popular women's magazines advocated reconciliation and resolution in favor of the status quo rather suggesting a more radical restructuring of marital relations. Additionally these magazines generally placed the burden on wives to manage their marriages.<sup>5</sup>

### *Stability is Valued*

In a November 1963 article in *Good Housekeeping*, one wife wrote about her disillusionment with her husband and her subsequent decision to pursue an extramarital affair. When her husband found out and gave her an ultimatum, she decided in favor of marriage, and noted "a good marriage isn't the same as an exciting romance."<sup>6</sup> Other articles in the early to mid-1960s presented stability and predictability as highly valued features of marriage in the wake of escalating divorce rates and argued that most marriages remained generally happy.<sup>7</sup> What

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<sup>4</sup> Ann L. Geise, "The Female Role in Middle-Class Women's Magazines from 1955 to 1976: A Content Analysis of Nonfiction Selections," *Sex Roles*, Vol. 5 (February 1979), 51-62, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 142.

<sup>5</sup> "Love and Anger – The Changing Rules," *Vogue* 177 (May 1987), 124, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 159-160; Ruth Rosen, "You've Come a Long Way," *It Ain't Me*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (28 April 1970), 5+, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 177.

<sup>6</sup> "My Problem and How I Solved It #17: Flight From Marriage," *GH*, V. 157 (November 1963): p. 12+

<sup>7</sup> Andre Maurois, "The Sweet Monotony of Marriage," *Ladies Home Journal*, Vol. 81 (March 1964): 43; George Riemer, "A Frank Look at Marital Fidelity," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 158 (January 1964): 49+.

these articles and others in popular women's periodicals revealed about marriage in the 1960s was that while contemplation about the situation was acceptable, the appropriate decision was to side in favor of marriage rather than be single or divorced. By the early 1970s, feminist critiques of marriage had shaken this line.

### *Politicizing Marriage*

The politicization of marriage advocated by many feminist woman-centered critiques of marriage in the 1969 to 1971 period became a hot controversy in women's magazines. One of the keys to feminist politicization of marriage was the expression of contempt for husbands and wives patching up problems and not challenging the foundations of their marriages in sex-based gender roles.<sup>8</sup> Women's magazines in this period advocated this approach while most feminist groups encouraged women to remember that the "personal is political." In a July 1971 article for *Redbook*, Vivian Cadden explored the question of whether power politics, eerily reminiscent of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* written a year earlier, was an effective way to understand marital relations. Like several articles that appeared in women's magazines during the decade, Cadden's article contemplated how the destabilization in role expectations within marriage and the new emphasis on consciousness of power politics would play out. She concluded that the emphasis on wielding power, particularly advocated of wives by the women's liberation movement, created obvious dire consequences. Of the relationship between feminism and marriage, she asserted: "if the Women's Liberation has done anything, it is to make vivid

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<sup>8</sup> "Love and Anger," 124, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 159; Rosen, "You've Come a Long Way," 5+, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 177.

the cost in human waste and human suffering involved in a power-ridden relationship.<sup>9</sup>

In a February 1971 article for *Redbook*, Philip Slater countered the great majority of women's periodical literature when he asserted that women must unite under the banner of female solidarity, rather than work only individually, in order to change the power politics within the institution of marriage and not simply within individual couples.<sup>10</sup> Like radical women's groups, he argued that a division of labor by sex within marriages promoted inequality between husbands and wives.<sup>11</sup> In addition he argued that assigning traits in society was arbitrary and an indication of power politics.<sup>12</sup> Although the discussion of the politicization of marriage in women's magazines upheld that conviction that instability harmed marriage, the inclusion of articles on both sides of the debate exposed more women to woman-centered critiques of marriage that inspired at least a deeper appraisal of married women's satisfaction.

### *Tensions in Marital Stability*

One of the few things clear about the state of marriage at the mid-1970s according to mainstream women's magazines was that it was in a state of flux. Societal changes across many arenas had profoundly affected marriage. The most prominent influence in the shifts in coverage of marriage in mainstream women's magazines was attributable to second wave feminists' critiques. In the latter half

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<sup>9</sup> Vivian Cadden, "The Politics of Marriage: A Delicate Balance," *Redbook* (July 1971), 130.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 66+

<sup>11</sup> Philip E. Slater, "Must Marriage Cheat Today's Young Women?" *Redbook* (February 1971), 166.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166. Although Slater maintained that women and men did possess some gender-specific trait differences, he affirmed that equality should not require women to become men but should rather promote fluidity.

of the 1970s, as women and society took stock of the contributions and pitfalls of woman-centered social movements, a tension between more radical positions and retrenchment occurred due as a result of fatigue with social movement culture and the splintering of second wave feminism. In most popular women's periodicals, a conservative response became a more noticeable feature by mid 1975.<sup>13</sup>

While America by mid-decade experienced a marriage boom, at the same time, more women attempted to break down the confines of their marriage. One of the primary motivations for this was a growing sense of consciousness of self and of one's individual needs and interests. In the summer of 1974, Martha Weinman Lear decided to leave behind her husband and children in order to search for an individual identity and to contemplate what married life had meant for her. Traveling alone and without using any of the economic privileges or social connections she had acquired since her single days, she kept a journal chronicling her experiences and feelings.<sup>14</sup> Lear traversed the gamut of experiences for a married woman: companionship with her husband, the social stigma of singleness, extramarital affairs, economic dependency, child rearing, and more. Her journal entries hinted at an ambivalent sense of confusion and firm resolve that she arose when married women thought deeply about critiquing and

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Cagan, "The Selling of the Women's Movement," *Social Policy* Vol. 9 (May/June 1978), 4-12, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 124; "Liberating Magazines," 101-102, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 158. Some popular women's magazines became noticeably more feminist during the 1970s, one of which was *Mademoiselle*. On this, see Dorothy D. Prisco, "Women and Social Change as Reflected in a Major Fashion Magazine," *Journalism Quarterly* Vol. 59 (September 1982), 131-133, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 229. Bridal magazines also changed their coverage as a result of feminist critiques of marriage. See "New Nuptials: 'Modern Bride' and 'Bride's Magazine'," *Human Behavior* Vol. 7 (November 1978), 36, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 168.

