

A HISTORY OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE
IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY UNITED STATES

MAKING MARRIAGE
work

KRISTIN CELELLO

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The University of
North Carolina Press
CHAPEL HILL



KRISTIN CELELLO

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For Carl

How exactly did the rhetoric of the factory
become the default language of coupledness?

—LAURA KIPNIS, 2004

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MAKING MARRIAGE WORK



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INTRODUCTION

MAKING MARRIAGE WORK

Nestled in an article about St. Petersburg, Russia, in the July 28, 2003, issue of the *New Yorker* is a Mick Stevens cartoon that pokes fun at the mores of contemporary American relationships.¹ It features two well-dressed, white, heterosexual couples walking toward one another on a city street. On the left, the female member of the couple rides on the man's shoulders. On the right, the woman carries the man. The latter woman, with an infuriated look on her face, exclaims to her mate: "Now *there's* a relationship that's working." The cartoon thus cleverly transforms what sociologists refer to as the "emotion work" of personal relationships into a physical burden.² In a similar manner, the drawing gently mocks the gender norms associated with such endeavors. The angry woman's comment is funny because it acknowledges the novelty of her male counterpart's efforts. She expects (however reluctantly) to shoulder the weight of her relationship and is thus jealous of the other woman's free "ride."

Stevens's cartoon assumes that *New Yorker* readers are readily conversant with one of the most sacred rules of personal relationships, and especially marriages, in the early twenty-first century: they require effort on the part of one or both of the partners in order to succeed. The pairing of "marriage" and "work" is so pervasive and



"Now there's a relationship that's working!"

Mick Stevens's cartoon from the *New Yorker* transforms the emotional burden of working on a relationship into a physical one. © The New Yorker Collection 2003 Mick Stevens from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.

reflexive that it is difficult to imagine a time in which this was not a guiding maxim of American unions. Before the twentieth century, however, Americans did not work on their marital relationships. Rather, the "marriage as work" formula became popular in response to specific changes in marriage patterns, most notably the growing incidence of divorce in the white middle class. Furthermore, what it meant to work at your marriage, as well as the question of who performed this work, was by no means static, and, indeed, frequently contested. Beneath the seemingly timeless quality of this common wisdom, in other words, lies a far more complicated story with significant ramifications for how Americans thought about and went about being married in the twentieth-century United States.

This book, then, explores how Americans came to understand

marriage as an institution that couples, and especially wives, needed to work at in order to succeed. Beginning in the 1920s, a diverse group of experts defined and shaped the character of marital work in response to heightened fears about an increase in divorce and family breakdown. While these experts promised new levels of companionship and intimacy for married men and women, by the 1950s a successful marriage was, quite simply, one that did not end in divorce. Even when second-wave feminists posed a significant challenge to this state of affairs in the 1960s and 1970s, they rarely denied that work was an important element in any marital relationship. Decades of visits with marriage counselors, of reading advice columns in magazines and newspapers, and of watching portrayals of marriage and divorce on film had ingrained the “marriage as work” formula in the minds and lives of American women and men.

Two interrelated forces decisively influenced this history: deep-seated anxiety about divorce, on the one hand, and Americans’ desire to have stronger, more satisfying marital relationships, on the other. While historians most frequently treat marriage and divorce as distinct areas of inquiry, this book demonstrates the centrality of the concerns and the debates about divorce to the history of contemporary American marriage.³ Throughout the twentieth century, Americans demonstrated great faith in marriage, even as they simultaneously worried that the institution was on the verge of collapse. The knowledge that every marriage had the potential to end in divorce (the United States had one of the highest divorce rates in the world throughout the period in question) clearly influenced the efforts of experts to strengthen the institution. The desire to avoid divorce and to be happily married, in turn, led American couples to seek out the experts’ advice and to embrace the idea that hard work could save their relationships.

Experts and the public alike, therefore, engaged in a constant negotiation between trying to hold on to “traditional” relationships and transforming marriage into a thoroughly modern institution that could survive in the face of prevalent and relatively accessible divorce. The ongoing nature of this process points to the importance of analyz-

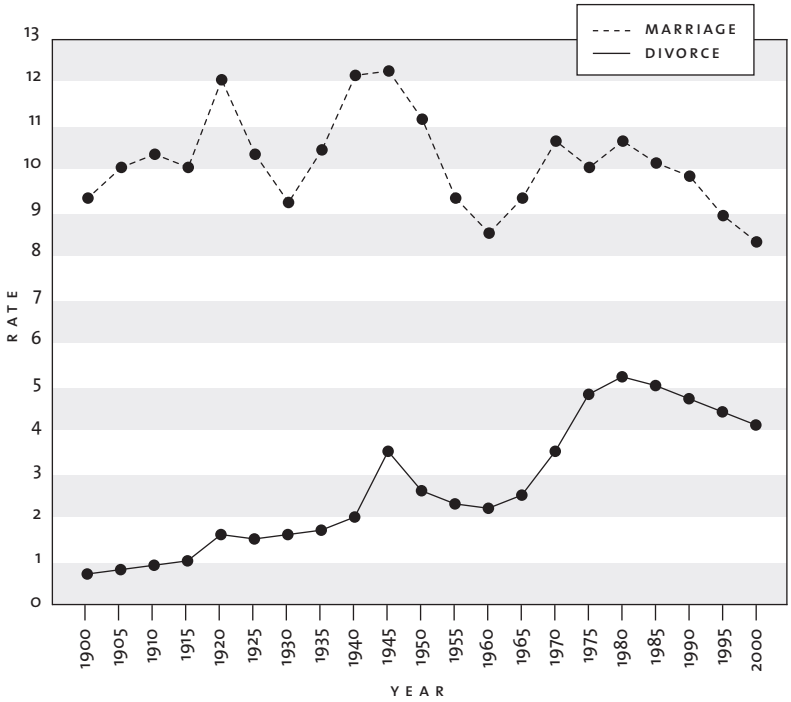


FIGURE ONE MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATES IN THE UNITED STATES (rate per 1,000 population), 1900–2000. Rates for 1900–1965 are from U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *100 Years of Marriage and Divorce Statistics*; rates for 1970–2000 are from <[http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/o8s0077 .pdf](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/o8s0077.pdf)> (accessed February 29, 2008).

ing both continuity and change when studying the history of marriage in the United States. In the 1980s and 1990s, historians looked to combat a widespread public nostalgia for the “simpler” gender and family norms of the 1950s. In this vein, Elaine Tyler May argued that the decade did not represent the last gasp of traditional family life and rather was something new altogether, the product of political and social conditions specific to the postwar world, notably the Cold War. Jessica Weiss, in turn, demonstrated that the “parents of the baby boom” faced many of the same dilemmas about their relationships and how to raise their children that their offspring would in later decades. Recently, Stephanie Coontz has offered a revision of these analyses, asserting that the marriage patterns of the 1950s represented the “culmination” of a love ideal based on, among other characteristics, a male breadwinner/female homemaker division of labor. After the 1950s, however, patterns in family life changed so irrevocably that, in Coontz’s opinion, Americans have to come to terms with the fact that they will “never reinstate marriage as the primary source of commitment and caring in the modern world.”⁴

These interpretations, while compelling, all tend to overstate the extent of transformation at any given time, thereby neglecting to identify and to analyze certain recurring themes in contemporary American marriage discourse. Coontz’s analysis of this history before the 1950s, for instance, is a welcome corrective to those studies that, intent on challenging romanticized notions about marriages of the era, either simplify what came before or fail to consider the first half of the twentieth century—and even earlier—altogether. It is clear, however, that expert attempts in the 1920s and 1930s to address the growing incidence of divorce among the white middle class had a decisive influence on marriage in the postwar era. Similarly, many Americans still aspired to be happily married after the 1950s, even if they lived together before they tied the knot or were more willing to consider divorce if their relationships faltered. Experts, for their part, continued to expound the value of marital work, even if the question of who ideally should perform this work and what it should entail was, at times, politicized and hotly debated.

Who were these experts and how influential were they? This book uses the term “expert” loosely, in that it includes men and women from the scholarly world and those with little or no formal schooling in the social sciences or related fields.⁵ What defines their expertise is not the extent of their education but the authoritative way in which they present their views, particularly in the popular media. Paul Popenoe, who founded one of the nation’s first marriage counseling clinics in the early 1930s and who gained widespread fame through his appearances on radio and television and in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* in the 1950s, for instance, was a horticulturalist.⁶ John Gray, whose best-selling book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, birthed an advice-giving empire in the 1990s, earned his Ph.D. in psychology from an institution that was later shut down by the state of California for being a diploma mill.⁷ Notwithstanding their lack of traditional credentials (and much to the dismay of many of their more highly trained colleagues), both men portrayed themselves as marriage experts; judging by their ubiquitous presence in the media of their respective eras, everyday Americans accepted them as such. Similarly, the scholars discussed in this study, such as psychologist Clifford Rose Adams (author of the midcentury advice column “Making Marriage Work”) and feminist sociologist Arlie Hochschild, have received considerable attention outside academia.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know the myriad motivations that prompted these men and women to pursue careers as marriage and family life experts, although their personal experiences do sometimes indicate what inspired them. Sociologist Willard Waller, for example, wrote an influential 1930s book about the psychological effects of divorce after he personally went through a painful marital dissolution. Most of the experts considered in this book, however, did share common intellectual ground. First, they believed that marriage was an essential American institution and that its fortunes paralleled those of American society at large. Second, they thought that marriage was, or was about to be, in full-blown crisis. Third, most felt that the future of the nation’s marital health rested on the shoulders of the white middle class, especially its women. Finally,

they believed that they could develop strategies that would fortify marriage and would assure its viability for ensuing generations.

In their efforts to spread their ideas, marriage experts both benefited from and contributed to the nation's budding fascination with expertise and therapeutic practices.⁸ The phenomenal growth of the marriage counseling profession—from just a few small clinics in the early 1930s to the plethora of marital therapy sessions attended by several million couples each year at the end of the century—is compelling evidence of this trend. Recent work, most notably Rebecca L. Davis's exploration of the complex origins of the marriage counseling movement as well as its diversity of approaches and services as it gained in reputation, has filled a significant gap in our knowledge about the profession's history.⁹ This study broadens the existing scholarship by examining how marriage counselors formulated and sold their craft to the American public, ably adapting along the way to vast changes—some of which they helped to create—in the nation's marital landscape.

Of course, the married men and women who attended counseling sessions, as well as those who read prescriptive marriage literature, did not always follow the advice given to them by the experts. They decided what was relevant to their situations and, at times, discarded the experts' suggestions altogether.¹⁰ In the 1950s, when the "best" and most commonly proffered advice was that couples should avoid divorce at all costs, for instance, approximately one in four American marriages (close to 400,000 per year) nevertheless ended in divorce.¹¹ Still, the fact that so many husbands and wives demonstrated a willingness to work on their relationships, especially by seeking professional help for their problems, is evidence that they believed that experts could assist them in solving difficulties and in reaching new heights of marital satisfaction.

Did experts and their advice, in fact, lead Americans to expect too much of their marriages, thereby contributing to the rise in divorce over the twentieth century? This certainly was not their intention. If anything, most experts believed that they were working to correct the "problem" of the nation's overly romantic notions

about married life. They wanted husbands and wives to recognize that, at times, sustaining a marriage would be a laborious undertaking. But in order to convince Americans that it was worthwhile to work on their relationships, experts also had to promise that this effort would yield tangible rewards, namely, improved—albeit, they cautioned, still imperfect—unions. Because they could not control how Americans interpreted such promises, expert attempts to lower expectations about marriage may have, in certain circumstances, inadvertently raised them instead.

Note, however, that higher hopes for marriage did not automatically translate into more divorces. A combination of factors, some specific to each marital situation and others related to larger social trends, contributed to the rate of divorce at any given time. Taking a longer view, it is clear that experts—even those who eventually came to believe that some unions were untenable and thus best dissolved—did far more to discourage divorce than to encourage it. Assuredly many more Americans would have divorced if they had not believed in the importance of working hard in order to stay married and if the decision to divorce had not been viewed, on some level, as a personal failure to perform this vital work.

Much of the appeal of the working at marriage formula was its universality; any married person who aspired to have a successful marriage could do so by trying hard enough. Translated into everyday life, however, this formula became far less inclusive. Experts assumed that women needed marriage more than men, for both financial and emotional reasons. This assumption led them to direct much of their advice to women and to hold them accountable for their marital successes and failures. Practical considerations also influenced their approach: for a variety of reasons (during wartime, for instance), wives were an easier audience to reach than their husbands. Many women, in turn, proved to be willing consumers of what the experts had to say. Even after many feminists argued in favor of a redistribution of marital responsibilities in the 1970s, evidence suggests that women continued to take on the majority of

these tasks. Many husbands, of course, did care deeply about their relationships and tried as hard as their wives to solve marital problems. Still, throughout the twentieth century marriage was, most frequently, women's work.

The seeming simplicity of this formula also masked important assumptions about race and class. Most experts were white and middle class and expected their audience to be so, too. Once having a "working" marriage became a badge of middle-class status and accomplishment (especially for women), it stands to reason that this development influenced how Americans who lived in this mold thought about those who did not, such as unmarried African American mothers. Their attitudes, as well as the consequences of their perceptions, are difficult to document; this question ultimately falls outside the purview of this book, although it remains an important area for further research. It is evident, however, that the experts' messages reached beyond their target audience. After World War II, for example, African American magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet* also stressed the importance of working at marriage, frequently citing the same experts who appeared in the general media.

Throughout the twentieth century, therefore, experts succeeded in introducing the idea that marriage required work into mainstream discussions about American marriage. Chapter 1 examines the origins of this process. In the nineteenth century, most upper- and middle-class husbands and wives dutifully performed their assigned marital roles and hoped that their unions would provide some level of personal satisfaction. Social and financial pressures dictated that they had little recourse if their marriages failed to fulfill their romantic expectations. As these pressures loosened—although by no means disappeared—in the early twentieth century, a rising number of spouses signaled a willingness to terminate unions that they deemed to be unsatisfying. While most religious authorities continued to discuss the immorality of divorce, a new group of scientifically minded experts stepped in to address the pressing problems associated with the country's seemingly faltering marital relationships.

These experts argued that married men and women were asking too much of marriage and were thus overeager to terminate otherwise viable relationships.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, marriage experts developed strategies to spread this message. They taught marriage education courses, founded marriage counseling clinics, and launched research projects dedicated to predicting marital success or failure. Chapter 2 explores their successful entrée onto a considerably larger stage, as they skillfully injected themselves into a fiery debate about the desirability of “war marriages” (those unions contracted by young men and women because of the now-or-never aspect of wartime conditions). While the experts proved largely unable to put a brake on the record-setting number of marriages during the war years, their opinions about whether these relationships could be made “to work” nevertheless received extensive coverage in the national media. The answer was “yes,” as long as young brides were willing to dedicate themselves fully to this effort. After concerns about the fate of American marriages intensified during a postwar divorce panic, experts solidified their place in the national conversation about the health of the nation’s relationships.

Chapter 3 examines the flourishing marriage advice industry of the postwar years. In magazine columns such as “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” books such as *Help Your Husband Stay Alive!* and television shows such as *Divorce Hearing*, experts emphasized the many facets of wifely work and the potentially tragic consequences of failing to perform these duties. The experts who offered relationship guidance in the 1950s, however, faced a dilemma. While they believed that they could help married couples to achieve new heights of relationship satisfaction, they remained intensely concerned about the looming threat of marital breakdown. Their solution was to tout the efficacy of their strategies while setting the bar for marital success quite low. Experts thus argued that no problem—be it infidelity, alcoholism, or physical abuse—was so severe that it could not be overcome, especially once the wife recognized her culpability for her marital troubles and decided to ameliorate the situation.

Changes in divorce laws in the late 1960s and early 1970s exacerbated a general apprehension that Americans did not appreciate the importance of finding a mate and staying married. Chapter 4 considers the intense debates about the future of marriage in the United States during these years. While some radical feminists called for the abolition of marriage altogether, many other feminists struggled to redistribute marital work in an equitable manner. They also challenged any expert who argued that wives should hold their unions together at all costs. Feminist efforts, of course, did not meet with unqualified approbation, and many social conservatives strenuously argued that marriage was rightfully women's work and that wives could do even more to improve their marriages. That men and women from opposite sides of the political spectrum made the nature of marital work a key point of contention in how they viewed the institution's future demonstrates, in turn, the pivotal role that such work came to play in shaping marriage and divorce in the twentieth-century United States.

The final chapter argues that debates about marriage and its durability only intensified in the final decades of the twentieth century, especially as more married women pursued careers outside the home and the divorce rate (while down from its all-time high in the late 1970s) remained a hot-button political and social issue. As the men and women of the baby boom generation married and started their own families, many placed a renewed emphasis on the values of intimacy and commitment. They signaled their willingness to work on their relationships, and they visited marriage counselors in record numbers. In spite of the egalitarian language that emerged from the debates about marital work in the 1970s, however, evidence from the 1980s and 1990s suggested a continuing disparity between men's and women's marital roles. On the cusp of the twenty-first century, in other words, finding ways to maintain satisfying marriages remained extremely important to American wives.

Few would dispute that the institution of marriage was, and remains today, a vital part of American life. The demographics of marriage alone make this case. Throughout the twentieth century,

approximately 65 to 75 percent of the adult population in any given year was married, widowed, or divorced. In 1900 this proportion translated to almost 32 million individuals. By 2000 the number was more than 153 million.¹² To better understand the lives of these millions of married Americans—and indeed, given the demographics, to understand the twentieth-century American experience—we need to recognize the social, cultural, and political forces and ideas that shaped their world. *Making Marriage Work* explains how one such important idea, that marriage requires work, became part of the collective American consciousness. While not every American read popular advice literature or visited a marriage counselor, the totality of the interaction between these forms and twentieth-century Americans helped construct a national language and dialogue about marriage. When Americans go to bookstores today to buy *Making Marriage Work for Dummies*, they are participating in and perpetuating this conversation and history, just as their parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents did before them.¹³

THE CHAOS OF MODERN MARRIAGE

EXPERTS, DIVORCE, AND THE ORIGINS
OF MARITAL WORK, 1900–1940

On May 3, 1930, a large advertisement for Robert Z. Leonard's film *The Divorcée* asked the readers of the *Washington Post*, "Has Love a Chance in Today's Hot Pursuit of Pleasure?"¹ Loosely based on Ursula Parrott's 1929 novel *Ex-Wife*,² the film starred Norma Shearer, who won an Oscar for her portrayal of the title character. From the opening scene in which Jerry, played by Shearer, boldly insists that she and Ted (Chester Morris) get married and "make a go of it" as equals, the filmmakers signaled that Shearer's character was a quintessential "new woman," committed to a form of female equality and independence defined by male standards. Jerry's determination on this point is so strong, in fact, that upon discovering Ted's affair with another woman three years into their marriage, she promptly retaliates by having an extramarital sexual encounter of her own. Ted, after learning of her infidelity, demands a divorce. Jerry plainly has overestimated the extent of her equality—a sentiment echoed in the advertisement when it teased: "Her sin was no greater than his—but she was a woman!"³

Once again single, Jerry vows to enjoy her freedom and to keep her bed open to all men except for her ex-husband. She quickly, however, becomes dissatisfied and physically drained by her new life of sexual adventure. Escape presents itself in the form of a married friend named Paul (Conrad Nagel), who proposes to divorce his wife Dorothy (Judith Wood) so that he and Jerry can begin a new life together. Indeed, Dorothy is Jerry's counterpoint throughout the film. Whereas Jerry is beautiful, Dorothy has been tragically disfigured in a car accident on the night of Jerry and Ted's engagement. Jerry and Ted married for love, but Paul, who was heavily intoxicated when the accident occurred, married Dorothy only out of guilt. While Jerry accedes to Ted's insistence of a divorce, Dorothy refuses to concede marital defeat and will not give Paul the divorce he so desperately desires. Comparing herself to Dorothy, Jerry realizes the many ways that she has wronged her own union with Ted. Jerry thus arrives, as one reviewer explained, at "the realization that her own marriage has been a failure because she has not had the same determination [as Dorothy] to see it through."⁴ She resolves to find Ted, and the two have an emotional reunion in which they promise to make their new marriage a success.

By the conclusion of *The Divorcée*, Jerry—and by extension, the audience—have learned several lessons. First, Jerry's desire for marital equality is foolish and unrealistic. The film does not criticize a sex-based double standard; rather, its message is that in trying to emulate men, women can lose sight of what is truly important: love and marriage. The pitiful Dorothy is the true female center of the film—she is not beautiful, but she appreciates the value of being married and is willing to fight for Paul. Moreover, the film says, sexual freedom does not ensure happiness, especially for women. Prior to their mutual transgressions, Jerry and Ted plainly enjoy a fulfilling sexual relationship. Jerry's life as a wanton divorcée, however, is unsatisfying, and only a chance encounter with Paul prevents her from becoming a hardened seductress. Finally, while divorce is sometimes a necessity, it is also frequently the result of easily avoided misunderstandings. Only in reunification—a theme that under-



Jerry and Ted discuss their mutual infidelities in *The Divorcée*.
Courtesy of Getty Images.

standably became a popular Hollywood ending—can Jerry and Ted rediscover their former happiness and lead constructive lives.⁵

The Divorcée quickly became one of the “stand-out hits of the early summer season” of 1930, and popular demand extended its run throughout the nation.⁶ The media’s descriptions of the film—press coverage alternately described it as “a chapter out of modern life,” “a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production dealing with a great social problem,” and “the most sophisticated treatment of the question of divorce”—highlighted its varied appeal to audiences.⁷ By 1930 divorce had indeed become a reality of everyday American life. At the same time, however, many Americans were deeply anxious about what the escalating divorce rate meant for the family, women, and the very future of the nation. Such fears were fanned by an emergent group of experts who spent the first several decades of the twentieth century identifying a “crisis” in American marriage.⁸ These self-appointed

experts, some from within the academy and some with little or no formal training in sociology or related fields, came from different parts of the political and ideological spectrum. They agreed, however, that marriage (particularly for the white middle class) was in a period of crucial transition and that married couples could not handle this transition effectively on their own.⁹

The general belief that marriage was in trouble was hardly new. Social critics and clergyman, in fact, had been decrying a “marriage problem” for most of the nation’s history.¹⁰ But these early critics had focused their efforts on convincing the American public of the indissolubility of the marital union and, if this former effort failed, of the need for uniform divorce laws in order to prevent most divorces. By the 1920s, however, this debate had grown increasingly stale and the arguments ineffective.¹¹ The ostracism that had once accompanied the decision to divorce had subsided, and the voices of experts began to supplement, and in many cases replace, those of religious authorities in the national conversation about marriage in the United States.¹²

As the nineteenth-century understanding of marriage as a duty faded, experts worked to convince Americans to take an active interest in the health of their marriages. They focused much of their attention on women, the traditional guardians of the home and the individuals deemed primarily responsible for the continuing changes in family life. Experts believed that if marriage was going to be a “companionate” venture—a relationship based on love and satisfying sexual relations—divorce was an important safety valve for husbands and wives who were trapped in loveless unions. They hoped, however, that by studying marriage in an objective manner, they could develop strategies that would slow the rising divorce rate and, more important, improve the general quality of American marriages.¹³ To this end, experts launched research studies intended to quantify marital success and taught marriage courses at universities. Some even began to experiment with a European technique known as “marriage counseling,” anticipating that they could prevent both ill-advised unions and unnecessary marital breakups. These efforts, in

turn, laid the groundwork for a new understanding of what it meant to be married in the United States.

HISTORIANS HAVE LONG UNDERSTOOD the early decades of the twentieth century as an important turning point in the history of the family in general and marriage in particular. These were the years in which the family, in the words of two well-known sociologists at midcentury, completed its transition “from institution to companionship.”¹⁴ In the broadest terms, this transition meant that the emotional interaction of family members with one another took precedence over the family’s interaction with society at large, particularly as an economic unit of survival. This change was by no means sudden; rather, it represented a slow evolution that roughly mirrored the history of industrialization and urbanization, as well as the emergence of the white middle class throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵ Furthermore, descriptions of family change originated in an unabashedly white, upper- and middle-class, heterosexual perspective that permeated most, if not all, discussions of normative family life at this time and for decades to come.

The nineteenth-century idealization of married, romantic love was a key ideological origin of this transition. Stereotypes of Victorian prudery aside, many American men and women—especially those from more privileged economic backgrounds—clearly expected to have intimate, loving relationships with their chosen mates. During courtship, they exchanged impassioned letters and expressed hopes that their fervent feelings would not subside after marriage.¹⁶ Once married, they expected to place their obligations to one another and to their growing families above those to their extended families and their civic responsibilities. Nineteenth-century Americans, therefore, gradually began to view marriage as a central life experience from which they could derive happiness and forge satisfying personal bonds.¹⁷ This ideal, of course, was often difficult to achieve. The Victorian belief in the innate differences between men and women, in particular, impeded the full realization of mari-

tal intimacy and romance. Many husbands and wives, in turn, struggled to share common experiences and interests with their spouses.¹⁸

Nineteenth-century marriage advisers (primarily ministers and physicians) nevertheless regarded this new emphasis on love with a sense of trepidation.¹⁹ One root of their concern was the fact that many nineteenth-century Americans believed love to be an uncontrollable emotion. While they considered it to be a prerequisite for marriage, they did not necessarily believe that all love was eternal. If marital love was lost, no prescribed action could recapture the feeling.²⁰ Critics, therefore, tried to inject a more practical view of marriage into discussions of the institution. They argued that love was a choice and that young married couples could take concrete steps to ensure that their unions remained happy. In print, advisers reminded their readers that if these efforts failed, their marriage vows remained binding. In his midcentury advice manual *Bridal Greetings*, for instance, Methodist minister Daniel Wise asserted, “Remember that, however unsuited to each other you may be, the irrevocable covenant has been uttered. You are bound to each other for life; and both prudence and duty command the concealment of your dislikes, and the strongest efforts to conform to each other’s tastes.”²¹ It was desirable, in other words, to be content—rather than miserable—while fulfilling ones’ duties.

When nineteenth-century marriage advisers pointedly rejected the possibility of divorce, however, they betrayed a fear that not all Americans understood the sanctity of their marriage vows. This concern was not necessarily misplaced. Divorce, in a very limited form, had been available in the United States as early as the colonial era and spread in the years following the American Revolution. As historian Norma Basch explains, “No sooner, it seemed, did Americans create a rationale for dissolving the bonds of empire than they set about creating rules for dissolving the bonds of matrimony.”²² While the two acts—dissolution of empire and dissolution of marriage—existed on vastly different scales, the language used by the patriots and lawmakers to justify both was strikingly similar. Furthermore, the legitimization of divorce beyond the very strict rules of English

common law helped the American legal system to sever its dependence on the English model. The theoretical legitimization of divorce as a means of ending a “tyrannical” (or sexually promiscuous) union, in other words, was ingrained in a distinctly American legal system from its onset.

The mere legality of divorce, however, did not ensure that divorce was widely available or publicly condoned after the nation’s founding. Until well into the twentieth century, couples could not divorce legally by mutual consent. While divorce laws varied widely from state to state, “fault” divorce always required that one spouse prove that the other was guilty of adultery, desertion, or some other serious failing.²³ Until the mid-nineteenth century, an aggrieved spouse in many states had to petition his or her state legislature in the hopes of obtaining a divorce decree. Only as the number of petitions proliferated did legislators begin to move divorce cases into the courts.²⁴

The nation’s slowly rising divorce rate went largely unnoticed until the 1850s, when it became a rallying point for social critics who saw the rate as irrefutable evidence of a creeping moral decay in American life.²⁵ In the 1870s and 1880s, many state legislatures made their divorce laws more stringent in (unsuccessful) attempts to decrease the number of couples eligible for divorce. Their efforts became even more urgent once a Department of Labor study in the late 1880s confirmed that the United States led the world in divorce.²⁶ Interestingly, the conservative opposition to divorce rarely called for its prohibition. The potential for chaos if couples resorted to extra-legal means to end their marital unions, paired with the laws’ origins in the Revolution, ensured that calls for an outright ban were muted. Plus, conservatives did not have a ready alternative to divorce for unions in which spouses flouted moral convention by committing adultery or violently assaulting their partners. The common trope of the victimized wife seeking a divorce as a last resort was too powerful an image for divorce conservatives to assail. Instead, they fought unsuccessfully for the passage of a federal divorce law that would supersede the lax laws of so-called divorce havens such as Indiana, South Dakota, and, later, Nevada.

Some men and women in the nineteenth century did support relaxed divorce laws, but their views could hardly be classified as prodivorce. Several women's rights advocates, notably Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were in favor of divorce because it gave women a modicum of control in the face of an otherwise patriarchal institution. This stance proved divisive, however, as many other activists believed that divorce hurt women by leaving them without financial support.²⁷ Other divorce supporters asserted that the availability of divorce allowed for better marriages. They pleaded in its favor, therefore, not because the availability of divorce subverted existing marriage norms, but rather because its accessibility augmented the value of marriage to American society. Their primary argument was that since the marital union was perfectible, any unions that failed to reach this high standard should be dissolved, leaving the divorced couple to pursue perfection with better-suited mates. This camp held that, at the present time, divorce was necessary but envisioned a future in which it could be eradicated.²⁸ The exact details of this plan were vague, although they generally involved making it more difficult to get married. One commentator, for instance, felt that "the greatest social evil in our country is the marrying habit."²⁹

What was truly problematic about the "marrying habit" in the minds of many Americans was not only its relationship to the rising incidence of divorce but also the perception that the wrong types of people were getting married and having children. Specifically, a significant number of the nation's most educated women were remaining single because (among other reasons) they did not want to give up their careers—as would be expected of them—after marriage.³⁰ The fight for women's rights, as well, threatened to separate women from their traditional duties as wives and mothers. Furthermore, the birth rate among native-born, white citizens had been in a steady decline since the early nineteenth century, whereas the immigrant birth rate (considered far less desirable at the time) was quite high. President Theodore Roosevelt undoubtedly did not assuage such concerns when he popularized the idea that given present trends, native-born, white U.S. citizens were in danger of committing "race

suicide.”³¹ Such rhetoric, when paired with anxieties about the divorce rate, contributed to a full-fledged sense of crisis in regard to the state of family life in the United States.

Ironically, only a small percentage of Americans were getting divorced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to historian Nancy Cott, there were fewer than two divorces for every thousand marriages in 1870.³² Certainly, many other couples created their own extralegal marital “exits,” prompted either by relationship woes or other necessity.³³ The evidence nevertheless suggests that most Americans’ motivations for divorcing were hardly frivolous. Court records, for example, indicate that husbands and wives only sought to end their unions in extreme circumstances, such as when an offending spouse had long since disappeared, failed to provide basic necessities, or had committed adultery.³⁴

While many divorcing men and women also knew what the courts needed to hear in order to decide in their favor and may well have tailored their cases to fit such expectations, the low divorce rate nevertheless points to the serious personal and social consequences that accompanied the decision to divorce in Victorian America. At the time, after all, “evil” was the word most frequently paired with “divorce” in the popular press and in religious and legal circles.³⁵ Most popular fiction, in turn, portrayed divorce as shameful and emphasized its harmful effects on individuals and society at large.³⁶ The deleterious consequences of divorce were particularly evident for women. For wives without independent financial means, the infrequency of alimony allocations meant that divorce could lead to reduced circumstances or even destitution. Plus, divorce clearly represented a grave failure for any woman who embraced a Victorian identity as the moral guardian of the home, especially if her husband had succumbed to temptation and committed adultery. Many Americans believed divorced men and women to be morally suspect, and the divorced faced an uncertain social future based on their decision to end a marriage, no matter what had motivated them to do so. One sympathetic magazine editor lamented in 1905, “Although divorce is so common, there is still so wide and deep a feeling against divorce

that some of those who suffer most from marriage are reluctant to take that cure for their pain.”³⁷

In the years following the Great War, however, social observers had begun to note a changing public attitude about divorce and, by extension, about marriage. In 1925, for instance, a front-page article in *Harper's Magazine*, titled “The Chaos of Modern Marriage,” noted that “a complete change in attitude, often in the form of a violent revolt against the former ideals and customs affecting the marriage relation, is in full swing.”³⁸ The author was not referring solely to “sex radicals,” some of whom had gone so far as to question the desirability of monogamy and even to demand the abolition of marriage in the 1910s.³⁹ Rather, she also had in mind the many white, middle-class Americans who seemingly had stopped thinking of marriage as a duty and saw it instead as a path to personal happiness and fulfillment.

When commentators tried to explain this change, they immediately focused on women, whose role in society looked to be undergoing a rapid transformation. It appeared that more and more women were shedding the Victorian mantle of domesticity in exchange for active lives in the political and professional sphere. Different from many of the women who graduated from college in the late nineteenth century, the new woman of the 1920s did not feel a tension between a public life and heterosexual love relationships. She eschewed the homosocial world of the Victorian era and worked and played in decidedly mixed company. In many ways, white, middle-class women of this sort were merely coming up to speed with their working-class counterparts, who had no choice but to work in the public sphere and who frequently made dates with eligible men.⁴⁰ But it was the polished image of the new woman—like Jerry in *The Divorcée*—that captured the popular imagination, in music, print, and film, of 1920s America.

The public and experts came to believe that such women would not be satisfied with marriage relationships that followed traditional, patriarchal patterns; they wanted marriages based on love, sexual gratification, and equality. These women did not need husbands for

the sole purpose of providing for their material needs; they were, at least hypothetically, capable of doing so on their own. “The woman of today,” explained one commentator, “acknowledges no master. No matter what tricks life may play on her she can always earn her daily bread.”⁴¹ For the first time, as well, some middle-class wives expected to continue working until they had children. Family limitation and child spacing, in fact, were increasingly viable and respectable options thanks to broadening access to birth control.⁴²

Marriages that followed this model did represent a break from past marital patterns, but this break was hardly a clean one and vestiges of the nineteenth-century mold remained. The definition of equality within such marriages, for example, still held to a strict sex-role differentiation, whereby the husband was the primary breadwinner and the wife was the primary housekeeper and caregiver. Even if wives worked outside the home, husbands and experts alike expected that they would also take charge of all household-related duties.⁴³ Wives also had new duties such as making sure that their marriages remained fresh and fun by planning leisure activities, cultivating hobbies that appealed to their husbands, and fostering mutually enjoyable sexual relationships.⁴⁴ According to historian Stephanie Coontz, this new “companionate” ideal actually made many women “*more* dependent upon their relationships with men” than they had been in the Victorian era. Marriage, rather than friendships or other familial relationships, was now to be the primary emotional center of women’s lives.⁴⁵

A rising divorce rate accompanied the popularity of companionate marriage as Americans grew more willing to end their unions if marriage failed to live up to certain romantic expectations.⁴⁶ In 1922 the rate of divorce was 6.6 per 1,000 married women fifteen years of age and older. By 1940 the proportion had risen to 8.8. The divorce rate did decline briefly in the 1930s, primarily as a product of economic conditions rather than on account of a new respect for the sanctity of marriage. Many couples in the early years of the Depression simply did not have the financial means with which to divorce and opted for extralegal separations instead.⁴⁷

Divorce, in other words, was becoming more of a reality in the everyday lives of Americans. In their landmark 1929 sociological study *Middletown*, Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd found a general tolerance of divorce and observed, “The frequency of divorces and the speed with which they are rushed through have become commonplaces in Middletown.” The rise in the community’s divorce rate was, in fact, extraordinary: between 1921 and 1924 it was 622 percent higher than in the period between 1889 and 1892 (whereas the population had only grown by 87 percent between 1890 and 1920).⁴⁸

This same general attitude existed on the national scale. In 1920, when film star Mary Pickford, popularly known as “America’s sweetheart,” divorced her first husband so that she could marry fellow actor Douglas Fairbanks (whose wife had recently divorced him), she worried that she had irreparably damaged her career. This fear made sense, given that Pickford had gained fame for her on-screen portrayals of young girls and by maintaining a public facade of girlish innocence.⁴⁹ But even an official investigation into the circumstances of her divorce—the Nevada attorney general accused Pickford of fabricating her testimony during her divorce hearing and of colluding with her ex-husband—did not dampen the public’s enthusiasm for “Mary and Doug.”⁵⁰ Such large crowds greeted Pickford and Fairbanks when they returned from their honeymoon in Europe that they had to be “saved” by the police.⁵¹ Interest in the couple’s private life remained high throughout the 1920s (although, ironically, they would later divorce).⁵² Pickford’s fears that her fans would react poorly to the marriage, in other words, were unfounded. The story of her relationship with Fairbanks was a fairy tale, unsullied by any association with adultery, collusion, and failed marriages.