<sup>14</sup> Part of her journal appeared in the article: Martha Weinman Lear, "A Vacation from Marriage," *McCall's* (March 1975), 91+.

challenging marriage. One conclusion that she reached about feminist appraisals of marriage, which summarized quite effectively how many women perceived of the changes in the institution through the mid-1970s, was while her husband “respects and supports my work [... and] encourages me to pursue my own interests” he still defaulted to traditional male behavior.<sup>15</sup> For Martha Lear, and for many married woman, marriage had produced a mixed bag of benefits and detriments. As feminists argued the latter outweighed the former and conservatives articulated the reverse, most women could agree with her conclusion: “I think I am both more and less than I used to be.”<sup>16</sup>

#### *Retrenchment from Feminism*

The Women’s Lib Movement, as popular magazines labeled it, had, by the mid-1970s, challenged marriage on several fronts but had run out of viable rhetoric. Writing in *McCall’s* in mid-1975, Barbara Grizzuti Harrison lamented the rise of two recent best sellers, Marabel Morgan’s *The Total Woman* and Helen B. Andelin’s *Fascinating Womanhood*, which instructed wives to submit to their husbands and return to the feminine and masculine distinctions of the post-War period.<sup>17</sup> Harrison decried the ability of these two female authors to profit from encouraging women to assume the burden of ‘saving their marriages’ by yielding, appreciating, and obeying the entreaties of their husband.<sup>18</sup> While the aforementioned articles presented critiques of marriage that were more

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara, Grizzuti Harrison, “The Books That Teach Wives to Be Submissive,” *McCall’s* (June 1975), 83+

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

conservative than those of feminists, they reflected more accurately the societal ambivalence surrounding marriage.

By the latter part of the 1970s, woman-centered movements had improved married women's lives in many ways. At the same time, the emphasis on total equality rather than equity caused their critiques and challenges to marriage to incur problems. By 1978, mainstream women's magazines declared that liberated women were those who married.<sup>19</sup> While these magazines agreed that a return to old values was improbable of the changed social circumstances and new gender consciousness of many women, they shared the sentiment that marriage and the family continued to serve as the foundation for society.

### **Being Married Is Not So Bad**

Popular women's magazines in the 1960s and 1970s stressed that marriage provided life's most fulfilling relationship. Despite the critiques that feminists waged against marriage and the instability of that articles in popular women's magazines acknowledged by the early to mid 1970s, the general message was that marriage was not so bad. In popular magazines, women challenged expectations, solve problems, and created instability within their marriages. Yet, as women's magazines historian Mary Ellen Zuckerman says of popular women's periodicals, their response to feminism and the issues it raised was ambivalent: "They did not typically try to radically reconfigure women's lives or society" but "eventually covered the feminist movement and wrote about some issues raised by feminists."<sup>20</sup> Although women raised important issues and challenged the status

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<sup>19</sup> Jane O' Reilly, "Why Liberated Women are Getting Married," *McCall's* (April 1978), 109+

<sup>20</sup> Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States*, xii, 236.

quo within their own marriages, the messages of popular women's magazines was that these disruptions were temporary and reconcilable to save marriages.

### *Challenging Expectations*

In 1965, *Redbook* published its revealing study on *Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped*. In a series of individually written stories, wives explored a variety of topics associated with marriage and the family and espoused a number of the concerns and problems expressed in *The Feminine Mystique* and a very limited number of women's periodicals. Some stories iterated frustration with the availability of husbands and the overcompensation through childrearing or the difficulty of completing all of the housework.<sup>21</sup> The most intriguing vignettes emphasized how wives and mothers challenged expectations within their marriages and families. Norma Duerst's story of her life as a 'lazy housekeeper' asserted that being a homemaker could be a satisfying occupation for many women when they challenged expectations of domestic perfection by streamlining their labor and accepting some clutter in order to provide personal time.<sup>22</sup> While the stories showed women upholding their marital commitment, the details and challenges to marriage demonstrate that the women of the late 1950s and early 1960s did not passively endure their marriages in the way that Friedan described.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, they concluded with affirming marriage as a challenge

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<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Carol Denton, "Life with a Part-Time Husband," In Robert Stein (ed.), *Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped: A Redbook Documentary* (New York: Trident Press, 1965), 211-216; Patricia Heald, "The Five Years We Lost," In *Ibid.*, 217-222; Barbara B. Lawler, "We Found More Time for Each Other," In *Ibid.*, 223-228.

<sup>22</sup> Norma Duerst, "I Am a Lazy Housekeeper and My Family Loves It," In Robert Stein (ed.), *Why Young Mothers Feel Trapped*, 154-160.

<sup>23</sup> The emergence of feminist periodicals in the 1960s and 1970s has been labeled as a reaction against popular women's magazines and the values they articulate. On this perspective, see Anne Mather, "A History of Feminist Periodicals, Part 2," *Journalism History* 1 (Winter 1974), 108-111,

worthy of wifehood, though with modification in routine and expectations, and not without tension.

### *Solving Problems*

Ambivalence about how to reconcile problems within marriage with the broader and more insistent demands of liberal, and later, radical, feminists, began during the mid to late 1960s. While married women became more vocal about discrepancies between a marital ideal and reality, most continued to remain married and work through growing differences. Periodicals featured descriptions of conflict within marriage including marital infidelity, companionship, and economics, among others. The realities of 'modern married life' had produced challenges of questions about the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives, although in popular women's magazines, it had not posed basic questions of the institution of marriage. Popular women's magazines postulated that marriage for women was unlike any other relationship they could experience but also had more severe consequences for women if problems arose. Writing for *McCall's*, Harriet Van Horne asserted that imperfections in the institution of marriage "are always more hurtful to women."<sup>24</sup> Yet, Van Horne failed to explore how these imperfections should be resolved and resigned herself to the notion that consequently, people worried too much about working at marriage and not enough about simply experiencing it.

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In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 27. Yet, subsequent research has found that the messages found in popular women's periodicals were not how feminists characterized them. On this see Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines*, 236.

<sup>24</sup> Van Horne, "Are We the Last Married Generation?" 141.

Other articles in women's magazines supported the belief that in challenging times, people depended on marriage to anchor their lives and ought to avoid working so hard to recast marital relations in equality.<sup>25</sup> An article from the August 1968 issue of *Good Housekeeping* told the story of a woman who chose to remain married in order to provide her children with a wholesome home rather than to leave a loveless marriage.<sup>26</sup> Tentative and ambivalent steps characterized the willingness of mainstream women's periodicals to critique marriage.<sup>27</sup>

### *Flux in the Mid 1970s*

One of the most important driving force for the redefinition of the institution of marriage was the 'Women's Liberation Movement.'<sup>28</sup> The women's liberation movement had, according to a *Redbook* three month survey of thousands of couples from diverse backgrounds marriage published in early 1975, encouraged women to choose marriage as an option to cultivate their personal identities and build a partnership based on equality in all arenas of marriage life. Nonetheless, the *Redbook* study concluded that while much had changed regarding marriage, the institution remained an ever-present and important feature of American life. It announced: "The need to be married [...] is reasserting itself everywhere in the United States. Many may fear that the institution of marriage is

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<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Dorothy Barclay Thompson, "Happy Marriage: Is It Real?" *Vogue* (1 November 1971), 117+

<sup>26</sup> "My Problem and How I Solved It: For the Sake of the Children," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 167 (August 1968): 12+

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. Stanley Frank, "The Most Delicate Problem in Marriage," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 164 (March 1967): 87+; Dr. Haim Ginott, "'Husbandese' – The New Language of Intimate Persuasion Between Husband and Wife," *Ladies Home Journal* (February 1968): 61+; Jessie Bernard and Norman Lobsenz, "Why Husbands and Wives Remain Strangers," *The Reader's Digest* (February 1968): 63-66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

withering away but it is not. It is flourishing.”<sup>29</sup> *Redbook* found that, despite the movings of the women’s liberation movement and other social movements advocating an individualist approach to life, commitment and stability brought people together to marry. Open marriages, without marital fidelity, had become, according to the Report, outdated and on the decline in nearly the entire country.

In the mid 1970s, women’s magazines reported that the nation had experienced a marriage boom but that women also aspired to partially separate themselves from their marriage. An anonymous writer to *Good Housekeeping* confirmed a growing conservative reaction to the feminist movement and its challenges to marriage by explaining how women’s lib nearly caused her to lose her husband.<sup>30</sup> After relaying a series of conversations and attendance at consciousness raising meetings with her female liberationist neighbor Marianne, the writer/wife felt that despite the highly gendered division of labor within her own marriage and her exposure to feminist ideas, she felt happy as a housewife because she believed she had the *opportunity* to do other things if she desired.<sup>31</sup>

While the aforementioned articles presented critiques of marriage more conservative than those of feminist-minded women, they reflected more closely the societal ambivalence surrounding marriage. By the latter part of the 1970s, feminist movements had improved married women’s lives in many ways. At the same time, the emphasis on total equality rather than equity caused their critiques and challenges to marriage to incur problems. By 1978, mainstream women’s

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<sup>29</sup> Ellen Sullivan, “The Marriage Boom: A Nationwide Report,” *Redbook* (February 1975), 86.

<sup>30</sup> “My Problem and How I Solved It: Liberation Almost Ruined My Marriage,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 185 (August 1977), 24+

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

magazines declared that liberated women were those who married.<sup>32</sup> While these magazines agreed that a return to old values was improbable because of the changed social circumstances and new gender consciousness of many women, they shared the sentiment that marriage and the family remained the foundation for American society.

### **Unhappiness - Divorce**

As divorce rates increased as married individuals increasingly acted upon their unhappiness with their situations, popular women's magazines of the 1960s and 1970s offered some commentary on divorce laws and remarriage. For example, an April 1970 article in *Good Housekeeping* criticized divorce laws not because of their liberalness or because they led to wives abandoning marriage in droves, but rather because they benefited the members of the judicial system much more than the litigants, particularly wives and children. The article's author Evan Wylie argued that society was behind the times in restructuring divorce laws to provide for peaceful resolution of tense marital situations and instead thrived on adding insult to injury through judicial procedures that rewarded fighting.<sup>33</sup> Citing the sentiments of an Illinois woman active in the divorce reform movement, Wylie encouraged the proposition that women's organizations around the country should examine and reform divorce within the United States as a method of constituent service.<sup>34</sup> While feminists had been complaining about the sex discrimination built into marriage through law and social and cultural

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<sup>32</sup> Jane O' Reilly, "Why Liberated Women are Getting Married," *McCall's* (April 1978), 109+

<sup>33</sup> Evan McLeod Wylie, "The Disgrace of Our Divorce Laws," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 170 (April 1970), 98+

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

customs, in this period, Wylie persuasively demonstrated that they had ignored the disproportionately greater problems that divorce created for wives: isolation and loss of identity, loss of income, and the necessity to find employment to live. Many challenges and questions faced divorced women in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s and that society had to increasingly come to recognize.