When Americans tried to explain the increasing frequency of divorce, they directed their attention toward women. Common wisdom held that just as new women were demanding more out of marriage, they were disinclined to remain in unsatisfying or loveless unions. According to the Lynds, the views of the people of Middletown on this subject mirrored those of popular advice columnist Dorothy Dix, who asserted, “The reason there are more divorces is

that people are demanding more of life than they used to. . . . In former times . . . they expected to settle down to a life of hard work . . . and to putting up with each other. Probably men are just as good husbands now as they ever were, but grandmother had to stand grandpa, for he was her meal ticket and her card of admission to good society. A divorced woman was a disgraced woman. . . . But now we view the matter differently. We see that no good purpose is achieved by keeping two people together who have come to hate each other.”⁵³ Dix’s observation was correct: more women than men instigated divorce cases in the 1920s and 1930s. It is important to note, however, that the legal culture—much more than any sort of newfound freedom for women—facilitated this “feminization” of divorce. Specifically, the system of fault divorce led many husbands and wives to manipulate their cases in order to fit the letter, if not the intent, of the law. They often found that the easiest way to end their marriages was for the wife to allege that she had been treated “cruelly” by her husband. While in some cases this cruelty was surely a reality, in others the allegation simply provided a means to an end.⁵⁴ Still, unflattering descriptions of women who changed husbands as frequently as they changed wardrobes made the rounds in the popular press.⁵⁵

Many Americans, therefore, made a sharp distinction between necessary and frivolous divorces. Public approval of divorce in the abstract (and for the rich and famous), in other words, did not always translate into a full-scale sanctioning of divorce in substance. It is clear, however, that the growing tolerance of divorce meant that many of the nation’s citizens were now out of step with the religious leaders who previously had led the national conversation about divorce. By the late 1920s most Protestant denominations had accepted that divorce was a social reality. But many Christian leaders still held to the belief expressed by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America that “divorce, even when allowed by the church, must be looked upon as a tragic and humiliating failure.”⁵⁶ The Catholic Church had proved even less willing to modify its views, and Pope Pius XI’s 1930 encyclical “On Christian Marriage” denounced the effects of modernity on marriage and roundly condemned divorce.⁵⁷

A new group of experts specifically interested in marriage and divorce stood poised to step into the gap between the views of religious authorities and the desires of couples looking to end their marriages.⁵⁸ They were not, however, the first specialists to demonstrate an interest in middle-class American family life. In the late nineteenth century, experts such as physician L. Emmett Holt and psychologist G. Stanley Hall had started to place an intensive focus on the nation's childrearing practices. They believed that American mothers needed professional guidance if they were going to raise healthy, happy children in the modern world; many mothers clearly embraced the opportunity to receive such advice. Interest in child psychology and study, in turn, grew even stronger in the years after the First World War.⁵⁹

Experts arrived at the topic of marriage and divorce somewhat later than that of parenting for a variety of reasons. The influential psychologist Lewis M. Terman, for example, was of the opinion that scientists had hesitated to investigate marriage precisely because the institution and religious traditions were so closely linked.⁶⁰ Along the same lines, universities and grant-making foundations were reluctant well into the 1920s to lend financial support to any study that dealt, even obliquely, with the question of sexual relations within marriage.⁶¹ A lack of public demand for experts' opinions about marriage and divorce also contributed to this delay, particularly because the general public had long assumed that divorce (and its handmaiden, desertion) were the problems of the very rich and the very poor.

By the late 1920s, however, it was clear that middle-class couples were just as likely to divorce as their wealthy or poverty-stricken contemporaries. The rapid growth of the social science professions and the growing popularity of Freud also helped to spark the growing academic and public interest in marriage.⁶² Still, the larger shift from religious to scientific authority was neither smooth nor complete. Religious leaders remained keenly engaged with these issues. Many experts, in turn, implicitly injected morality into their inquiries in spite of their claims of objectivity. This transition nevertheless had

dramatic consequences with regard to how Americans thought about the married and the divorced.

Experts, in particular, came to portray the divorced (both men and women) as psychologically damaged rather than morally suspect. Whereas previous studies of divorce had considered the causes (but not the effects) of marital breakdown, Willard W. Waller's 1930 study *The Old Love and the New: Divorce and Readjustment* was the first full-length monograph to consider the psyche of the divorced.⁶³ Waller's choice of topic was not coincidental; his first marriage had failed prior to his decision to pursue his graduate studies in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania.⁶⁴ In *The Old Love and the New*, Waller positioned himself as a compassionate chronicler of the lives of divorced men and women, stating in his introduction the hope that "if the reader emerges at the end with a better understanding of, and perhaps a little more sympathy for, those persons who do not stay married, this little volume will have served its purpose."⁶⁵ In his view, the divorced needed the public's empathy because they were profoundly unhappy individuals who rarely had the wherewithal to cope successfully with the end of their marriages. This opinion was hardly surprising, given that Waller himself had contemplated suicide after his wife had left him.⁶⁶ He thus urged his readers not to be fooled by the expressions of relief and gaiety regularly evinced by the newly divorced. Behind this facade, he argued, one could see the "chaos and trouble that reign within it." The divorced, in other words, were psychologically fragile and in need of mental "reorganization."⁶⁷

Waller believed that a select group of divorced men and women could overcome the psychological wounds of divorce and form healthy love relationships in the future. "We shall have need of all our optimism before we have finished," Waller warned, "but we may yet be able to conduct our people, or a few of them at least, through the mazes of conflict till we see them at last safely on the other side of hell."⁶⁸ Making it through this "hell" required a great deal of hard work and self-knowledge; the road to being "saved"—psychologically, not religiously—was arduous indeed. To this end, Waller assembled a

“formidable list” of obstacles that divorced men and women needed to overcome in order to reorganize their lives. He advised, for instance, that the divorced work to forget their love for their former spouses, to reconstruct their egos, and to face up to past regrets. Failure to accomplish these goals, Waller cautioned, could render their postdivorce neuroses “perpetual” and they would be unable to exchange their “old loves” for new, healthier relationships.⁶⁹ Waller likely considered himself to be just such a success story; he had remarried and accepted a position at the University of Nebraska after obtaining his graduate degree. Furthermore, his book received positive reviews and quickly became a standard divorce text.⁷⁰

Experts also launched a parallel investigation about the psychological effects of divorce on children in the late 1920s and 1930s. As they examined this question, experts made substantive contributions to a debate that raged throughout the twentieth century (and remains salient today): was it better for parents to stay together for the sake of their children, or did staying in an unhealthy marital relationship cause children more harm than good? It is particularly interesting that this question arose in spite of the fact that childless couples were more likely to divorce than those with children; in 1930, for instance, courts granted 62 percent of divorces to childless couples.⁷¹ Even so, as the divorce rate steadily increased, it was evident that an increasing number of children were going to become, in the words of one journalist, “divorced children.”⁷²

The study of broken homes—defined as homes in which children lived with only one parent as a result of death, desertion, or divorce—was hardly new to child welfare advocates.⁷³ They had long believed that children living in single-parent households were more likely than those living with two parents to become juvenile delinquents and to find themselves in the penal system. Most middle-class parents who entered the divorce courts, however, did not fear that their children would become delinquents. Rather, they worried that their children would suffer from poor mental health, the effects of which could become evident in a variety of situations—from a son’s failure to complete college to a daughter’s sexual promiscuity.⁷⁴ At

the same time, parents contended with anecdotal evidence that there were real psychological dangers inherent in keeping children in tension-filled, “loveless” homes.⁷⁵

Both Waller’s work and the debate about the effect of divorce on children led Americans to wonder if there was any way to mitigate the seemingly inescapable problems associated with divorce. Devising strategies to do so, in turn, became a key area of academic inquiry during these years. Sociologists, in particular, had been discussing the consequences of structural changes, such as industrialization, on American family life since the early twentieth century, and they generally agreed that the family was in a period of difficult transition. The conviction that marriage, for all its current flaws, was going to remain an essential national institution spurred their interest in finding ways to reduce the divorce rate.

Most of these experts were not explicitly antidivorce; they believed that divorce could be necessary not only for the couple, but also for the greater social good. Experts generally supported the adversarial divorce process—in spite of the frequent occurrence of collusion in divorce suits—because, at least in theory, this process only ended marriages in which one of the partners had egregiously violated the marital contract. In a similar vein, they challenged any suggestion that couples should be allowed to divorce by mutual consent because of its potential to lead to social and legal havoc. Sociologist Ernest Groves, for instance, asserted that “divorce by mutual consent caters to immaturity of purpose, and, by encouraging an easy-going indifference to consequences, antagonizes the development of a more serious commitment to matrimony.”⁷⁶ Experts also resisted the popular romanticization of marriage, which seemed to imply that couples should split up when love and sexual excitement faded into companionship. It is easy to portray this distaste for romance (particularly as Hollywood films increasingly valued and glorified such relationships), as evidence that marriage experts were out of touch with the wants and desires of the American public. Experts did not believe that people would stop marrying for love—ministers, after all, had been fighting this losing battle since the

nineteenth century. What they keenly understood, however, was that most Americans wanted to be happily married.

Armed with this understanding, a number of academics initiated research studies intended to identify the factors that contributed to marital adjustment and happiness.⁷⁷ In retrospect, such efforts to produce scientific equations to calculate the possibility of marital success and failure may seem far-fetched. Still, many social scientists in the 1920s and 1930s—especially those from the University of Chicago—sincerely believed in the possibility of finding objective truths through the application of natural science techniques in their research.⁷⁸ Ernest W. Burgess, a sociologist who both trained and taught at Chicago, clearly thought that empirical research could help to suggest cures for social problems such as poor marital adjustment.⁷⁹ In 1938 he expressed this very sentiment to *Time*, explaining that marital success “now depends more than ever before upon the findings of research in the psychological and social sciences.”⁸⁰

Earlier in the decade, Burgess and a graduate student, Leonard S. Cottrell Jr., had started a project that they hoped would provide Americans with a map to the structural, cultural, and psychological factors that contributed to marital happiness.⁸¹ They asked 526 married couples to appraise their marriages on a sliding scale that ranged from “very unhappy” to “very happy.” They offered no definition of “happiness,” reasoning that each participant should apply his or her own personal understanding of the word. Over 70 percent of the couples agreed exactly on their assessments of their marriages, and their evaluations were further validated by the appraisals of outside observers.⁸²

Burgess and Cottrell then presented their subjects with twenty-seven questions intended to ascertain those factors that were the most important in determining relative happiness and marital adjustment. From this investigation they discovered, for instance, that agreement on the handling of finances and on dealing with in-laws correlated more closely with happiness than did agreement about religion or proper table manners.⁸³ The researchers also developed a battery of tests with the express intent of determining which individ-

uals were most likely to succeed at being married. Their final list of “certain factors at the time of marriage [that] show a rather high positive correlation with adjustment in marriage”—published in their 1938 book *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage*—both reflected and shaped new trends in American marriage discourse.⁸⁴ Their determination that children whose parents were happily married were more likely to adjust to marriage than those who grew up with unhappily married or divorced parents, for example, echoed concerns about children and divorce. The emphasis that they placed on similar family backgrounds paralleled the eugenic belief that like should marry and reproduce with like.

The final and most significant conclusion of Burgess and Cottrell’s study, however, was the bold assertion that “prediction *before* marriage of marital adjustment is feasible.”⁸⁵ Burgess and Cottrell likely agreed with Lewis M. Terman, who had come to a similar conclusion in his work *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness*, that it would be initially difficult to convince engaged couples that they should submit to such testing before they married. But, as Terman, the architect of the Stanford-Binet test, pointed out, the efficacy of intelligence testing in college admissions had also once been met with “derision.”⁸⁶

Burgess and Cottrell’s findings held potentially vast implications for all American men and women who aspired to become husbands and wives. Hypothetically, prediction tests could eliminate bad marriages and divorce from modern society, and the authors’ optimism for the realization of this goal is clear. If engaged couples could learn before they married whether or not their union would be successful, the couples who scored poorly on such prediction tests married at their own risk. By taking this risk, they implicitly promised that even if their marriages did not live up to expectations, they would be accountable for their decision to marry. Couples who scored well on marital adjustments tests also shared this burden, however, because if their marriages proved to be unhappy, they had to discover what it was about their personalities that made the union a failure. By cleverly embedding a campaign against marital failure into the academic search for the sources of marital happiness, therefore, *Predicting Suc-*

cess or Failure in Marriage helped experts to explore and to define the link between personal responsibility and marriage success.

At the same time that academics were developing methods to identify the factors that contributed to marital happiness, they were also developing ways to disseminate their views and findings to a wide audience. They were convinced that most Americans were woefully unprepared to embark on married life and that this situation could and should be remedied as quickly as possible. In the past, most young people had received premarital instruction (however paltry or extensive) at home. But, by the early twentieth century, many academics concurred with self-proclaimed expert Paul Popenoe that current social conditions had “deprived the home of most of its educational functions.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, many experts believed that their knowledge about these weighty issues was superior to whatever piecemeal information parents could offer their children (although they certainly did not discourage parents from discussing dating and marriage with their offspring). Experts, then, launched significant efforts to educate the nation, and especially its white, middle-class citizens, in their version of what constituted successful married life. It is not surprising that many of these first efforts took place in university classrooms, given that most academic researchers also had teaching duties. But academics alone did not drive this trend. Rather, student demand coalesced with their professors’ agendas to create an entirely new type of classroom experience.

Ernest Rutherford Groves was one of the pioneers in this field. A sociologist by training, Groves became “a strong advocate of frank education for marriage” after his first wife died during pregnancy in 1916. On reflection, Groves became convinced that he could have prevented her death if he had been more knowledgeable about how to take care of her. Groves’s opportunity to help others avoid similar misfortunes came in 1927. A group of male seniors approached the administration at the University of North Carolina and asked that a course about marriage be added to the curriculum. The university president agreed to their request and hired Groves to develop such a class. By the mid-1930s, Groves had added a similar course for

women. He believed that, all told, his students of both sexes were “fine examples of the young people who give marriage the respect and the intelligent thought that it deserves.”⁸⁸

Courses such as Groves’s became increasingly popular on college campuses across the United States throughout the 1930s and also spread into high schools in the postwar years.⁸⁹ Indeed, estimates in 1937 indicated that over 200 colleges and universities (of the 672 in the nation) offered a course in marriage preparation.⁹⁰ The syllabi for marriage education classes deviated from traditional academic curricula as educators worked to present students with a blend of “scientific” facts and pragmatic advice on subjects ranging from individual personality assessment, finding a potential mate, and adjusting sexually, economically, and psychologically to married life. Homework in Norman E. Himes’s marriage class at Colgate University (at that time an all-male institution), therefore, was just as likely to be an assignment in which the students composed lists of “ideal” and “acceptable” qualities in their prospective wives than one in which they wrote research papers.⁹¹ The purpose of this assignment, in turn, was to make sure that students had realistic expectations about their future spouses. Instructors in such courses also encouraged their students to see them as confidantes and counselors, whom they could consult concerning personal questions and problems. Himes explained to one reporter: “I let the men know that the latchstring is always out for more personal, individual consultation.”⁹²

The blend of academic and practical subject material paired with therapeutic intentions to make taking a marriage preparation class a distinctive classroom experience.⁹³ While such courses only reached a small, elite population, they nevertheless served an important symbolic role in the marriage discourse of the time. On the one hand, instructors charged their students to forge marital relationships that would form the vanguard of a new, more successful American marriage. They sincerely believed that their courses taught undergraduate men and women skills that someday—if they were applied across a wide spectrum—would eliminate bad marriages altogether. Columbia professor Maurice Bigelow held, for instance, that “thou-

sands of divorce cases had been averted by scientific information given in such courses.”⁹⁴ On the other hand, if students’ marriages failed after they had participated in such courses, surely they or their partners had serious flaws that should have been recognized and confronted before the unions took place. Furthermore, students who choose not to take these courses faced a similar reproach: their universities had given them a valuable opportunity to avoid marital problems, and they had knowingly shunned this chance.