For most of the 1970s, mainstream women's magazines presented articles in reaction to radical feminist and woman-centered critiques and challenges to marriage. Betty Friedan, the acclaimed author of *The Feminine Mystique*, and vocal proponent of liberal feminism, turned, during the 1970s, more conservative in her views on marriage. In a May 1973 article for *McCall's*, Friedan asked whether the rise in divorce rates spelled the end of marriage.<sup>35</sup> Her answer was that, after talking with her friends and reflecting upon her own divorce four years ago, the situation was quite complicated. She explained: "some of my most sophisticated, cynical friends are getting married, while some of my most conventional friends are getting divorced."<sup>36</sup> Friedan affirmed that marriage by the early 1970s had changed not just for those already married but for those contemplating wedlock. She argued that couples marrying now carefully considered their decision to marry and set specific boundaries on their commitment. Nevertheless, she concluded that while marriage changed, and needed to do so, she did not believe that women had "been liberated from marriage" or that it would disappear.<sup>37</sup> Friedan's ambivalence on the direction

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<sup>35</sup> Betty Friedan, "New Marriages That Make Their Own Rules," *McCall's* (May 1973), 67

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. Much of Friedan's article focuses on stories of the recent marriages of some of her friends.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

that marriage might take in the 1970s hinted at the effectiveness of feminist critiques and challenges that had destabilized an institution previously known for its permanency.

### **Important Social and Cultural Issues**

Mainstream women's magazines selectively engaged with social and cultural issues during the 1960s and 1970s. Due to advertising constraints and their middle-class, predominantly white, conservative female readership, popular women's magazines featured articles on social and cultural issues in a less threatening light than feminists had. It did so by presenting personalized accounts of women's marital experiences. While the stories may have resonated with their readers, their individualistic nature limited their applicability and circumscribed calls for broad social change. Popular women's magazines broached some similar critiques of marriage as feminists but carefully repackaged and depoliticized their analyses of social and cultural issues.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Concerns of the Feminine Mystique – Early Marriages and Mothers*

During the first half of the 1960s, popular women's periodicals broadened their offerings of woman-centered critiques of marriage. Two particular questions during this period, which had formed the foundation for Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, were the issue of early marriages and the stifling confines of married life with children. In February 1965, *McCall's* ran a long article on the subject of early marriages for teenage girls. In making a case against teenage marriages,

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Ellen Zuckerman argues that the primary reason for popular women's magazines to disengage with feminism was business constraints and that these magazines covered the feminist movement when it helped sell magazines. See Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines*, 236-237.

Ernest Havemann asserted that statistical data on female teenage marriages concluded that such girls were more likely to become divorced than women who married in their early twenties.<sup>39</sup> Several reasons for this proclivity to divorce existed: accidental pregnancy, low income, lack of job potential, and sexual incompatibility, and domestic labor drudgery. The most troublesome, according to one mid-twenties female divorcee, was that teenage girls “married before we had any idea what we really were or really wanted – and now we’ve discovered that what we want is certainly not each other.”<sup>40</sup> Other magazine articles in the mid 1960s further lamented the marriage of teenage girls as impairing young women’s personal development and growth.<sup>41</sup> Collectively, these articles suggested that several of the issues of marriage presented in Friedan’s book had been addressed in the very periodicals she condemned.<sup>42</sup>

### *Gender Roles*

In the late 1960s and 1970s, mainstream women’s magazines focused more fully on feminist challenges to marriage through their discussion of gender roles. Articles found in mainstream women’s magazines often emphasized that husbands and wives should embrace traditional gender roles within their marriages and work out problems in a manner that stirred up as little as possible. These articles stressed that problems of indifference, negligence, or

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<sup>39</sup> Ernest Havemann, “Should 17–and 18-year-old girls marry? The Case Against It!” *McCall’s* (February 1965), 101

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>41</sup> Jo Coudert, “Making a Weak Marriage Work,”; “Young Wives’ Tales,” *Mademoiselle* (January 1966): 126; Joan Dash, “Problems of Coexistence: Gifted Women and the Men They Marry,” *Mademoiselle* (March 1968), 199, 218.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, “Two Washes in the Morning and a Bridge Party at Night: The American Housewife Between the Wars,” *Women’s Studies* Vol. 3 (1976), 147-171, In Humphreys, *American Women’s Magazines*, 129.

miscommunication were accidents or non malicious errors generally the fault of the wife, and not the fault of the ‘institution of marriage’ itself.<sup>43</sup> According to these articles, the most common and potentially most damaging problems within marriages were those involving communication. Writers for women’s magazines emphasized that wives should take on the task of ensuring that they and their husbands practiced open and honest communication.<sup>44</sup> At times, some writers suggested that effective communication required wives to battle with their husbands to bring buried issues into the light.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, while article writers sometimes encouraged wives to challenge their husbands on some issues, they emphasized tranquility and a return to normalcy. For feminists critiquing marriage, such advice portended the maintenance of traditional gender roles and power relations within marriages.

#### *African American Women and Marriage*

With second wave feminists’ work on critiquing marriage, an analysis of the intersections of race and sex became more apparent in women’s magazines. Marcia Ann Gillespie, Editor in Chief of *Essence* magazine, wrote a column for inclusion in the February 1975 *Redbook* report that revealed a sentiment shared by many Black women. In spite of battling racism and problems within African American families, she affirmed the importance of marriage to Black women and

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<sup>43</sup> Dr. Joyce Brothers, “On Being a Woman: If Your Husband Takes You for Granted,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 168 (May 1969), 52+; “My Problem and How I Solved It: Playing at Marriage,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 168 (April 1969), 28+

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. “My Problem and How I Solved It: Playing at Marriage,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 168 (April 1969), 28+; For a list of suggestions that wives might use to facilitate communication with their husbands, see Catherine W. Menninger with Margaret Lane, “What Wives Can Do to Solve the Communication Problem,” *Reader’s Digest* (July 1969), 211-216

<sup>45</sup> Mrs. Norman Vincent Peale, “Tested Ways of Saving Your Marriage,” *Reader’s Digest* (July 1971), 72-75; Dr. Joyce Brothers, “On Being a Woman: If Your Husband Takes You for Granted,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 168 (May 1969), 52+

Black society as a cohesive force.<sup>46</sup> In addition, she asserted that the history of African Americans warranted that marriage be taken seriously as a legal right previously denied, and be enjoyed to create a family and home.<sup>47</sup> Gillespie's comments resonated with many African American feminists, who rarely advocated the abolishment of marriage and instead agitated for improved domestic relations in general.<sup>48</sup> While African American women took marriage quite seriously as a privilege and opportunity, research confirmed that many Black women waited later to marry in order to pursue education or employment.

### *Interracial Marriage*

While the highly contentious and sensitive societal issue of interracial marriage applied questions of sexual dynamics within marriage that feminists of the 1970s had taken the lead in initiating, media coverage of this topic remained relatively silent on sexual dynamics and focused on race.<sup>49</sup> Although women's and mainstream magazines had initially followed the buildup to the Supreme Court's 1967 ruling in *Loving* that struck down legal barriers to interracial marriage, none provided analysis of interracial marriage until the late 1970s, and only then in magazines geared to a young black female audience. Women's magazines geared toward a predominantly white audience did not feature a single

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<sup>46</sup> Marcia Ann Gillespie, "A Rock Against the Wind: What Marriage Means to Blacks," In "The Marriage Boom: A Nationwide Report," *Redbook* (February 1975), 89.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Johnston, *Sexual Power*, 262-265.

<sup>49</sup> The arguments found in Moran and Romano's monographs reflect the delicate balancing act of issues of race and sex within marriage. While Moran asserted a viewpoint espoused by feminists and other women in social movements that interracial marriage involved issues of race and sex, Romano avowed the majority societal viewpoint on the relationship between race, sex, and marriage: "Yet whatever a couple's political convictions, class background, or gender composition, racial boundaries defined their lives." Romano, *Race Mixing*, 127.

substantial article in the period of 1973 to 1978 examining interracial marriage.<sup>50</sup> The only women's magazine to devote attention to this vitally important social topic of the 1970s was *Ebony*, which retained a predominantly young, African-American female audience. Two articles on interracial marriage contained in the magazine offered several revelations about how woman-centered critiques of marriage from earlier feminists had made their way into the mainstream African American community.

In separate studies of interracial marriage, Bill Berry and Shawn Lewis focused on the connections between race and sex in marriage. In his study of interracial marriages in the South, Bill Berry interviewed a number of couples about their feelings about their own interracial marriages and their views about the social topic in general. Although many couples that Berry interviewed indicated that they believed that their lives were no different from interracial couples in the North, several stated that they were reluctant to discuss their marriages, citing social stigma.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, Berry concluded, "The consensus of many interracial couples living in the South is that they are married to people, not to traditions, fears and myths."<sup>52</sup> In a January 1978 article in *Ebony* surveying black wives' attitudes and experiences of their interracial marriages, the results of the survey revealed a much more pessimistic outlook on interracial marriage.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Examples of women's magazines geared to a white audience included *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, and *McCall's*. A search of the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature revealed no substantial stories examining interracial marriage.

<sup>51</sup> Bill Berry, "Interracial Marriages in the South," *Ebony* (June 1978), 64-65.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Shawn D. Lewis, "Black Women/White Men: The 'Other' Mixed Marriage," *Ebony* (January 1978)

This pessimism, and the differences arising in the two articles, reflected the difficulties in reconciling race and sex within analysis of marriage.

The difference between Berry's and Lewis's articles implicated the multifaceted nature of marriage. Lewis reported that two of the most common attitudes that Black women had encountered from others about their marriages were that Black men, particularly their relatives, had said that they held a "responsibility" to marry Black men or that some women were "jealous because they feel my husband treats me better than their husbands treat them."<sup>54</sup> One Black woman intimated: "When my ex-husband found out [...] [e]ven though he had married a White woman, he thought it was terrible that I would marry a White man."<sup>55</sup> Other Black wives reported that Black women had been more hostile toward them than anyone else, including White men. They attributed this to the expectation that Black women had a duty to marry Black men.<sup>56</sup>

When African American feminists and Black women focused on issues arising from marriage, they did so with acuity toward race and sex. Women's magazines, on the other hand, often ignored class, and sometimes gender, analysis in discussing interracial marriage. For example, only briefly did Bill Berry's article on interracial marriage distinguish the experiences between middle-class and working-class couples. Paul and Amaya King, who lived in Albany, Georgia, indicated that their middle-class standing and successful business rooted in the Black community had helped to keep anyone from harassing or discriminating

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 39. One person reported that Black wives of white men had not "turned our backs on Black men; we have merely chosen to marry the men we love.

against them. On the other hand, Peggy and Glen Williams, who lived in the same city, stated that they faced economic inequality because of their interracial marriage.<sup>57</sup>

### **Economic Issues**

Issues surrounding married women's employment received significant attention in popular women's magazines. During the 1960s, much of the discussion in these magazines centered on the perils of married women's employment. An article in the March 1968 issue of *Mademoiselle* purporting to examine the dynamics of marriages of talented and educated women and the men that they marry, instead of exploring current situations, discussed the marriages of famous women in recent history including Edna St. Vincent Millay and Marie Curie.<sup>58</sup> In one of its numerous columns entitled "My Problem and How I Solved It," an anonymous wife wrote into *Good Housekeeping* to tell its readers of her experience attempting to run her husband's business when he became ill. After rejecting the entreaties of her husband to not change the operations of the store unless asking him first, the 'helpmate' faced troubles when things went awry. When she told her husband, he pitied her; she resolved that as a wife and a partner with her husband, her role was to help and not take over.<sup>59</sup> The moral of the 'helpmate's' story, like much of the articles found in the women's magazines of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Despite mainstream press coverage of interracial marriage, class and gender at times had implications for perceptions and treatment of interracial marriages. While white men could use their gender privilege to promote acceptance of their interracial marriages with non-white women, white women married to black men often faced social ostracism. Romano, *Race Mixing*, 133-134.