Many students clearly wanted to take marriage preparation courses in the late 1920s and 1930s. When Syracuse University announced its intention of establishing a “personal relations” course for its sophomore students, for instance, its seniors protested their exclusion. The university ultimately agreed to allow seniors to petition for registration into their own separate course. Students at Syracuse and other universities also shaped the content of marriage preparation courses. In particular, they demanded that their professors’ lectures privilege practical information over materials that students deemed to be less useful, such as “the institution of marriage as it existed in earlier times and remote places.”⁹⁵

The functional approach to the teaching of marriage was one of the main reasons that these courses were popular among both male and female students.⁹⁶ Unlike traditional home economics courses, which taught young women how to manage well-run homes, marriage preparation classes contained strong emotional and sexual components (which is also why most professors preferred to teach to sex-segregated classrooms). In spite of the best efforts of groups such as the American Social Hygiene Association, most students could not expect to learn about sexual matters—beyond, perhaps, disease prevention—in high school.⁹⁷ But, at the same time, Americans were placing quite a high value on the place of mutually satisfying sexual relations within marriage. This change was particularly significant for men, in that, according to one psychiatrist, it demanded “a greater understanding of ways and means whereby they [men] can develop a keener insight into the technics [sic] essential to a satisfactory relationship.”⁹⁸ While sexual education was not the only, or even

primary, goal of undergraduate marriage courses, this aspect of the curriculum undoubtedly appealed to both male and female college students. The professors conducting marriage courses also spent a great deal of time discussing how to select a compatible spouse, a matter of keen interest to either sex.

It is evident, however, that many professors believed marriage preparation courses to be of greater utility to women than to men. Fears that college women would want to pursue careers rather than get married continued to preoccupy experts, especially those with a strong belief in eugenics. In order to dissuade women from settling into careers at the expense of marriage, educators chose to highlight the complexity of modern housekeeping and child care. As historian Jeffrey Moran explains, “By making a housewife’s role seem more ‘scientific’ and worthy of study, marriage education could make college learning and a woman’s traditional duty compatible—even mutually reinforcing.”⁹⁹ Thus, when Groves told a conference of fellow educators, “It takes intelligence to be a modern wife,” he clearly hoped this message would convince college women that wifehood was as intellectually stimulating as any other career.¹⁰⁰ Not surprisingly, comparable messages were not forthcoming for men, whose ideal marital role as breadwinner had not changed. Furthermore, while some professors, including Groves, offered marriage courses for young brides, no evidence suggests that they held similar classes for grooms. After the wedding, in other words, learning how to make marriage run smoothly was a wife’s responsibility.

Marriage educators did not anticipate that all couples—even those who had participated in college courses on the subject—would be able to make a seamless transition to married life. In fact, they advised their students that married couples often had to overcome serious obstacles during their lives together.¹⁰¹ In this vein, professors impressed on their students the necessity of seeking professional assistance if their relationship problems grew too overwhelming to cope with on their own. By the early 1940s, many popular marriage textbooks included chapters with titles such as “If You Still Need Help” and appendixes that listed marriage counseling/consul-

tation services across the nation.¹⁰² In doing so, marriage educators hoped that students would learn this essential message: “Successful marriage is distinguished from unsuccessful marriage not by the number of problems or the kind of problems which married people need to face, but rather by the presence or absence of *resources* for dealing with the common problems at hand. The successful and the unsuccessful alike have problems. The resourceless people are overcome by their problems; the resourceful overcome them.”¹⁰³ Couples facing marital difficulties, in other words, needed to work aggressively at solving them, so as to recapture their previous happiness and to ensure future relationship success.

Beginning in the early 1930s, marriage counseling services intended to provide further resources for resolving marital troubles had sprung up in a seemingly spontaneous manner in major metropolitan areas from New York to Los Angeles. Clinics of a somewhat similar nature had been operational in Europe for about a decade. American experts generally considered an Austrian clinic that opened in Vienna in 1922 with the intention of “furnish[ing] advice to those desirous of founding new families” to be the first of its type.¹⁰⁴ Other evidence suggests, however, that the first such clinics opened in Germany in 1920 as a part of the Weimar government’s eugenics program. By the late 1930s, many marriage counseling pioneers had started to distance themselves from their European intellectual roots, probably because they did not want to be associated with the social engineering programs of the Nazi government.¹⁰⁵ In 1940, for instance, Ernest Groves praised “the recent development of marital counseling” as “a movement indigenous to American culture” that had merely been “influenced” by European models.¹⁰⁶

Still, no single definition—or even uniform spelling—of “marriage counseling” existed during the 1930s.¹⁰⁷ At its broadest, experts applied the term to all agencies and professionals, including (but not limited to) educators, clergymen, lawyers, physicians, and social workers, who advised men and women about their present or future marital relationships, either in private or in a group setting (such as a marriage education course). Given such a diffuse range of activities

and the extensive audience implied by this definition, one expert wondered in an important 1932 article “whether or not marriage and family guidance will become a highly organized and specialized movement.”¹⁰⁸

The founders of the nation’s first marriage counseling clinics definitely had diverse backgrounds and intentions for the movement.¹⁰⁹ Paul Bowman Popenoe opened the American Institute of Family Relations (AIFR) in Los Angeles in February 1930.¹¹⁰ Popenoe had first made a name for himself in horticulture (as the author of a book about date palms) and as a popularizer of eugenics. In the 1920s he championed surgical sterilization for the unfit in his home state of California and published a strong endorsement of this policy in his 1929 book *Sterilization for Human Betterment* (which may, in fact, have influenced Nazi sterilization policies).¹¹¹ Conversely, Popenoe believed that healthy young men and women needed encouragement to choose their future mates wisely and, once they married, to plan on having large families. Thus while he was a proponent of sterilization, Popenoe was a firm opponent of the legalization of birth control. Popenoe believed that couples could do more to foster companionship and sexual compatibility because happy marriages would inevitably lead to more babies. He explained: “A good deal can be done to promote successful marriage. This will, in general, result in more children than unsuccessful marriage.”¹¹² Establishing a clinic that provided educational programs and counseling services, therefore, was a means to a eugenic end for Popenoe. He proved to be a masterful salesperson for his mission; articles by Popenoe regularly appeared in the popular and academic press, and the AIFR was by far the most widely covered marriage counseling clinic in the United States during the 1930s.¹¹³

Like Popenoe, Doctors Abraham and Hannah Mayer Stone, who founded a clinic at the Labor Temple of New York in 1930, and Emily Hartshorne Mudd, the first director of the Marriage Counsel of Philadelphia, believed in marriage counseling’s eugenic potential. Unlike Popenoe, however, they were also strong birth control advocates. Hannah Stone, in fact, had become the chief medical director of

Margaret Sanger's New York birth control clinic in the mid-1920s; Mudd remembered that Stone's patients referred to her as "the Madonna of the clinic."¹¹⁴ The Stones clearly envisioned the sexual education of their clients to be the primary function of their clinic. They explained in their 1935 book *A Marriage Manual*: "It has been our experience that an appreciation of the sex factors in marriage and reliable contraceptive information are essential for a well-adjusted and satisfactory marital union."¹¹⁵

By 1940, according to a list compiled by Mudd, there were at least twenty-three facilities dedicated to marriage counseling in the United States. Marriage counseling also occurred in a variety of other settings, from universities to public charity organizations.¹¹⁶ But while the diverse ideological backgrounds of the movement's potential leaders posed a possible hindrance to the development of a coherent marriage counseling movement, these differences ultimately proved to be inconsequential. The belief that Americans desperately needed advice about a wide array of marriage-related topics, paired with a conviction that traditional resources such as family, friends, and clergymen were increasingly ill equipped to offer such advice, trumped any ideological discrepancies between individual counselors. "To one at all sensitive to social trends," explained one mental health expert, "there is nothing novel in the observation that the task of adjusting to marriage is a vastly more complicated and precarious business today than it used to be."¹¹⁷

The founders of the first marriage counseling clinics quickly identified young, white middle-class Americans as their target audience, and they expressed a true optimism regarding their ability to help the nation's youth. In a speech that inspired the formation of the Marriage Counsel of Philadelphia, for example, Mudd argued: "If then, marriage in some form is still to be an ideal worth working for, let us combat the bogies of ignorance, superstition and fear with knowledge and truth. Let us make available to the youth of our country, men and women who are to be married or have been recently married, the facts about sex and marriage which we now give to older men and women who have found life to be dragging them down and

under. . . . Let us above all remember that life and love are full of joy and beauty to those who are armed with knowledge and truth.”¹¹⁸

Imparting this “knowledge and truth,” however, was somewhat more difficult than clinic founders initially anticipated. First, while the social work profession had been one of the first to advocate the need for specialized marriage counseling in the United States, clinic founders soon endeavored to differentiate their services from those of social work agencies.¹¹⁹ Groves explained that the middle-class client “often hesitates to seek the service available because of the idea that it [counseling] is directed chiefly to the underprivileged classes.”¹²⁰ Second, marriage counselors had little control over who chose to use their services. While they had hoped to help single men and women and engaged couples prepare for married life, clinic operators soon discovered that already-married couples were the most likely candidates to use their counseling services.¹²¹ Finally, marriage counselors had little say over what kinds of problems clients brought to discuss with them. Lester Dearborn’s counseling service, which was founded in 1934 under the sponsorship of the Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene, for example, was supposed to focus exclusively on questions relating to sexual education and adjustment. A 1938 report and survey issued by the society’s Marriage Study Committee, however, indicates that clients came to Dearborn with a host of questions that included not only those of a sexual nature but also ones concerned with finances, child-rearing, and getting along with in-laws.¹²²

In spite of these drawbacks, the importance of the rise of marriage counseling cannot be discounted. Movement pioneers introduced several significant ideas into American marriage discourse. They promoted the notion that American couples frequently needed expert intervention in order to overcome their problems and to have successful marriages. The mere presence of counseling professionals in a community meant that couples with failing relationships who did not seek help were not as committed to marriage as those who did. Furthermore, marriage counselors suggested that by seeking help

and by actively participating in the counseling process, most marriages—or at least those contracted between two “healthy” individuals—could not fail. They prompted single, engaged, and married men and women alike to take responsibility for the welfare of their relationships.

Given the wide variety of efforts undertaken by experts to promote better marriages—from the development of prediction tests to the founding of marriage counseling clinics—it is surprising that they paid minimal attention to the most immediate problem facing American society: the Great Depression. (The same held true in mainstream magazines, which rarely considered the links between marriage, divorce, and the nation’s economic situation.) Certainly, it was common knowledge that the Depression placed heretofore unprecedented pressures on the family and many academics studied the practical hardships facing American family life—such as the consequences of a father’s unemployment—and the potential long-term effects of the crisis on children. Those experts interested in fostering happy marriages, however, may have felt that their work transcended the economic crisis, given what they viewed as the enduring benefits of what they were doing. Moreover, their intensive focus on the upper and middle class, subjects for whom the effects of the Depression were often mitigated by their privileged financial status, also contributed to this otherwise curious omission.

It was nevertheless evident to marriage experts that changing social conditions and the widespread availability of divorce meant that happy marriages could not be taken for granted. Rather, couples needed to pay close attention to the state of their relationships: to work at them. Conceiving of marriage as work was a means of injecting realism into an institution that Americans increasingly looked to as a primary source of personal happiness. If experts could not altogether prevent Americans from romanticizing marriage, they could at least temper their enthusiasm with a more pragmatic approach to the marital relationship. The idea that marriage required work was not restricted solely to academic circles, although it was by

no means as ubiquitous as it would be in later years. Writers in the popular press clearly felt that they were fighting an uphill battle against the divorce rate, on the one hand, and the idealization of marriage, on the other. In articles with pointed titles such as “Should We Leave Romance out of Marriage?” and “Romantic Divorce,” authors pleaded with their fellow citizens to think of their marriages as ongoing, even artistic, projects. “Let us, then,” wrote the author of the former article, “conceive marriage as a matter of effort and art—a challenge to the powers of workmanship of those who enter into it.”¹²³ The author of the latter piece echoed the expert theme of personal responsibility. She asserted that Americans needed to jettison “the vague general belief that if you marry, in good faith, for love, that marriage will take care of itself, and that if it does not, it is not your fault; that your happiness is the particular and exclusive job of the God of Love.”¹²⁴

At this point, many of the specifics of what marital work entailed remained vague. More evident, however, was which marriage partner would bear most of the burden: the wife. Experts often paid lip service to the inclusion of men in the marital work equation, making, for instance, the following argument: “As thoroughly as a girl in past centuries was indoctrinated for the old marriage, the girl *and the boy* of today should be psychologically prepared for the new, by being taught early to look upon marriage as an art into which they must put the best that they have, not as the natural state of man and woman in which they can relax after a ceremony.”¹²⁵ The case of the Good Housekeeping Institute’s “Brides’ School,” however, points to how the inclusion of men operated on the ground. For the project, *Good Housekeeping* recruited twenty-five young women to “take part in a sort of marriage laboratory,” the purpose of which was to help establish “the maladjustments, the misunderstandings, and the wrong attitudes that are sending sixteen of every hundred American marriages crashing on the rocks and spoiling the joy and harmony of twice that many matings that never reach the divorce courts.”¹²⁶ To this end, the school held a series of forums in order to discuss issues

that the magazine had determined to be essential elements for marital success, ranging from money management to personal appearance to sexual adjustment.

The first report of the school's activities, in *Good Housekeeping's* December 1939 issue, detailed its opening luncheon, attended by Eleanor Roosevelt. The First Lady had spoken out before about the need for Americans to work for marital success, arguing, for instance, that newlyweds "should understand that they are undertaking a full-time job which is going to be part of their everyday existence from the time the marriage ceremony is read until 'death do them part,' a job which they cannot neglect for a day without being confronted with failure."¹²⁷ Roosevelt echoed this sentiment to the brides and expressed the opinion that their husbands should also attend the forums. In response to her suggestion, "plans were made for at least one forum to which the husbands would be invited."¹²⁸ The implication was clear: women had more of a vested interest, as well as the necessary time, to work toward successful marriages.

With marriage no longer a duty and divorce an increasingly visible aspect of everyday life, it is not surprising that experts and the public alike held impassioned discussions concerning the future of the institution in the early decades of the twentieth century. While some continued to bemoan the lack of morality associated with changing marriage patterns and others called for the abolition of the institution altogether, most Americans accepted that marriage was and would remain an essential element of their society, both as a personal life experience and as an institution that benefited the larger public good. But even if the broader social acceptance of divorce did not lead to a wholesale rejection of marriage, it did foster a belief that marital relationships were more complicated and more fragile than they had been in the previous century.

The experts who tried to enhance the stability of the institution knew that they were entering relatively uncharted territory. Yet they were profoundly optimistic that their efforts would lead to better, stronger marriages well suited for modern times. Certainly, their narrow focus on the white middle class had the potential to compli-

cate such bold predictions. Still, the intellectual origins of the idea that marriage required work—and that wives, in particular, should do most of it—would have broad implications for how many Americans came to understand their marital roles and responsibilities throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

CAN WAR MARRIAGES BE MADE TO WORK?

KEEPING WOMEN ON THE MARITAL JOB
IN WAR AND PEACE

Joe Allen and Alice Mayberry, the principal characters of Vincente Minnelli's 1945 film *The Clock*, meet by chance during World War II and within forty-eight hours are married. Joe (Robert Walker) is a small-town corporal on a last fling to New York City before going overseas; Alice (Judy Garland) is a small-town transplant now working in the big city. When the pair accidentally collide at Penn Station, Joe convinces a skeptical Alice to spend the day with him. That day quickly turns into an all-night date. After an almost disastrous separation on the subway, Alice and Joe resolve to get married that day. Tying the knot before Joe leaves for the war, however, is not easy. The couple has to jump through difficult bureaucratic hoops in order to obtain a marriage license and the necessary blood tests. Finally, at the end of a trying day, Joe and Alice recite their vows in the city clerk's drab office, and a quiet interlude in a church soothes Alice's worries about the casual nature of their wedding. After spending just one night together with her husband, Alice sees Joe off to the train station, the fate of his life and of their marriage uncertain.

The plot of *The Clock*, which features Garland (Minnelli's soon-to-be wife) in her only dramatic, nonsinging role of the 1940s, clearly contains melodramatic elements intended to add Hollywood romance and suspense to Joe and Alice's otherwise simple love story.¹ Their chance encounter at Penn Station, their quixotic nocturnal adventures, and particularly their climactic separation and reunification are all such devices. Plus, as film critic James Agee wryly noted in his generally positive review of the film in *Time*: "The average lonely soldier in New York doesn't have the good luck to pick up Judy Garland, or true love, or anything remotely resembling either."²

But, in fact, Joe and Alice's tale closely mirrored the wartime experiences of millions of American men and women. In 1942 alone clergymen and officials throughout the country married a record 1.8 million American couples. Servicemen and their brides—many of whom had only known each other for brief periods of time—composed a full two-thirds of this number. Many GIs, under the mistaken impression that it was easier to be married in New York than in other states, tried to tie the knot in New York City and encountered bureaucratic snarls similar to those met by Joe and Alice.³ After the wedding ceremony, newlyweds faced an ambiguous future, knowing that in the short run they could not start their married life together, and that in the long run—providing that the husband survived the war—the likelihood of their "war marriage" ending in divorce was exceedingly high.

Alice's fear that she is somehow less than married because of her slapdash engagement and wedding echoed the greatest concerns of marriage experts in the 1940s. It is certainly ironic that having largely ignored the Great Depression, these experts found themselves actively debating the pros and cons of war marriages (even as they acknowledged that they could do little to stop the deluge). They needed to do so, however, in order to maintain, and even expand, their foothold in the national discourse about marriage. After spending the preceding decades counseling American youths to proceed cautiously into wedlock, such advice was suddenly inconsequential as men and women of all social classes rushed impulsively to the altar

and possibly, as well, to the divorce courts. In spite of this threatened spike in the divorce rate, experts remained optimistic. They reached a consensus that the proper guidance could turn even hastily made unions into “successful” marriages. They argued that newlywed women, in particular, needed to understand the great personal responsibility of working to hold together their marriages to, first, servicemen and, then, veterans. Millions of young American couples, therefore, learned that the answer to the question “Can war marriages be made to work?” (the title of a 1944 War Department pamphlet) was a resounding “yes,” especially if wives were ready to do their part.⁴

While most historians of the American home front acknowledge these marriage and divorce trends, they generally treat them as interesting statistical anomalies.⁵ Historians of women, in turn, have focused most of their analyses of the home front on two separate, but interrelated, areas of inquiry: women’s lives as factory workers, housewives, and mothers apart from men during the war years and the postwar push for women to be dutiful wives to their returned servicemen husbands.⁶ It is difficult, however, to understand the context of the postwar “prescriptions for Penelope” to return to her home—usually understood as an attempt to propel women out of the workforce and to reinforce their dependence on men—without exploring the wartime debate about the viability of war marriages as well as the fears of a postwar divorce boom.⁷ These discussions did not take place in a historical vacuum. Rather, they were an integral part of an ongoing public conversation about the contours of marital success and failure that reinforced, modified, and expanded the debates of the 1920s and 1930s. The war marriage debate substantively contributed to the spread of the idea that marriage required time and hard work.⁸ It also broadened the very definition of marital success, so that by the mid-1940s, experts and the public regarded any marriage that remained intact to be a positive female achievement.