<sup>58</sup> Dash, "Problems of Coexistence," 199+.

<sup>59</sup> "My Problem and How I Solved It: Overzealous Helpmate," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 170 (May 1970), 36+

time, was that a little bit of change within marriage was sometimes permissible and that substantial changes that shifted the power balance resulted in problems.

In the 1970s, increases in middle-class married women's employment, particularly among white women coincided with the inclusion of articles in popular women's magazines on the trend and its implications. Immediately apparent in these articles was a concern for the connections between married women's employment and her marriage and children. Unlike the literature of the 1960s, however, articles in the 1970s were more positive about the possibilities for married women to work. Reporting the results of a series of surveys and reports presented at a recent conference, an article in the December 1978 issue of *Ladies Home Journal* found married women were happy to work for wages. Other articles interviewed working wives to uncover "a big switch in American family life" that occurred as nearly half of the women in the United States became wage earners during the 1970s. While some of the women cited in these articles felt more personally satisfied or fulfilled because of their work, others felt that if they had started working when they were younger, rather than waiting until their children were in grade school, they might enjoy their employment more. Other women were more pessimistic in their outlook on their wage employment, emphasizing economic necessity over desire to work. These and other magazine articles supported the notion that across the 1960s and 1970s, attitudes towards women's employment changed to accommodate women balancing a career with a family.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Geraldine Carro, "The Wage-Earning Mother: What Working means to Her Marriage, Her Kids – Her Life," *Ladies Home Journal* Vol. 95 (December 1978), 56; Elisabeth Keiffer, "What

Perhaps the most dominating feature of coverage of married women's employment in popular women's magazines was the expectation of a wife's double burden. When asking why women assumed the dual burden of earning and income and performing domestic tasks, women cited economic motives first and personal fulfillment or satisfaction second.<sup>61</sup> Some married women enjoyed the challenges of working for wages and working at home. Sheila, a teacher's aide in her mid forties with school age children said of her double burden, "Right now I have the best of both worlds."<sup>62</sup> While some women thrived in working two jobs, they also faced and understood the expectations of domestic work. A 1978 *Ladies Home Journal* article labeled [married] women with children and paid jobs "Time Crunch Mother."

The most frequent criticism of employed wives in popular women's magazines was that their husbands did not help them enough with the domestic tasks.<sup>63</sup> While this critique of marriage resembled that of liberal and working-class feminists, the moral of the double burden in popular women's magazines differed. Whereas feminists stressed sharing domestic tasks, the message of the double burden in popular magazines was that women retained the ultimate

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Happens to Marriage When a Wife Goes Back to Work," *Good Housekeeping* (October 1975), 100. Scholarly research on women's employment and presentation of this in popular women's magazines confirms a shift in attitudes. See e.g. Geise, "The Female Role in Middle Class Women's Magazines," 51-62, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 142; Lovelle Ray, "The American Wome in Mass Media: How Much Emancipation and What Does It Mean?" In Constantina Siflios-Rothschild (ed.), *Toward a Sociology of Women* (Lexington, MA: Xerox Corporation, 1972), 41-62, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 174-175; Susan Henry, "Juggling the Frying Pan and the Fire: The Portrayal of Employment and Family Life in Seven Women's Magazines, 1975-1982," *Social Science Journal* 21 (October 1984), 87-107, In Humphreys, *American Women's Magazines*, 147-148.

<sup>61</sup> Carro, "The Wage Earning Mother," 56.

<sup>62</sup> Keiffer., "What Happens to Marriage...?" 101.

<sup>63</sup> Carro, "The Wage Earning Mother," 59.

responsibility for juggling career and family. *Ladies Home Journal* Editor Lenore Hershey said of a wife's decision to work, "She no longer has to justify that choice [...] That's the true liberation: every woman can select the pattern that's right for her without apology – and make it work."<sup>64</sup> This distinction characterized the fundamental differences between feminist critiques of marriage during the 1960s and 1970s and the messages about marriage that filtered down in popular women's magazines. While many feminists advocated broad based reform to marriage through challenges to the sociocultural, economic, sexual, and legal facets of marriage, these messages morphed into something different in popular magazines. Instead of institutional and societal reform along with individual initiatives to facilitate change, women's magazines stressed only individual initiatives for reforming marriage. As a result, the discrepancies between feminist critiques of marriage and mainstream reception pitted equality of outcome against equality of opportunity.

### **Maintaining Monogamy**

Unlike some radical feminists, mainstream women's magazines highly favored monogamous marriage. In an October 1963 article in a regular column of *Good Housekeeping* titled "My Problem and How I Solved It," an engaged woman described her fears of spending the rest of her life with only one man. After realizing that she was not yet ready for marriage, she called off the engagement. About a year later, she became engaged again and reported that she

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<sup>64</sup> Carro, "The Wage-Earning Mother," 164.

felt “sure” about being married.<sup>65</sup> In a November article from the same year, a woman married for eight years expressed her disillusionment with her husband, whom she could not fault for anything in particular but a lack of excitement within her marriage. Consequently, she decided to date another man, with whom “[f]or the first time in a long time I felt young and gay, and adventurous” while not telling her husband. After becoming more involved, her husband put her at a crossroads regarding their marriage; she decided to stay with him. Her husband espoused the two fold marriage moral of the story that swayed her opinion: “a good marriage isn’t the same as an exciting romance” and “I love you.”<sup>66</sup> In the late 1960s, Harriet Van Horne asserted that evolving standards of sexual relations that broke down monogamous marriage destabilized society. Of the contemporary disfavor toward monogamy, she wrote: “the prevailing theory that fidelity simply doesn’t work in 1969 is one of the many idiocies that we should erase from the credo of the young. It works a great deal better than infidelity.”<sup>67</sup> The issue of divorce was obscured in women’s magazines with the exception of the possibility of ‘emotional divorce’ in which, generally the wife, felt estranged from her husband.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>65</sup> “My Problem and How I Solved It #16: I Broke My Engagement,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 157 (October 1963): p. 12+