THE UNITED STATES OFFICIALLY entered World War II in December 1941, and by January 1942 a *New York Times* headline announced a

“Flood of Marriages Marks Our War Entry.”⁹ The rise in the marriage rate actually had commenced in earnest in 1940; more American couples married in that year than in any previous year of the nation’s history. This record was soon eclipsed, however, by a 15 percent increase in marriages in 1941.¹⁰ The economic upswing that accompanied prewar mobilization efforts undoubtedly allowed many engaged couples who had postponed their weddings in the face of financial insecurity during the Great Depression to get married. Some commentators also insinuated (without hard evidence) that the 1940 passage of the Selective Service Act had brought some cowardly men to marry in the hopes of attaining “dependency deferments” from the draft.¹¹

With the nation’s entry into war, however, a new sense of urgency stemming in part from the impending deployment of troops to both the European and the Pacific theaters led to an even greater rush to the altar, especially in cities with large military installations. San Francisco, San Diego, and Seattle, for example, all reported issuing a record number of marriage licenses in December 1941. The *New York Times* reported that city officials from Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Fort Wayne also registered 100 percent increases in their December 1941 marriage license figures in comparison with those from December 1940.¹²

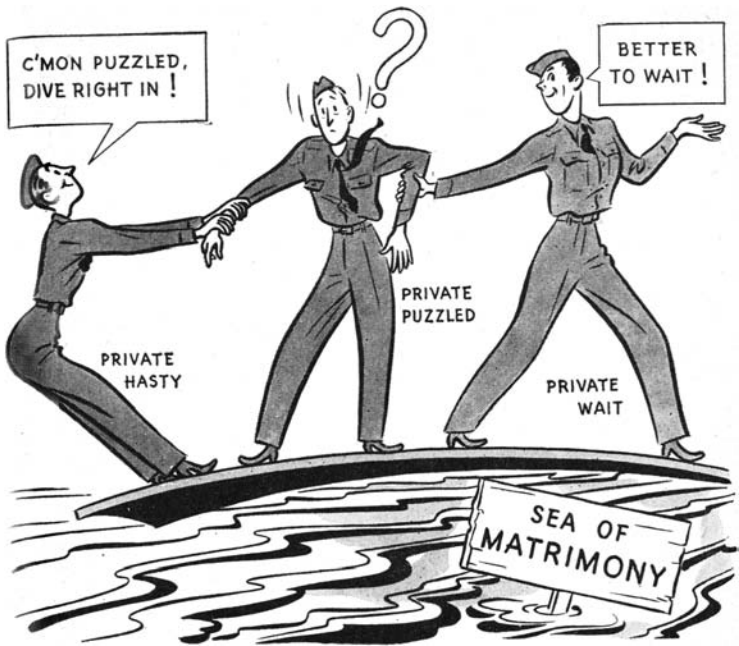
Until the declaration of war, the steady rise in America’s marriage rate received virtually no coverage in the national and popular press. Afterward, however, the reaction was immediate. For instance, on February 1, 1942, during her Sunday evening radio broadcast on the Blue Network, Eleanor Roosevelt counseled college “girls” not to marry in a “patriotic fervor.”¹³ The *Ladies’ Home Journal* became the first mainstream women’s magazine to publish an article on the subject that March, and many others promptly followed suit.¹⁴

Why did the nation suddenly start paying attention to these trends? Before the war, it had appeared that most of the marriages were between long-time sweethearts. It soon became clear, however, that many of the nation’s wartime newlyweds were not only quite young but also relative strangers when they married. Of course, the

encouragement of youthful marriages had long been on the agenda of marriage and eugenics experts. But their advice had been predicated on a courtship of substantial duration and the assumption that the couple would spend the early years of their marriage together, rather than thousands of miles apart. Furthermore, it was a well-established fact that more marriages entered into during and immediately following World War I ended in divorce compared with those contracted during peacetime.¹⁵ A debate soon raged throughout the United States, therefore, regarding the desirability and future prospects of war marriages.

A literal interpretation of this debate occurred in the previously mentioned pamphlet “Can War Marriages Be Made to Work?” The publication features a young soldier named “Private Puzzled” who consults his friends “Private Hasty” and “Private Wait” about whether or not he should get married. Private Hasty argues vehemently that marriage is a smart decision. He explains: “Listen, young fellow, don’t you believe, for a moment, that any girl, even if she is dumb enough to love you, is going to sit on ice waiting for you to get out of the Army. If you love the girl and she loves you, marry her quick, even if you just met her last week.”¹⁶ Private Wait, however, disagrees, and he highlights the problems inherent in long-term separation. He maintains that “it’s a lot worse to come back home and find yourself a stranger to your wife than to just your girlfriend . . . It’s all the harder to get free and then have to start looking for the right person.”¹⁷ Although the debate ends in a draw of sorts (Wait declares, “Maybe it depends on the kind of guy Puzzled is and the kind of girl who gave him the picture that he carries around”), it is evident that Wait has won the day.¹⁸ Wait’s realistic view of marriage, paired with the authors’ use of expert data to back up his claims, clearly trumps Hasty’s argument to marry now and to worry about the future later.

Similar arguments both for and against war marriages quickly emerged in the expert community. Those opposed to such marriages undoubtedly outpaced those in favor throughout the early 1940s. The anti-war marriage camp drew strength from the military’s historical preference for bachelor soldiers; previous military authorities had



Private Wait and Private Hasty debate war marriages. American Historical Association. *Can War Marriages Be Made to Work?* Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1944.

reasoned that married soldiers were more likely to worry about what was going on at home and less likely to have a single-minded focus on their duties than those who were single. They also feared that married soldiers would hesitate to sacrifice their lives for their country, knowing that their families would lose their financial and emotional support. Building on this conviction, one author who opposed war marriages even suggested that soldiers and their potential brides threatened the success of the war effort itself by getting married. She strongly advised each soldier to consider “whether his country’s interests are better served by his marrying his girl or by delaying marriage until the war is past,” and she recommended that each fiancée “decide whether her husband makes as good a soldier or sailor as any single man.”¹⁹

Critics of war marriages also warned that hastily made unions threatened the sanctity of marriage. Couples married under such circumstances, they argued, were unlikely to understand the weighty responsibilities that came with being husbands and wives. One cynical Catholic priest homilized, for example, that prospective couples needed “to remember that the vows taken before the altar are not a campaign speech.”²⁰ Clearly, he believed that America’s youth lacked the foresight to understand that marriage vows—unlike political promises—were not made to be broken. Other marriage experts argued that the inevitable postwar wave of divorces would severely undermine both the individual soldier’s and the nation’s readjustment to peacetime. This belief led one critic to query: “How can a soldier full of emotional turmoil, aggravated by economic pressure, return to marriage with a wife who is half a stranger to him?”²¹ His proposed solution was for soldiers to wait and to marry after the war. Following this path presumably allowed engaged couples who were poorly matched to recognize that their potential unions were untenable. By breaking an engagement, rather than a marriage, they could search out more suitable mates without experiencing the taint or psychological trauma of divorce.

War marriage critics were decidedly not antimarriage, and they did not advise all couples to forego marriage in wartime. Indeed, they sharply differentiated marriages made after a brief acquaintance from ones that “probably would have taken place anyway” but were “speeded up” by the onset of war. Experts defended this seemingly contradictory position by arguing that such couples were marrying “not because of the war, but in spite of it.”²² Experts, in other words, tried to limit marriage to those couples deemed to have the greatest chances for postwar marital success.

The few experts who offered some level of support for war marriages favored very practical considerations. They, too, did not anticipate that war marriages were destined for unequivocal success. They did believe, however, that these marriages became more desirable when they were compared with the prospects of widespread premarital sexual activity or of denying certain segments of the popula-

tion (namely, women in their twenties) the opportunity to marry at all. As one commentator succinctly argued, for instance: “War marriages probably won’t work so well as ordinary marriages. But they certainly will work a lot better than no marriages.”²³

Experts in favor of war marriages also argued that being married gave soldiers and their wives a meaningful stake in the war effort. Soldiers, in other words, would be fighting not for abstract ideals, but for a tangible better life for their wives and future children.²⁴ Young married women, for their part, would become more efficient war workers and more willing to sacrifice luxury goods if they believed that their actions directly helped their husbands to return home safely. The anonymous author of the defiantly titled “I Married My Soldier Anyway” echoed both sides of this argument when she proclaimed, “Both Danny [her new husband] and I feel that the democratic way of life is deeply a part of us. We want to defend it with all we have, with all our heart and soul.”²⁵

The majority of the American men and women who flocked to altars and city clerks’ offices throughout the United States during the war years likely shared this young bride’s patriotic sentiments. They plainly, however, did not heed the war marriage critics’ warnings. While it is impossible to know the myriad personal reasons that led young couples to get married in the early 1940s, it is evident that several broad trends contributed to the steadily rising marriage rates. The return of flush economic times made marriage a feasible option for many who might not have had the financial means to marry during the Great Depression.²⁶ War-related industries boomed during these years and soldiers received dependency allotments that often far exceeded their civilian earning potential. The nation’s improved economic outlook undoubtedly led many young couples to believe that they could and should forge a secure future together.

Furthermore, American women were under great social pressure to marry during the war years. For some women, the continuing social disapproval of premarital sexual activity compelled them to go to the altar. Whether they had already engaged in such activity or not, marriage legitimated sexual relationships and allowed women to

be sexually active with their new spouses with full social sanction and a clear conscience. Other women felt that it was unpatriotic to say “no” to marriage with a soldier. Dellie Hahne, who was a young woman during the early 1940s, reminisced, for example, “The serviceman was giving everything to his country—arms, legs, his eyesight, his blood, his life. The least you could do was give yourself to this man. And since sex outside of marriage was frowned upon, the only thing left was to marry him. It was almost your duty.”²⁷

But the greatest pressure to marry came from the popular conviction that if women did not find husbands during the war years, they might be consigning themselves to unfulfilling lives as spinsters. The media contributed to this anxiety by publishing ominous statistics such as those from a Metropolitan Life Insurance study that reported that women were only half as likely to marry at thirty as they were at fifteen.²⁸ Even unmarried women with steady love interests, the popular press warned, had to work hard to hold on to their potential husbands. Naomi Riol, the author of a cautionary tale titled “Somebody’s after Your Man,” explained, “Quantities of females with flowers in their hair, perfume on their ears, and fancy lipstick cases clenched in their hot little fists are hijacking men from one another with incredible speed and ferocity.”²⁹ Concerns that American men would fall in love while overseas only added to this alarm.³⁰ It is not surprising, then, that a packed audience of college women at New York’s Hunter College cheered when a panelist at a discussion titled “War Marriages, to Be or Not to Be” argued, “If the war lasts very long, it will be a question of marry now or never” and advised women over twenty-one to “get busy.”³¹

The public clearly expected unmarried women to walk a fine line between finding a loving, well-suited soldier-mate and marrying simply for the sake of marrying. Many agreed with one journalist, who in assessing the war marriage phenomenon simply stated, “The girls are mostly to blame.”³² From the onset of war, rumors swirled throughout the country about manipulative “Allotment Annies” who married multiple soldiers for the sole purpose of collecting their monthly checks from the federal government.³³ While not exactly condemning

American brides as gold diggers, one marriage expert plainly questioned young women's intentions by reporting that "many women today are picking husbands like they shop on bargain days. They do not exactly want the article which is selling so rapidly, but if they do not buy it, someone else will, and besides, one may need it later on. Who knows?"³⁴ Such critiques not only provided evidence of a war-time fear of women's ability to take advantage of unsuspecting men—indeed anxiety about single women's independence and power pervaded the war years—but also held important ramifications for the postwar years.³⁵ In short, by implying that young women drove the war marriage phenomenon, critics laid the groundwork for holding those same young brides responsible for keeping their marriages together both during and after the war.

Most young couples, however, were not considering such weighty issues when they decided to marry. Caught up in whirlwind courtships and literally rushing to the altar, the majority of servicemen and their sweethearts had little use for dire predictions of marital failure. Indeed, many young couples married during the war years expressly because of the romantic mystique that surrounded such unions. It is ironic, although perhaps not surprising, that the very media outlets that forwarded criticisms of war marriages also played an essential role in creating this mystique. Stories of young couples who overcame great obstacles to marry one another and columns advising young women on how to plan weddings "in a hurry" surfaced in the press. Popular songs with titles such as "You Can't Say No to a Soldier" and "I Wanna Marry a Bombardier" played over the radio airwaves.³⁶ These trends led educator and vehement war marriage critic Henry Bowman to lament, "Everybody seems to be doing his best to hasten the soldier and his girl to church."³⁷

While many war marriages did result from long acquaintances, it is easy to understand how the stories of soldiers—by all accounts "glamorous" in their uniforms—and pretty, innocent, young women who met, fell in love, and married in a matter of days or weeks captured the public's imagination.³⁸ The now-or-never aspect of these unions, based in the harsh reality that many soldiers would not

return from the front, led many Americans to believe that young lovers should enjoy broad leeway in making marriage decisions. Asking a soldier and his intended bride to wait to get married until after the war actually meant asking them to assume the risk that they might never have the chance to become husband and wife. The Senate Committee on Military Affairs expressed this very point in a report concerning the rights of officers to marry. It stated, "In time of peace, it is not unreasonable to require a couple to delay their marriage for the period of a year. In time of war, however, it is the rule rather than the exception that a couple will be separated, many times forever, in less than 1 year after the man is commissioned an officer of the armed services. Under such circumstances, it is felt that any restraint upon the marriage of the officer concerned is unreasonable."³⁹ It was difficult, in other words, to enjoin young couples to think seriously about the future for the very reason that many of them would not have the opportunity to enjoy postwar lives together. If they were sure enough about their love that they wanted to marry, and additionally were willing to find a way to tie the knot on a few days notice, who—other than perhaps curmudgeonly war marriage critics—wanted to deny their desires?

The logistics of staging quick weddings presented engaged couples with quite a challenge and also added to the mystique of these unions. The drastic lengths to which couples went to do so became legendary during the war years, and the popular press interpreted their actions as grand romantic gestures. Gladys Norwood's autobiographical account of her difficult path to marriage with her husband, Feaster, for example, was replete with drama—dashing across the country, jumping trains, cajoling authority figures to bend the law—and important lessons.⁴⁰ The piece, which was published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1943, detailed at length Gladys's race from Florida to Salt Lake City to California to keep up with her intended, as well as their four failed marriage attempts along the way. The tension heightened when the couple finally reunited but found that they could not fulfill California's mandatory three-day waiting period for marriage.

The story, however, did come to an inevitable happy ending. A recalcitrant magistrate was moved by Feaster's ardent, patriotic plea: "I know I can do a better job of keeping our country and our people free if I'm married to the girl I love better than life itself . . . Can't you see, judge, not only would you make two people happy, you'd also be helping your country."⁴¹ A lost ring and a blackout later, the couple finally exchanged their vows, leading the new husband to joke as he kissed the bride: "Blasting Tokyo off the face of the earth won't be half so hard as marrying you!"⁴² Leaving aside the flippancy of his remark, one can see the underlying message: now that he was married, he was ready and willing to give his all as an American soldier. Putting up hurdles to stop war marriages, readers therefore learned, was not only hopelessly unsentimental but also directly detrimental to the war effort.

Note that, not unlike the case of the fictional Joe Allen and Alice Mayberry in *The Clock*, Gladys's account of her marriage concluded with her wedding. Publishing under her married name almost two years after their nuptials, Gladys clearly remained married. But what she had been doing in the intervening years—where she had lived, how she had supported herself—was inconsequential to her account. Missing from her story, for example, was how the newlywed bride had found appropriate housing in the face of a nationwide shortage. (This task, unsurprisingly, was even more difficult for African American brides. Indeed, the only article published about marriage in the *Crisis* during the war years detailed the difficulties, such as the rampant housing and employment discrimination, faced by these women.)⁴³ Perhaps Gladys had moved back in with her parents or was fortunate enough to rent an apartment with other soldiers' wives. But she was the "Bombardier's Bride," not the "Bombardier's Wife," and this difference was significant. With the wedding itself as the climax, the public could celebrate its newlyweds while ignoring the countless problems that came with housing shortages, long-term separations, and an uncertain postwar future.

In this spirit, helping young people get married became a widespread goal during the war years. Such aid came in an array of forms.

Department stores—undoubtedly sensing an opportunity for profit—provided wedding consultants to assist “hurry-up brides” in planning formal weddings (in which the bride wore a white gown and veil). Brides, in fact, could only aspire to wear these full dresses that required yards of cloth because the War Production Board’s regulations for gown style and length specifically exempted wedding gowns.⁴⁴ Indeed, one wedding consultant found in an informal poll that 90 percent of military men preferred that their brides wear a “flowing train and veil.” While the erratic nature of servicemen’s schedules meant that weddings were less elaborate than in previous years, anecdotal evidence suggests that most servicemen and their brides wanted their ceremonies to be as formal as possible.⁴⁵ Many marriage experts supported this desire because they believed that it would lead young couples to understand the gravity of marriage. One expert counseled parents: “Just because in many cases the young people will not have much time to live together, the spiritual significance of marriage is all the more important and needs to be emphasized in every way possible. A really beautiful marriage ceremony is a help here.”⁴⁶

Many couples, though, did not have the financial means or the time to plan elaborate ceremonies. Their utmost concern was simply to be married, preferably as quickly as possible. Certain roadblocks, though, stood in the way of accomplishing this aim. A couple who traveled to popular wedding destination New York City, for example, technically needed to have a marriage license, blood test results that were at least seventy-two hours old (thus instituting a three-day waiting period), and doctors’ certificates that verified their physical and mental fitness for marriage before any sort of ceremony could be performed.⁴⁷ New York officials quickly realized that these restrictions were untenable. Just several months into the war, in April 1942, Queens County officials agreed to allow servicemen to petition the county’s supreme court to waive the three-day waiting period; this practice soon spread throughout the state.⁴⁸

In early December of the same year, the New York City Clerk notified his deputies—who were responsible for issuing marriage

licenses and for performing civil ceremonies—to keep their offices open until 5:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays, “for the benefit of men in military service.”⁴⁹ In fact, First Deputy City Clerk Murray W. Stand, who on one day in early May 1943 performed thirty-three marriages before 11:30 a.m., became something of a folk hero in the New York and national press.⁵⁰ One of Stand’s favorite anecdotes about nervous young couples was his estimation that “eight of ten grooms try to put the wedding ring on the bride’s middle finger.”⁵¹ He further solidified his popularity by refusing to accept gratuities or gifts and advising servicemen to put their money into war bonds instead. Another such hero was Fay Van Wagoner of the city’s Legal Aid Society, who “appalled by the sight of helpless out-of-towners wasting precious three-day honeymoons in hunting labs and ministers,” assembled reference files of all labs in the city that performed blood testing and of clergy willing to perform war marriages. Van Wagoner bragged that her files were so comprehensive that she had been able to find a Mormon bishop to marry a soldier and young woman from Utah.⁵²

New York officials were not alone in their efforts to assist servicemen in tying the knot. By 1943 the navy had lifted a ten-year-old rule that prevented officers from marrying during their first two years of service. The army, for its part, rescinded its requirement that all soldiers obtain permission to marry from their superior officers.⁵³ These actions by the military effectively silenced the war marriage critics’ claims that the armed forces preferred unmarried men. The dual threats of unfettered premarital sexual activity (and the presumed attendant rise in sexually transmitted infections) and of a disenchanting fighting force thus outweighed the postwar threat of divorce in the minds of state and military authorities alike.

Similar considerations influenced the military’s decision making in regard to marriages between soldiers and foreign women. On the one hand, the army instructed its chaplains to discourage such unions. The War Department stressed the many problems associated with these marriages, such as the three-year residency that U.S. immigration law required for foreign-born wives to obtain citizenship.

Army policy continued to dictate that a soldier who wanted to marry a foreign woman obtain his commanding officer's permission and also enforced a two-month waiting period (which could be waived in cases of premarital pregnancy).⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, it was particularly difficult for African American soldiers to receive permission to marry white women, even though the U.S. embassy reassured British government officials that it did not discriminate on the basis of race.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the army found that its policies were unsuccessful in discouraging soldiers from marrying the foreign women with whom they had fallen in love. Estimates suggest that over 100,000 U.S. soldiers married foreign women during the war years.⁵⁶

Clearly, critics failed to abate the flow of war marriages at home and abroad. Indeed, most of them were fully aware that their efforts would be in vain, especially because they had no viable plan to stop couples from marrying at will. Yet they still continued to discuss the issue of war marriage heatedly throughout the early 1940s. Professional ambition was undoubtedly a motivating factor in this decision as was a desire to capitalize on the nation's blossoming "romance" with psychology.⁵⁷ During the 1920s and 1930s, the activities of marriage educators and counselors had received a minimal amount of coverage in the popular media. The war marriage phenomenon, however, gave marriage experts an entrée onto an expanded public stage. As the nation's record-setting marriage rates took Americans by surprise, the experts' willingness to explain—and frequently to inveigh against—these trends greatly increased their media exposure. Their commonsense advice, laced as it was with strong convictions about the importance of marriage and the devastation of divorce, appealed to men and women eager to find social stability and to have successful marriages in spite of the chaos of wartime.

The marriage counseling profession, in particular, received a boost during these years. In 1942 a small group of counselors established the American Association of Marriage Counselors (AAMC), the first professional organization dedicated solely to marriage counseling.⁵⁸ Lester Dearborn of the Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene was the driving force behind the group's formation; Emily

Hartshorne Mudd, Abraham Stone, and Ernest Groves were among the organization's thirteen charter members.⁵⁹ While historian Eva S. Moskowitz is correct in suggesting that the organization's founding is more attributable to "the end of an intense phase of professional development" than to the onset of war, the connection between the war and the profession's emergence in the public spotlight is nevertheless clear.⁶⁰ By identifying the war marriage phenomenon as a problem of national significance and by broadcasting their desire and ability to mitigate it, marriage counselors successfully made their skills known to a broad audience beyond the narrow confines of their expert community.

Nowhere, in fact, was this link between the war and the profession's rise in prominence more evident than in Hannah Lees's "Good and Married," an article published in the June 27, 1942, issue of *Collier's*. One of the first mainstream, nationally distributed pieces written about marriage counseling, the article featured Mudd's work at the Marriage Counsel of Philadelphia.⁶¹ The article opened with three war-marriage scenarios and the eye-opening prediction that by 1950 "there may easily be one divorce to every four marriages."⁶² The remainder of the piece, however, had relatively little to do with war. In this case, the war marriage issue merely served to catch the reader's attention before delving into the more mundane details of the clinic's "friendly, expert guidance" and its success in solving common problems that transcended wartime, such as sexual adjustment and interference from in-laws.⁶³ The article thus ensured that readers came into contact with the profession's broader message, which Lees aptly summarized: "It takes brains to make a modern marriage work. Sometimes it takes expert advice as well. That's what marriage counseling is for—to make marriage work and to see that it keeps on being fun." The piece did not deny that marriage would inevitably involve difficulties. It did suggest, though, that such problems could be overcome and that even marital work did not have to be a chore.⁶⁴

While the *Collier's* piece used the issue of war marriages as a means to the larger end of publicizing the profession to a national audience, other media coverage explored the more immediate bene-

fits of marital (and premarital) counseling for couples contemplating wartime marriages. “Meet an Engaged Couple,” published in the August 1943 issue of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, for example, followed Dot Marting and serviceman Dick Ong as “they learned painlessly and thoroughly their chances of happiness together before they even stepped near an altar.”⁶⁵ A responsible young couple, Dick and Dot had initially sought this advice because they were aware that so many war marriages would end in divorce; the *Journal* flew marriage counselor Paul Popenoe to Missouri from Los Angeles so that he could personally assess their chances for a successful marriage. This process was important, the article held, because the “flood of signed-and-sealed romances . . . has lent national importance to the wisdom of asking intelligence to help when promising to love and to cherish till death do us part.”⁶⁶ After subjecting Dot and Dick to a battery of physical and personality tests, Popenoe declared them decidedly well suited for one another. He praised them for their decision to wait to marry until after the war and pronounced that they would in all likelihood have a successful union, “not least because both the participants knew in advance that marriage takes well-informed gumption as well as love.”⁶⁷

On the surface, “Meet an Engaged Couple” reads like a novel experiment, as the wise California expert descends on the Midwest to teach an all-American couple a thing or two about marriage. On a deeper level, however, the piece demystified the counseling process for its readers and implied that couples who did not enter marriage with a certain degree of self-knowledge (earned either from counseling or on their own) were wholly responsible if their marriages—even wartime unions—failed. Wartime romance, the article suggested, need not lead to a tide of postwar divorce. In order to avoid this situation, however, young couples needed to look to the friendly guidance provided by marriage counselors like Popenoe.

Participating in the debate about war marriages certainly allowed marriage experts to publicize their approach to modern marriage. It also gave them the opportunity to speak directly to “duration widows.”⁶⁸ A combination of ideological and practical concerns led ex-

perts to their wartime focus on young married women. Most experts held young women responsible for the war-marriage phenomenon and frequently repeated this conviction in the popular press. Furthermore, for all their praises of the “democratic” family, experts still believed that wives, more than their husbands, had a vested interest and responsibility in keeping their marriages together. By logical extension, this responsibility intensified during wartime, when military husbands were not only absent but also needed to concentrate on their military responsibilities rather than their personal affairs. Plus, marriage experts had limited access to married men overseas, whereas their wives were a far more conveniently located audience.

Experts believed that many new brides were woefully unprepared for married life, a situation made all the more precarious by the fact that they were essentially wives without husbands. Such women, they feared, would not feel “married” and would continue to behave socially as they did before marriage. Even worse, they might be tempted to engage in adultery, which could easily lead to divorce. In order to convince women of the gravity of this issue, experts employed a variety of tactics. They emphasized, for example, young wives’ ignorance of what it was like to be married. They wrote at length about how changed servicemen were going to be when they returned home from the front. Perhaps most important, marriage experts insinuated that if women did not follow their advice, they might be dooming their marriages to failure before they even really started.

Although it is impossible to know how many women were swayed by these arguments, it is clear that there was a market for expert advice in the media. By taking advantage of this market, marriage commentators effectively introduced the message that women alone could make postwar marriages “work,” meaning at the very least that they did not end in divorce. For all their pessimism about war marriages, many critics believed, ironically enough, that such unions could and should be saved from postwar dissolution. One marriage counselor, for instance, argued for a positive approach to a fraught situation: “The important thing at present, however, is not so much

one of attempting to forestall what is inevitable but to see if some contribution cannot be made to insure increasing happiness and success for those who are married and those who are marrying.”⁶⁹

Marriage experts, however, did not believe that the trends they perceived were irreconcilable. They advised against war marriages *and* offered help to those couples who did not heed their advice. They further claimed that both deeds were patriotic endeavors that would help bring the nation to victory and that further ensured the future of American democracy. One such expert explained that “the provision of education and counsel that will tend to stabilize the marriages of this war epoch stands out as a defense measure of deepest significance.”⁷⁰ Another argued, “The human needs of our time cry for more adequate resources for the great readjustments that are being made by people everywhere.” Her solution to this pressing problem included “a wider recognition of the need for more available and better counseling” and “more resources for education for marriage for youth of all ages and social levels.”⁷¹ Such pronouncements served two other important purposes. First, they portrayed marriage experts as vital to the war effort. Second, they effectively shielded such experts from appearing to act solely out of professional self-interest as they sold their services to the American public.

While historians, most notably Susan Hartmann, have considered this barrage of advice giving in relation to the end of the war, they have failed to notice that it commenced well before then (although it clearly increased as victory, and the return of husbands from overseas, became imminent). From this perspective, it is clear that such advice was not simply a reaction to wartime conditions but also an extension of the marriage discourse of the 1920s and 1930s.

Commentators in the early 1940s also worked to balance wartime and postwar concerns. In September 1942, for example, Paul Popehoe offered brides pragmatic advice about a range of issues. He encouraged them to work, especially in war industries, thereby expressing their loyalty to their country and their husbands. He also advised them not to live with their parents, because they were unlikely to gain important practice in homemaking if they continued to

live with their mothers. Surprisingly, he urged war brides not to have babies before their husbands went overseas.⁷² For all their eugenics-inspired enthusiasm for young families, many experts feared that if a husband were to die in combat, his wife would not have the necessary capability or resources to raise a child on her own. They also expressed concerns—hardly surprising given that Philip Wylie had just published his indictment of “momism” in *Generation of Vipers*—that young mothers would drown their children with the affection that they usually reserved for their absent spouses. Thus the New York State Federation for Planned Parenthood strongly discouraged young couples from becoming parents in “these uncertain and anxious times.”⁷³

All of this advice, while eminently practical, had the deeper intention of forcing women to remain invested in marriage, to “keep them on the job” as wives.⁷⁴ The hardest work that Popenoe prescribed for young wives, therefore, was not of the menial variety. Rather, he said they had to prepare themselves psychologically for their husbands’ return. For each woman, this preparation process involved analyzing her husband’s interests and cultivating herself in ways that she anticipated would be pleasing to him. Popenoe acknowledged that both wives and husbands would change during their time apart, but he clearly believed that women alone needed to anticipate making adjustments in the postwar years. Never a romantic, he also told wives they could in fact be disappointed with their husbands and with their married lives together. He counseled: “Many a marriage was wrecked after the last war simply because neither husband nor wife had planned to meet these [personality] changes. Begin to do so today. Accustom yourself, in deadly earnest, that he won’t seem so wonderful when he returns as he did when he went away. Make up your mind that he will come back less than you expected, but that in the meanwhile you will make every effort to greet him with *more* than he expected. If you can do that, then any surprise is likely to be a pleasant one instead of a shocking one.”⁷⁵ This idea that anticipating and coping with postwar disappointment in their marriages was women’s work became a common refrain in wartime marriage discourse. An-

other expert echoed this theme when he suggested that wartime brides “should prepare themselves for the possibility that their difficulties, psychological and otherwise, will not end with the war. They should learn now, and in time, to face them with understanding and patience. That means that now, in the period of separation, women should try to visualize their probable postwar problems and plan ways to meet them that the best interests not only of the individual but of the family may be served.”⁷⁶

Marriage commentators extended such advice to women whose husbands were not in the military. In “Is Your Marriage Slipping a Little?” for instance, *Good Housekeeping’s* Helen Van Pelt Wilson suggested that if a wife answered “yes” to the title question, she needed to stop blaming her husband for their problems and to start examining her responsibility for this “plain-vanilla stage” in her married life. According to Wilson, wives should go through this trouble because “a happy marriage means so much to a woman that it should be worth considerable investment in effort.”⁷⁷ Happiness, however, clearly seemed less important to the definition of a successful marriage in Wilson’s formulation than did ensuring that the marriage did not “slip” into divorce. All wives, in other words, had to make a concerted effort to fend off the possibility that their disenchantment with married life would lead to marital failure.

Fears of an explosion of postwar divorces deepened as the Allies approached victory. On April 24, 1944, a *New York Times* headline announced that “7 of 10 War Marriages Held Headed for Trouble.”⁷⁸ A frequently cited statistic, released by the Census Bureau in 1944, cautioned that by 1965 over 51 percent of marriages would end in divorce if current rates persisted.⁷⁹ This apprehension about divorce rates fed a larger national anxiety about the future prospects of America’s soon-to-be veterans. These men, warned sociologist Willard Waller, were poised to become “America’s gravest social problem.”⁸⁰ Returning servicemen had successfully vanquished the Axis powers, and yet it appeared that their native country had very little to offer them upon their coming home except for housing shortages and unemployment. The question of veterans’ psychological health also

generated public concern. “Never in history,” one piece that expressed concern about the fate of war marriages explained, “has a war produced so many neuroses or neurotics.”⁸¹

Marriage experts responded to these anxieties by emphasizing that a healthy marriage could “succeed in cushioning the psychological shocks of war.”⁸² In doing so, they also continued to spread their message of women’s marital responsibility. Experts argued that exactly because veterans faced such a vast array of readjustment problems, it was only appropriate for wives, and not husbands, to adapt after they were reunited. They wanted wives to realize, in other words, that “marriage with a veteran is a job and not a simple realization of fantasies.”⁸³ Such advice pointedly ignored the important adjustments made by a great number of American wives, newlywed and otherwise, during the war years, including entering the workforce for the first time, learning a skilled trade, dealing with rationing, and living (and perhaps raising children) alone. Any acknowledgment of this reality, however, would have detracted from the experts’ larger point: in the postwar years, marriage was properly women’s primary occupation, and the very fate of the institution rested on their shoulders. Marriage counselor Sidney E. Goldstein (who was also a rabbi) reflected the magnitude of these expectations when he argued in his 1945 counseling manual, “What happens to marriage and marriage relationships in this war period and the period to follow the war will depend in largest measure upon the women. If the women will maintain themselves upon a high level of conduct, if they will cherish as inviolable the ideal of fidelity, if they will preserve untarnished the sanctity of married life, their marriages will survive.”⁸⁴

Surely many soldiers were also willing to contribute to their marital success. Little evidence suggests, however, that these men received much marriage advice—a stark contrast to their wives’ experiences at home. The Mediterranean edition of the *Stars and Stripes* (a weekly newspaper for soldiers published between December 1942 and June 1945), for instance, contained only one article regarding marriage in the postwar world. The piece, “Look Out, Men, They’re

Plotting Planned Marriages Back Home,” discussed Planned Parenthood’s efforts to convince young couples married during the war to practice family limitation. One of the lead quotes, “They’re even thinking about the vet’s postwar matrimony,” implied that such an interest was surprising.⁸⁵ The quote also intimated that soon-to-be veterans themselves were not, and did not need to be, concerned about their marriages. Instead, the topics of education and employment (both of which would allow men to fulfill their traditional familial roles as breadwinners) dominated the newspaper’s discussion of the veterans’ role in the postwar United States.