<sup>66</sup> “My Problem and How I Solved It #17: Flight From Marriage,” 12+

<sup>67</sup> Harriet Van Horne, “Are We the Last Married Generation?” *McCall’s*, Vol. 96 (May 1969), 141.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Jo Coudert, “Making a Weak Marriage Work,” *Ladies Home Journal*, Vol. 83 (May 1966): 106-108; Stanley Frank, “The Most Delicate Problem in Marriage,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 164 (March 1967): 87+; “My Problem and How I Solved It: For the Sake of the Children,” *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 167 (August 1968): 12+

The presentation, content, and subject matter of mainstream women's magazine articles contrasted with much of the second wave feminist writing. While most of the liberal and radical feminists who critiqued marriage attempted to apply their analysis to all women, writers for mainstream women's magazines more frequently told individual stories about their marriage experiences. Wide sweeping, universal analysis of the relationship between marriage and women were not found in women's magazines. The subject matter of mainstream women's magazines carefully skirted the thorniest structural issues that radical feminists posed with marriage, such as monogamy, heterosexuality, and marital violence. While women's magazines did address several of the same issues as feminists did regarding marriage, including married women's employment, child-rearing, domestic labor, and interracial marriage, they did so in a way that shut off consideration of radical efforts to restructure power relations within marriages. Finally, the language found in mainstream women's magazines was quite conciliatory and apologetic regarding women's troubles within marriage. Most of the articles showed women uneasily solving their problems or sacrificing their personal interests for their husband and families. The conservatism of popular women's magazines indicated that much of American society took strong issue with feminist attempts to radically restructure the foundation of society.

Rather than reading these women's magazines as reactionary and hostile to change, viewing the change that they displayed in their own pages over the two decades confirm that some feminist critiques of marriage had reached into mainstream society in profound ways. Across the 1960s and 1970s, the issues of

marriage in women's magazines grew in their diversity and questioning of the institution. New subjects of married women's employment, interracial marriage, sexuality and marital fidelity, and married identities indicated that deeper considerations of how married women existed in marriage were warranted. In some instances, magazine writers challenged the prevailing sociocultural discourses on marriage by promoting greater fluidity in gender roles. Mainstream women's magazines generally disengaged themselves from second wave feminism but could not ignore some of the feminists' basic critiques of marriage.



## CONCLUSION

By the late 1970s, feminist critiques of marriage had waned as feminists moved to challenge other facets of women's discrimination and societal backlash against activist agendas set in. The diversification of second wave feminism brought a myriad of analyses of marriage that touched sociocultural, economic, sexual, and legal issues. Many feminists shared convictions that marriage discriminated against women in ways that it did not do so to men. Feminists differed, however, on which elements of marriage they deemed in need of change and by what means they should be changed. Complex and intersecting issues of gender, race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation shaped feminist critiques of marriage and produced conflicts between various groups of feminists. As a result, no unified, coherent feminist analysis of marriage emerged during second wave feminism. In spite of this, the critiques that feminists offered indicated that marriage had become increasingly incompatible in several fundamental ways with married women's identities.

The variety of issues that liberal and radical feminists, feminists of color, lesbian feminists, and working-class feminists raised produced valuable results. Nancy Cott argues in *Public Vows* that marriage "is the vehicle through which the apparatus of state can shape the gender order."<sup>1</sup> Through their analysis of sociocultural and psychological issues, liberal and radical feminists in particular brought gender as a category of analysis to bear on marriage. They demonstrated that marriage existed as a politicized personal relationship where gendered roles,

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<sup>1</sup> Cott, *Public Vows*, 3.

racial bias, and heterosexist orientation created a volatile and discriminatory institution. Feminists identified women as a sex-class, understood gender as politicized, and viewed the family as a container for women's societal status. Rather than being anti-family, these feminists continued to sanction the existence of the institution but sought to fundamentally remake it on egalitarian grounds instead of on principles of gendered obligations.<sup>2</sup> Some feminists supporting separatism sought to abolish marriage, but this was a position that few advocated. Instead, feminists remained attuned to the fact that nearly all women married at some point in their lives. Measuring the effectiveness of feminist sociocultural critiques of marriage is certainly not easy. Since the second wave of feminism ended in the early 1980s, the social context of marriage has undoubtedly changed. In her introduction to Alice Echols' *Daring to Be Bad*, Ellen Willis recognized "Women need marriage less than they once did."<sup>3</sup> The ability of feminists to inspire such commentary indicated that while not unified in their analysis of marriage, they were persuasive in unloosening women's bondage to this institution.

Several problematic issues of marriage emerged following second wave feminism. These issues included the growth in the number of women facing a double burden of domestic and waged labor, gender neutral divorce laws, domestic violence, and same-sex marriage. Feminists worked diligently to

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<sup>2</sup> Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 125. Some feminists supporting separatism sought to abolish marriage, but this was a position that few advocated. Instead, feminists remained attuned to the fact that nearly all women married at some point in their lives.

<sup>3</sup> Echols, *Daring to B Bad*, xiii.

challenge the paradigm of the white middle-class heterosexual housewife who never divorced. While noticeable breaches in the armor were made, particularly in married women breaking out of the household and pursuing divorce, unintended consequences occurred.