Once soldiers did return home, however, they would have quickly become aware that marriage was an important topic of conversation in the United States. Stories of young couples whose marriages had survived the war abounded in the media of the mid-1940s; these true-life tales generally reinforced the experts’ opinions about what it took to have a successful postwar union. In “Married Strangers,” for instance, submarine commander Bud Watkins shared his advice for solving marital and familial problems caused by long wartime absences. Bud attained this “expert” status because his marriage had remained intact even after his wife, Ellie, and their newborn child had spent months in a Japanese concentration camp in the Philippines. His advice that the husband should be the “captain of the family” clearly worked to bolster male authority. More important was the larger message that if Bud’s wife could survive this trauma and remain happily married, then it should not be too difficult for other women to do so as well.⁸⁶

Other stories in this vein emphasized that many couples who could not make a go of marriage alone needed to seek outside intervention. A Mrs. D., for example, sought counseling because she discovered that she and her veteran husband had dissimilar musical tastes and political views. Terrible quarreling ensued and she came to believe that her spouse had deliberately misrepresented himself when they were dating. She began to contemplate divorce. The couple’s marriage counselor, however, demonstrated to Mrs. D. that her husband was hardly to blame for their problems. While she logically

was in the right, he informed her, she was psychologically in the wrong because she provoked their conflicts. “The whole fate of this union,” according to the counselor, “depended upon her attitude alone.”⁸⁷ Mrs. D. decided to work hard to change her behavior and to respect her husband’s opinions. As a result, the couple’s marriage survived, and Mrs. D.—and the readers of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*—learned an important lesson about the need for veterans’ wives to take the lead in ensuring marital success.

Many couples, however, did not follow the example set by Bud and Ellie Watkins and by Mrs. D. In fact, marriage experts’ attempts to slow the incidence of divorce were an abject failure. The divorce rate nearly doubled throughout the war years, and worse times lay ahead.⁸⁸ In October 1946 *U.S. News and World Report* announced that the country’s divorce rate had reached an all-time high in 1945 (a 25.5 percent increase over the previous year) and that the rise would continue, albeit more slowly, at least through 1946. In hard numbers, these statistics translated into a projected 550,000 divorces in 1946 alone.⁸⁹ Furthermore, *Newsweek* reported, the American divorce rate was the world’s highest, and the marriage rate, while also high, was not keeping pace. One out of every three marriages, the piece predicted, would someday be dissolved.⁹⁰ This situation appeared so uncontrollable—and, indeed, inevitable—that it led one journalist to observe that couples were “buying divorces everywhere almost as matter-of-factly as they had bought moonshine in the ’20s.”⁹¹

Why were so many American couples heading to the nation’s divorce courts? The motivations for seeking a divorce were, undoubtedly, as varied as the reasons for marrying. While anecdotal evidence suggests that judges were granting at least some of the nation’s divorces to long-married couples, an understanding—which was probably in part correct—developed that most involved the young and newly married, especially those without joint property or children.⁹² “The Whys of War Divorces,” a 1946 piece in the *New York Times Magazine*, aptly summarized the prevailing conventional wisdom about the postwar divorce outbreak. The article, citing predictions that by 1950 1 million wartime marriages would have ended in di-

vorce, investigated this widespread “disaster” and looked for the reason behind the boom of GI divorces.⁹³ Not surprisingly, the “Whys of War Divorces” listed hasty marriages as a major cause of postwar marital failure. Separation, in which newlywed couples lost out on the period of “normal adjustment” and instead “had completely different experiences” while living apart, also contributed to the problem. As the separation lengthened, the article continued, some servicemen succumbed to the temptation to fraternize “enthusiastically and impartially with fraeulein, mesdemoiselles, and signorine.” But even couples who remained faithful during their time apart were likely to face problems. Disillusionment and economic ills, caused by joblessness and housing shortages, also contributed to the rising divorce rate.⁹⁴

The quick terminations of wartime unions deeply disturbed many Americans, who saw a lack of regard for the sanctity of marriage. As confirmation of their distress, there were reports of divorce suits in which “the husband was unable to tell his wife’s first name.”⁹⁵ Spurred by doomsayers’ claims that the divorce rate foretold the full-scale demise of the American family, a real panic ensued. One judge labeled the situation “horrifying,” and the editors of the *Christian Century* argued, “This appalling [divorce] record constitutes one of the most dependable indices of the disintegration now manifesting itself in American life.”⁹⁶ Ohio congressman Homer A. Ramey, who had proposed a constitutional amendment to establish uniform marriage and divorce laws throughout the United States, echoed similar concerns when he argued in 1945, “As the American home goes, so the country goes. . . . The sanctity of the home, particularly under present military conditions, must be protected. It is necessary to check the trend toward popularizing divorce, toward glamour marriages and glamour divorces, by tightening up the laws on a uniform basis throughout the United States.”⁹⁷ While his efforts—like those of legislators throughout the first half of the century—ultimately faltered over concerns about states’ rights, his anxiety about the future of American marriage (and society) nevertheless resonated with the discourse of the day.

Most marriage experts, however, refused to concede failure. They readily acknowledged that “thousands of our war marriages, of course, are doomed.”⁹⁸ After all, their trenchant criticisms of the war marriage phenomenon had anticipated this very trend. Nevertheless, they still held out hope that many war marriages, and the American family, could be “saved,” especially with proper intervention. In 1946, for example, counselor Marie Munk optimistically argued that “thousands of ‘war casualty marriages’ in which the partners now rush to the divorce courts, can and should be salvaged by improved community services.”⁹⁹

Professional interests, again, informed this stance. Fears about the tenuous future of the American family undoubtedly fueled the market for marriage experts’ educational and counseling services. “Marriage counsel,” reported one article about the postwar marital experience, “has become a necessary part of American life.”¹⁰⁰ While this statement exaggerates the availability of marriage counseling clinics in the United States, it is indicative of the growing legitimacy of the profession. A similar boost came from the serial publication of “The Companion Marriage Clinic” in the *Woman’s Home Companion*. Written by Penn State psychologist Clifford R. Adams, this series pioneered an advice-giving format that, by offering readers the opportunity to consult with a marriage counselor in the comfort of their own homes, became increasingly popular in the 1950s.¹⁰¹ During the immediate postwar years, as well, marriage experts influenced the operating procedures of the nation’s divorce courts. Experiments in reconciling couples on the verge of divorce took place in communities from New York City to Milwaukee. While, in retrospect, the long-term effectiveness of such efforts is questionable, their symbolic value was nevertheless important. In these years, any measure that held the potential to abate the steadily climbing divorce rate garnered accolades from the expert community and attention from the media.¹⁰²

Many marriage experts retained their faith in the viability of American marriage because they held preconceived notions about what types of women and men were seeking to terminate their

unions in the nation's divorce courts. Experts believed that middle-class women, in particular, would be the most susceptible to advice of the "you married him, now stick with him" variety.¹⁰³ Given that the expert community had focused almost exclusively on defining middle-class marital success in preceding decades, this emphasis is hardly surprising. Although these women might have been swept off their feet by their soldier-husbands, it was assumed that they were the likeliest candidates to understand the importance of taking marriage seriously and of giving their unions a chance to succeed. The association of "stable marriage" with "middle class" would only intensify as more Americans aspired to and achieved a rise in socioeconomic status during the 1950s.

Class and gender assumptions also played a role in public perceptions of the postwar divorcée. The popular 1946 film *The Best Years of Our Lives*, for example, portrays the (soon-to-be) divorcée Marie (Virginia Mayo) as a woman of questionable background and decidedly low morals, who displays little respect for the generally accepted view that war wives need to subsume their own wants and desires to those of their returning husbands.¹⁰⁴ Not only is she working at a nightclub and therefore not home when her husband, Fred (Dana Andrews), returns from the service, but Marie also is unwilling to give up her fun, extravagant lifestyle in order to settle down and be the devoted wife of a working-class soda jerk. She expresses displeasure with Fred's appearance when he is not in uniform and openly flirts with and entertains other men in their apartment. Moreover, she chastises her husband, who obviously experienced a severe trauma while in action, for living in the past and suggests that he is foolish for failing to put his war experiences behind him.¹⁰⁵ When Fred and Marie's marriage subsequently falls apart, it is precisely because she has violated all of the obligations of a veteran's wife—in stark contrast with the other dutiful women in the film. Because of Marie's disregard for marital norms, Fred is able to escape the taint of a failed marriage and to find love with the intelligent, middle-class Peggy (Theresa Wright).

Marriage experts and the public, therefore, began to differentiate

between war marriages that were worth saving and ones that were doomed for divorce by the behavior of women like Marie. They believed that by weathering the rough period of postwar readjustment, young couples (especially those who aspired to be middle class) could be successfully married, meaning at the very least, that they would not divorce. No longer “married strangers,” the husbands and especially the wives who avoided the divorce courts during their early years of marriage implicitly accepted the responsibility of staying married for their own wellbeing, the interests of their children, and the nation’s welfare.

The idea that marriage required hard work thus flourished during the early and mid-1940s, even as wartime conditions separated husbands and wives for extended periods of time and as readjustment posed new and difficult challenges to the nation’s married couples. The audience for a marital work ethic grew during this time, as the national press increasingly asked marriage experts to explain the nation’s volatile marriage and divorce rates and to propose solutions that would stabilize both trends. The experts never denied that many war marriages would end in divorce, acknowledging that a lot of servicemen and their wives were poorly matched from the start. While they clearly did not prevent record numbers of couples from ending their marriages, they nevertheless reinforced the increasingly popular idea that a failed marriage was strong evidence of individual shortcomings, primarily on the part of the wife. In the ensuing years, the ability to hold a marriage together, for better or for worse, became the very definition of marital and wifely success. The importance of working at marriage, in other words, would intensify in the 1950s.

THEY LEARNED TO LOVE AGAIN

MARRIAGE SAVING IN THE 1950S

In 1958 *Divorce Hearing* debuted in syndication on television, “presented in the belief that divorce is America’s greatest danger in the home and the community . . . and that understanding is the greatest weapon against divorce.”¹ The program was the brainchild of Paul Popenoe, who had become a national celebrity thanks to his monthly feature in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* and regular appearances on *Art Linkletter’s House Party*. Each episode of the show featured two couples who had filed for divorce in real life. Standing before Popenoe in a courtroom setting, each spouse took a turn describing their path to marital breakdown. In one episode, for instance, a Mrs. G. alleged that her husband of two years had been “playing around” with a local beauty shop owner. She hired a private investigator, who confirmed her suspicions. Mr. G., however, argued that the investigator was a “phony” and that “he had heard about jealous women but his wife is in a class by herself.” Sadly, Mr. G. still loved his wife and their daughter, but he believed that “under the conditions” it would be best for them to divorce.²

Despite Mr. G.'s clear desire to reconcile with his wife, *Divorce Hearing's* purpose was not to bring about happy endings. As Popenoe clearly explained at the opening of each show, "It is our intention on this program to examine the complaints and problems of couples who have filed for divorce in the sincere hope that a better understanding of the causes and consequences of divorce may impress upon you the importance of saving your marriage. It should be understood that *Divorce Hearing* is an inquiry program—and is not marriage counselling [sic]."³ He further reminded the divorcing couple at the opening of each segment that their purpose on the show was "to help others avoid the tragedy you are now faced with."⁴ This stated intention, however, did not prevent Popenoe from advertising the benefits of marriage counseling. Nor did his producers' conviction that showcasing marital strife made for better television (to the point that they worked to provoke couples prior to taping).⁵ On one episode, then, Popenoe featured a "special bit for reconciliation" that reintroduced his viewers to a couple who had overcome their problems after appearing on the show. His script read, "In most instances the couples appearing on *Divorce Hearing* unfortunately have gone too far to save their marriages. Even though they may inwardly want to turn back and try again, they've generated so much momentum toward divorce—by filing and telling their friends and relatives—that pride often becomes the main obstacle to a reconciliation. Had these couples, or any couple whose marriage ends in divorce sought competent counselling early in their marriage—even before any serious difficulty had arisen—they would, in all probability still be living happily together."⁶

Divorce Hearing, therefore, capitalized on two significant trends of the 1950s: the public's seemingly unquenchable thirst for televised courtroom dramas and high expectations for married life that were matched by widespread anxieties about the stability of American marriages.⁷ Over the past several decades, historians have debunked a variety of myths about family life in the 1950s. They have established, for instance, that the marriage patterns of the era were not the last gasps of tradition but closely related to specific political,



Paul Popenoe presides over his "court" on the set of *Divorce Hearing*. Courtesy Paul Popenoe Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

economic, and social conditions such as the Cold War.⁸ Historians also have complicated the notion of repressed 1950s womanhood, pointing to the growing frequency of married women's workforce participation, their contributions to voluntary and labor organizations, and their expressions of discontent with various aspects of their lives.⁹ But they have failed to explain why so many wives of the era simultaneously described their marriages as unsatisfying and rated their marital experiences as "above average" or even "successful."¹⁰ The answer lies in the deep-seated fear of divorce that influenced how experts and the public alike approached marriage in the 1950s. Experts, in other words, did not focus on marriage saving because, as Stephanie Coontz has suggested, they were optimistic about the direction of American family life. Rather, they did so because they were deeply concerned about the long-term consequences of widespread marital breakdown.¹¹

Riding a larger wave of American faith in expertise, specialists in marriage and family life found themselves on a considerably bigger public stage than their counterparts in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. As they took advantage of this opportunity, experts reached a sizable and apprehensive audience of young wives with the message that it was their job to create marital happiness and stability after years of economic and social upheaval. The scope of women's marital work, in turn, expanded as experts outlined a variety of tasks and described the ideal way to perform each one in explicit detail. They encouraged wives to have a heightened awareness of their family members' physical needs, and they urged them to promote their husbands' career success. Experts also recommended that women take responsibility for the psychological health of each of their family members. Failure to perform such duties, they cautioned, could result in premature death for an overworked husband, juvenile delinquency, or the dissolution of the marriage and the family.

The experts' larger message was simple: with enough effort, any marriage could be saved, if not from unhappiness, than at least from divorce. Many wives readily embraced this call to work as they strove

to achieve new heights of marital and familial togetherness. By the numbers, fewer couples divorced in the 1950s than in the immediate aftermath of the war. But for all the potential good that could come from women's efforts, there was also a downside. Because they had internalized the idea that hard work could help them overcome any problem, some women chose to remain married in the face of alcoholism, violence, and chronic infidelity. This aspect of marital work would come under harsh criticism in subsequent decades.

AFTER LONG YEARS OF depression and war, many American couples readily settled down in the 1950s. Soldiers returned home from the war, took advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them by the GI Bill, found jobs in the prospering economy, and moved their families out to the burgeoning suburbs. Their wives left jobs in wartime industries, cared for their growing families, and tried to help their families live happy, "well-adjusted" lives. Lurking beneath the surface of this serene picture, however, were significant problems and fears. Continuing racial discrimination throughout the nation blocked African Americans from participating in the postwar economy and housing boom. The possibility that the Cold War would become a "hot" one constantly posed a threat to international and domestic stability. Anxieties about conformity, corporate culture, education, youthful rebellion, and enforcing "normal" gender roles (to name but a few concerns) thus existed side by side with celebrations of America's prosperity and abundance.

The young husbands and wives who embraced this new lifestyle did not think that they were merely replicating the breadwinner/homemaker patterns of a bygone era. Rather, they believed that they were helping marriage to become a new, fully egalitarian institution. According to this interpretation, women's work inside the home was complementary to men's work in the outside world and thus of equal value to the family unit. Marriage experts encouraged wives to embrace this position and to view marriage as a fulfilling career. Emily Mudd, for instance, outlined the many roles that women had to assume when they became wives. She approvingly quoted a "modern

and prominent wife” who explained, “To be a successful wife is a career in itself, requiring among other things, the qualities of a diplomat, a businesswoman, a good cook, a trained nurse, a school-teacher, a politician, and a glamour girl.”¹² (Mudd evidently saw little irony in disseminating this advice despite the fact that she was not only a wife and mother of four but also an influential “career” woman in the more traditional sense of the word.)¹³ Similarly, psychologist Clifford R. Adams argued, “When a woman becomes a wife, she undertakes an entirely new role. Since her principal occupation will be running the house, in a sense marriage is a change of jobs. Adapting to this change successfully requires many of the same attitudes that would be needed in any new job.”¹⁴ By choosing this career change—and Adams did not necessarily mean that the wife immediately would give up paid employment—a woman thus became committed to “making marriage work” (the phrase used as the title of Adams’s monthly column in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*).

This job began before marriage as a young woman looked to find a potential mate and to convince him to get married. The general fear of a shortage of eligible bachelors persisted even after the war. As the average age of marriage dropped for both men and women, unmarried women as young as twenty or twenty-one often thought of themselves as “old maids.”¹⁵ The common perception that women had much more to gain from marriage than did men further complicated this situation, as did the romanticization of the bachelor lifestyle that appeared in “men’s” publications such as *Playboy* (founded in 1953).¹⁶ Marriage commentators thus counseled women that it was their responsibility to persuade men that being married was a desirable alternative to the single life. The author of “How to Make Him Propose,” for example, offered the following strategy: “It is up to you to *earn* the proposal—by waging a dignified, common-sense campaign designed to help him see for himself that matrimony rather than bachelorhood is the keystone of a full and happy life.”¹⁷

The intensity of the pressure to marry, as well as the need to work at finding a suitable mate, was clear in a four-part series titled “How to Be Marriageable,” which appeared in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* in 1954.

It followed “Marcia,” an unmarried twenty-nine-year-old school-teacher, as she overcame the flaws that had prevented her from “earning” a proposal at a younger age. Marcia, in fact, had been so desperate to find a husband that she had left her small town, moved to Los Angeles, and enrolled in a “Marriage Readiness Course” at the American Institute of Family Relations (AIFR). Each installment of the series featured Marcia’s first-person account of her counseling sessions and of her personal life. The counselor’s revelations—that Marcia needed to soften her appearance, that her expectations for her future husband were too high, that she was subconsciously fearful of emotional intimacy—helped her move toward becoming appealing wife material. By the time that Marcia met and was courted by good, solid Dick, it was clear that she had invested sufficient time and energy in her program to become a successfully married woman.¹⁸

For all her hard work, however, the real-life “Marcia” did not want her fiancé to know about her participation in the project. Her reluctance led the *Journal’s* executive editor to propose that a reporter pose as a commercial photographer in order to cover Marcia’s wedding without Dick’s knowledge.¹⁹ Although it is impossible to know the personal reasons behind Marcia’s decision not to share her participation in the project with Dick, the series certainly suggested that all unmarried women over a certain age were psychologically defective.²⁰ Her unwillingness to share her secret also implied that a woman’s work in convincing a man to marry her needed to be covert. Indeed, marriage experts cautioned women trying to win proposals to avoid being overly aggressive in their tactics because “harping on marriage” frequently drove men away.²¹

“How to Be Marriageable” ultimately gave unmarried women who wanted to find husbands the impression that self-improvement and lowered expectations were surefire ways to accomplish their ambition. To this end, AIFR director Paul Popenoe stated, “Any normal, young woman who wishes to marry, and is willing to try, can succeed.”²² Popenoe, however, had considerably less faith in his staff’s capabilities in private than he did in public. The AIFR, in fact, had conducted an exhaustive search for a suitable candidate who

would find a spouse and live happily ever after. This search, however, did not find its way into the *Journal*.