Married women's employment increased dramatically from 1960 to 1980 and featured noticeable benefits and drawbacks. For the liberal and radical feminists who had often advocated for married women to engage in paid labor, the increase in the percentage of employed married women from 36% to 65% between these years meant that many women had broken away from the role of housewife.<sup>4</sup> Since 1960, the percentage of female headed households, single parent households, cohabitating couples, and unmarried mothers with children have increased.<sup>5</sup> The family structure of American society surely changed during the period of second wave feminism. Yet, for the married women who made up the majority of new participants in the paid labor force during the 1960s and 1970s their paid employment 'complemented' rather than replaced their household labor since married women continue to have children and complete domestic tasks.<sup>6</sup> By the early 1980s, white middle-class women had come to share in the double burden of labor that women of color and working-class women had already faced. Rather than generating some balance in sex-specification of housework, married women's employment has generally given them more work to do.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 166-167

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 151-154.

<sup>6</sup> Van Horn, *Women, Work, and Fertility*, 4-5; Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 172-173

Issues of sexuality and marriage have continued to be in the spotlight since the era of second wave feminism. One of the most troubling dilemmas for feminists and other activist women in the early 1980s was the continued existence of the marital rape exemption throughout the United States. Only in 1984, in *People v. Liberta*, did a state finally declare the marital rape exemption illegal; other states reluctantly followed and by the late 1990s all states had eliminated sanction of marital rape.<sup>7</sup> The most prominent contemporary issue to emerge from second wave feminist critiques of marriage was same sex-marriage. A wide variety of literature has been produced on the subject of same-sex marriages and has exhaustively debated the rationale and merits of legalizing same sex marriages.<sup>8</sup> One of the more interesting questions is why lesbians decided to pursue legal recognition of their unions as marriages when they had in the 1960s and 1970s devoted such little attention to this issue. In *Why Marriage?* historian George Chauncey poses three answers: the growth of acceptance of gays and lesbians as individuals, the emergence of AIDS and the lesbian baby boom as motivators for stabilizing couples and families, and greater understanding of the legal discrimination of the domestic partnerships of gays and lesbians versus heterosexual marriages.<sup>9</sup> Marital sexuality has become the subject of a variety of popular literature geared toward couples looking to improve their sexual lives but has otherwise lost much of the attention that it gained from feminists during the second wave.

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<sup>7</sup> *People v. Liberta*, 474 N.E. 2d 567 (N.Y. 1984) In Ryan, "The Sex Right," 988-990.

<sup>8</sup> The following have been useful in my study and extend into more contemporary issues: Case, "Couples and Coupling in the Public Sphere;" Murdoch and Price, *Courting Justice*; Chauncey, *Why Marriage?*

<sup>9</sup> Chauncey, *Why Marriage?* 95-116.

The state of marriage law is ambivalent, contradictory, and uneven. Gender bias in naming and the age of consent for marriage have remained relatively unchanged since the late 1970s. It has become easier and more common for women to not assume their husbands' surname upon marriage. The difference in age of consent between women and men has gradually eroded. Marriage contracts, a briefly popular idea in the early to mid 1970s have not gained widespread legal sanction. Since the advent of no-fault divorce in California in 1970, nearly all states have subsequently adopted this framework for their own divorce laws. Nonetheless, one of the most troubling stories of marriage in the three decades since the end of second wave feminism has been how gender neutral, no-fault divorce laws have harmed women. Research has confirmed that a feminization of poverty has occurred with the rise in divorce rates and growth of female headed households.<sup>10</sup> Other avenues of law, particularly regarding distribution of child support and alimony, have improved for women, but much work remains to be done.

Mainstream women's magazines served as an important barometer of the extent to which feminist critiques of marriage entered mainstream media and integrated themselves into mainstream values. These magazines appeared noticeably more conservative in their treatment of feminist challenges to marriage than what the social history of the 1960s and 1970s suggested. Their disinterest in engaging with second wave feminism on issues of marriage existed for two primary reasons. Due to business concerns, which tailored the content of these

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<sup>10</sup> Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution*; 343-401; DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, 177; Peterson, *Women, Work, and Divorce*, 1-4; Ogden, *The Great American Housewife*, 210-216.

periodicals to align with the demographics of advertisers' products, and the values of their predominantly middle-class white married female readership, most mainstream women's magazines remained quite hesitant to embrace feminist critiques of marriage. When women's magazines did contain articles that critiqued the status quo within marriage, the subject matter, form, and language that they adopted demonstrated their reluctance to embrace feminist critiques.

During the period of second wave feminism, marriage served as a locus for a sustained, multi-voice critique of the place of women in American society. Feminist critiques uncovered the multiple and intersecting sociocultural, economic, sexual, and legal features of sex-discrimination within the institution of marriage. Feminists argued for reform, reconstruction, or abolition of marriage but disagreed on the most effective methods and necessary issues to consider in achieving their visions. Popular women's magazines encountered feminism but remained reluctant to embrace calls for a widespread challenge to marriage. Instead, these periodicals revised feminist critiques of marriage to fit what they thought were the sociocultural, economic, and sexual politics of their consumers. While the topics of the articles in popular women's periodicals broached many of the subjects of feminist activism and intellectualism, their treatment was noticeably more conservative. Arguably the greatest effects of feminist critiques of marriage in their own time were toward fostering married women's employment and uncovering the legal discrimination married women faced. Beyond second wave feminism, feminist critiques of marriage have inspired

greater gender consciousness that have more fully raised issues of domestic violence, same-sex marriage, and child care.



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*Killer Dyke*

*Lesbian Tide*

*The Lesbian Trap*

*It Ain't Me Babe*

*Off Our Backs*

*Rat*

*Second Coming*

*Sisters*

*Through the Looking Glass*

*Wildflowers*

*Womankind*

*Women and the Revolution*

*Women's Press*

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