Many of the women who read this series took seriously the message that being married was always more desirable than being unmarried. The AIFR was so inundated with letters from unmarried women looking for help that it opened a separate department, named the Human Relations Program, to respond to such inquiries.²³ The program's methods were rather unorthodox, as much of the counseling took place through correspondence rather than in person. The letters written between clients and their counselors reflected the defining role that marriage and motherhood played in postwar women's lives. "I want to be a wife, not a daughter, and I cannot seem to make myself fall in love with the kind of man who would be a suitable husband," explained a successful career woman.²⁴ The pressure for women to marry only intensified as they grew older; a thirty-three-year-old client stated, for instance, "I should be married and rearing a family at my age. This doesn't seem to worry me too much, which fact does worry me. I feel the fears and anxieties must be buried. Other people worry about my status more than I do. Occasionally I hesitate to give my age because of my single status."²⁵ Most of these women had accepted the idea that marriage was a job in and of itself. One single woman wrote her counselor, "I suppose that the fact that I am unmarried gives me the greatest concern. Being a wife and mother is the job that appeals to me most. Also not being married gives me a sense of failure."²⁶ The Human Relations Program, however, frequently did not live up to the promises of "How to Be Marriageable." Many clients corresponded with their counselors over the course of several years and still did not find husbands.²⁷ Their letters nevertheless demonstrate the lengths that unmarried women were willing to go to in order to become wives.

Once they had attained their new career, the basic work of postwar wives involved housework and child care, much as it had for previous generations of women. But this work, while never simple, became more complicated in the postwar years. As families moved to the suburbs and purchased an ever-growing number of "labor-

saving” devices, social norms dictated that homes be extraordinarily clean and efficiently managed. Experts warned wives, however, to avoid making their homes too sterile or feminine, at the risk of making their husbands feel uncomfortable or unwelcome at the end of a long work day.²⁸ This blunder, they implied, could lead husbands to avoid spending time at home, a clear indication of wifely failure at a time when many Americans believed “togetherness” to be an essential element of successful family life.²⁹ Raising children required a similarly delicate balancing act. Advice literature about child rearing proliferated in these years and young mothers learned from these texts that they needed to be loving and attentive without being overbearing or domineering. On the one hand, family life experts counseled that neglectful mothers contributed to juvenile delinquency. On the other, they warned that aggressive “moms” feminized their sons, perhaps even leading them to exhibit homosexual tendencies.³⁰ These experts further cautioned that women who invested all of their time in their children did so at the expense of their marriages. Such mothers, they argued, did not provide their children with the models necessary to help them forge their own happy marital relationships in the future.³¹

A successful postwar wife’s work, however, did not end with these duties. “There’s a good deal more to being a good wife,” one journalist/wife wrote in 1953, “than just being a good housewife and mother.”³² That same year, Dorothy Carnegie (wife of the famous self-help guru Dale Carnegie) outlined an important new task for wives in her book *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead*.³³ Carnegie’s book promised to help women “fulfill their obligations as helpmates, and assist their husbands up the ladder of success.”³⁴ The author did not guarantee that following her advice would help her readers’ husbands to become millionaires (as her own husband had). She did imply, citing a 90 percent rate of effectiveness, that the application of her principles would unfailingly help “normal” husbands prosper at their chosen careers and thus be happier in their personal lives as well. Carnegie’s suggestions ranged from the intangible, such as working to raise a man’s “EQ” (enthusiasm quotient), to the practical, such as how to live

within a certain income.³⁵ By illustrating all of her tenets with examples drawn from history and from personal experience, Carnegie demonstrated the viability of her program. She explained, for instance, that Dale had problems remembering names at social gatherings. In order to solve this problem, she made sure to learn the names of guests before they went out and to work their names into conversation. This strategy, in turn, “relieved him of much strain and embarrassment.”³⁶

While Carnegie’s belief that women were best suited to be their husbands’ helpmates had roots reaching back to the colonial period, her assertion that wives should be actively involved in their husbands’ business affairs was relatively novel, a clear by-product of postwar corporate culture. Corporate wisdom in the 1950s held that when a company was making hiring and promotion decisions, it should consider not only the merits of the candidate but also those of his wife. A man whose wife was friendly and adaptable, according to this logic, was a far better candidate than one whose wife was domineering (Carnegie labeled such a woman a “buttinsky”) or prone to inappropriate behavior, such as flirting with the boss or excessive drinking at company functions.³⁷ “Self-made millionaire” R. E. Dumas Milner explained to the readers of *Good Housekeeping*, “We employers realize how often the wrong wife can break the right man. This doesn’t mean that the wife is necessarily wrong for the man but that she is wrong for the job. On the other hand, more often than is realized the wife is the chief factor in the husband’s success in his career.”³⁸ Such thinking often left women with little choice but to accept corporate demands on their husbands’ time and on their social lives.³⁹

If shouldering responsibility for her husband’s career success was an important wifely duty, so too was making sure that his business demands did not affect his physical health. Specifically, many commentators warned white middle-class wives that their husbands were in grave danger of premature illness and death from working too hard in the cutthroat corporate world. Experts held that wives often drove their husbands to this dire fate by demanding that they

make enough money to purchase the outward trappings of material success. Only by working to curb these impulses, they suggested, could a wife avoid culpability for her husband's untimely demise. Underscoring this point were sad true-life tales such as one published by the widowed Jane Lincoln under the title "I'm to Blame That: My Husband Died Too Young."⁴⁰

In her widely excerpted 1957 book *Help Your Husband Stay Alive!* author Hannah Lees (the pseudonym of writer Elizabeth Head Fetter, whose husband Ferdinand, fittingly, was a physician) turned the assumption that wives had some degree of control over, as well as a vested interest in, their husbands' health into an explicit responsibility involving life and death.⁴¹ She argued that American women needed to monitor their husbands' eating and exercise habits and to make them desirous of living long lives. Lees believed that women, with a gender-specific capacity to love, were particularly suited to this job: "We don't always realize that being a good wife is one of the most highly skilled and specialized jobs in the world and one which only a woman, and a remarkably good woman at that, is capable of. A good wife can often do for a man what a whole battery of highly trained psychiatrists might never be able to do. She can make him feel strong and creative. She can make him proud of being a man and happy about being a husband and father and a hard-working responsible citizen. If a man is happy about those things he will live years longer and contribute more to life each year."⁴² Sexual availability also played a role in making men happy.⁴³ A wife who "wooded" her husband in bed, according to Lees, could "change her husband's whole life and save him from early old age and even death."⁴⁴ Rather than directly indicting a culture that drove men to work themselves "to death," *Help Your Husband Stay Alive!* urged women to accept responsibility for mitigating its effects. Wives whose husbands died "too young," then, were guilty of negligence and duly punished by having to rejoin the ranks of the unmarried.

All of the standard spousal duties had to be carried out even if a wife worked outside the home, as increasingly more married women did in the 1950s.⁴⁵ Given their insistence that marriage should be a

wife's primary career, it is initially surprising that marriage commentators did not automatically castigate all white, middle-class "working wives." But experts sharply divided on the issue and engaged in a rigorous debate about the positive and negative aspects of this trend throughout the 1950s. Commentators who objected to wives' engaging in paid employment did so because they feared that women who worked outside the home would neglect their duties within it. As a result, these women would damage their families, and, on a larger scale, the nation's welfare. Those who supported the growing number of wives in the workforce lauded the material benefits that the additional earnings brought to their families. They argued that by raising their families' standard of living, working wives literally and figuratively enriched American home life.⁴⁶

Such support, however, was by no means unconditional. Experts firmly held that wives should not work until their children reached school age, thereby failing to acknowledge that many married women worked not for "pin money" but rather out of basic economic necessity. They also insisted that wives be willing, in historian Jessica Weiss's words, "to work the double shift of paid labor outside the home and unpaid domestic labor within it."⁴⁷ This domestic labor, of course, extended beyond housekeeping. Marriage experts told working wives that they remained responsible for guaranteeing marital success and that under no circumstances should they let their careers hinder this goal. In a lengthy 1958 *Cosmopolitan* piece, "The American Wife," journalist T. F. James explained the utmost importance of working for marital happiness: "Accepting herself as a woman, the American wife accepts simultaneously her responsibility for the spiritual and emotional depth of her marriage. It is, in brief, up to her to create an emotional climate in which both love and equality prosper. Whether she chooses to combine a career with her marriage or stay home and raise a large family, this is the American wife's truly challenging job in the second half of the twentieth century."⁴⁸

The almost pleading tone of these attempts to convince women to think of marriage as a career choice betrayed a tacit acknowledgment that many wives knew that men's work remained more highly

valued than their own, as well as a fear that American women might not be content to settle for this subordinate role. Many wives nevertheless embraced their new job description because it gave them increased power in family decision making. It allowed them, for example, to demand their husbands' help with some of their "women's work," especially child rearing. Fathers, however, ultimately retained the final word as to how much time and energy they devoted to parenting. According to Weiss, this process of "contested egalitarianism" was a nascent step toward the gradual redistribution of familial power generally credited to the baby boom generation instead of to their parents. The long-term significance of the shift notwithstanding, the work associated with marriage clearly remained a female responsibility in the 1950s.⁴⁹

A slight decline in the nation's divorce rate—from 10.3 per 1,000 married women fifteen years old and over in 1950 to 9.2 in 1960—indicated that at least some American wives were taking such advice to heart.⁵⁰ Indeed, such numbers prompted a perhaps overly enthusiastic journalist to proclaim that "divorce is going out of style."⁵¹ But the general mood regarding divorce was not so optimistic. The number of divorces, while down from the postwar peak, remained higher than before the war, and the United States still had one of the highest divorce rates in the world.⁵² Furthermore, the lengths to which couples were willing to fit their divorce cases to the letter, rather than the intent, of the law seemed to be growing more extreme. The debate about the potential effects of divorce on children also remained unresolved. In 1950, for example, Sidonie Gruenberg, the retired director of the Child Study Association of America, commented that "a bad marriage and an unhappy home . . . might prove more tragic to a child than divorce."⁵³ At the same time, however, other experts labeled children the "tragic victims" of divorce.⁵⁴ The dean of Columbia University's School of Social Work issued a warning: "Imagine three hundred thousand children stricken one year by infantile paralysis . . . Yet the chances of these children being crippled emotionally [by divorce] are far greater than the chances for physical crippling by poliomyelitis."⁵⁵

Many of the broad concerns about divorce and its detrimental effects on individuals, families, and the larger public welfare echoed worries expressed in earlier decades, but they became heightened in the postwar years. Even though studies indicated that married couples from the lower and working classes were more likely to divorce than spouses from the expanding middle class, many experts and the media largely disregarded these numbers.⁵⁶ Instead, they worried about what would happen if divorce developed into a still more widespread middle-class phenomenon. Any rise in the divorce rate among the middle class threatened to expose weaknesses in the era's carefully constructed model of "egalitarian" marriage. It also had the potential to discredit the experts who claimed to be working to strengthen the institution. Most significantly, divorce appeared to be a slippery slope leading to a variety of other social problems, ranging from women's rejection of their assigned gender roles to juvenile delinquency, which could disrupt the nation's prosperity and stability at home and abroad.

Any woman who questioned the legitimacy of this perception did not have to look far to learn why she should hold on to her marriage, as the media consistently reminded wives how "lucky" they were to be married.⁵⁷ Spreading this message was the central mission of Divorcees Anonymous (DA), an organization founded with the explicit purpose of preventing women from seeking "unnecessary" divorces. The group was established by Chicago-based attorney Samuel M. Starr in 1949. As Starr told the story, he was meeting one afternoon with a couple determined to obtain a divorce.⁵⁸ Although good business sense would have dictated that he welcome this new business, Starr balked at working on the case because he believed that the couple "had merely exaggerated some little peeves." On leaving his office to find some documents, Starr encountered his next appointment, a divorcée who "had often expressed regret over legal banishment of her husband."⁵⁹ Accounts differ as to whether the divorcée offered to speak to the quarreling couple or if Starr suggested the idea. They all agree that, after spending time with the divorcée, the couple understood the folly of wanting to divorce and rediscovered their love

for one another.⁶⁰ Inspired by this success, Starr asked other former female clients who regretted their divorces to help him in keeping “married women from making similar blunders.”⁶¹

Within the group’s first month, the number of divorced women participating in the program and attending weekly meetings grew from five to over 100.⁶² When a wife interested in divorcing her husband came to Starr’s office, he would ask if she wanted “to save her marriage.”⁶³ If she expressed interest in doing so, the lawyer would match her up with one or two divorcées (or “DAs”) to help her through this difficult time. “Mary B.,” for instance, arrived at Starr’s office upset that her husband was having an affair. Her problem was easily diagnosed, Starr felt, because “she was 29 and looked closer to 40. Her clothes were dowdy, her hair stringy.” The DAs assigned to Mary’s case took her to a beauty salon and sewed her some new clothes. They met with her every day to work “on her mind and her heart as well as her appearance.” When they felt that Mary had sufficiently improved, her mentors arranged for her to go on a date with her estranged husband. Following their hard work, Mary’s husband willingly gave up his mistress and came back to live with his wife and baby.⁶⁴

By 1956 Divorcees Anonymous claimed to have “saved” 3,000 couples from divorce. The organization had spread beyond Chicago, establishing branches in various cities and towns, from Los Angeles, California, to Lubbock, Texas.⁶⁵ While the number of Americans who had direct contact with DA remained relatively small, the organization spread its message to a much broader audience through the popular press and television. Media accounts invariably described DAs as intelligent, well-educated women who believed fervently in their crusade. Because they had not worked hard enough to save their own marriages, these portrayals implied, DAs felt a strong obligation to teach other women—and occasionally even men—how to avoid their mistakes. The similarity in name and mission between DA and Alcoholics Anonymous (founded in 1935) was almost certainly not accidental. But if alcoholism was a “men’s” problem in the 1950s (as many considered it to be), divorce was most often a women’s.⁶⁶

The actions of individual DAS and the popular coverage of the organization reinforced the idea that women had much more invested in being married than did men.

DA's message was not incorrect. Having a "working" marriage was a badge of honor for many middle-class women in the 1950s and admitting defeat by pursuing divorce was likely not an easy decision. The social costs of divorce were high, as were the financial ones. Finding work that would allow a woman to maintain her family's accustomed style of living would have been particularly difficult given the sex-segregated nature of the economy and low wages assigned to "women's" work. While outrage about exorbitant alimony judgments frequently found its way into the press (the first issue of *Playboy* featured an article on this very topic, "Miss Gold-Digger of 1953"), the likelihood of a woman receiving an alimony decree was relatively small, as were the sums assessed to women who were fortunate enough to receive alimony at all.⁶⁷ Furthermore, mothers—who generally received primary custody of their children—also had to worry about mitigating the psychological effects of divorce on their children. A Baltimore social worker observed among his divorced clients "a marked anxiety revolving around the basic question: Am I doing the right thing in the way I am raising my child?"⁶⁸

The prospects for divorced women were not entirely gloomy. Several sociological studies published in the 1950s indicated that most divorced women eventually remarried and that many of them were happier in their second marriages than they had been in their first ones.⁶⁹ Such findings, however, received virtually no coverage outside the expert community and generally appear to have had little influence on most experts' approach to divorce, especially in the popular media. Like the DAS, their focus was on saving marriages, and they held fast to their message that divorce was an avoidable tragedy. In this regard, their faith in the personal and social benefits of the working marriage was unwavering.

Still, not all attempts to save marriages met with unqualified success. In the case of conciliation courts, for example, experts clearly overestimated their ability to heal "broken" relationships.

Interest in establishing such courts had existed before the Second World War, but the idea became increasingly popular in the postwar years as efforts to prevent divorce intensified. Pioneers in the field, notably Ohio judge Paul Alexander, assumed that most spouses who wanted to end their marriages had psychological problems that impeded their ability to form stable marital unions. The goal of the conciliation court, then, was to help the spouses identify and work through their problems, thus stopping them from pursuing a needless divorce. In this system, any couple desirous of obtaining a divorce would be investigated so that the court could evaluate the viability of their marriage. The couple would also attend mandatory counseling sessions. At the end of this process, a judge (and not the couple) would determine whether or not the marriage should be dissolved. Despite great optimism for this project in the therapeutic community, it simply did not work. Its architects overlooked the time and expense needed to investigate each potential divorce. When the courts were put into practice, their effectiveness was dubious at best. In New Jersey, for instance, a pilot program in “quasi-mandatory” counseling for divorce petitioners yielded a 97.3 percent failure rate.⁷⁰ Supporters of conciliation courts had failed to recognize that many of the men and women who petitioned for divorce had already gone through a long and painful process before making the decision to terminate their unions.

In spite of such setbacks, experts redoubled their efforts to prevent divorce and to promote the virtues of marriage. One important strategy in this regard, as it had been in earlier decades, was to reach young Americans before they married. Classes devoted to “family life education” (FLE) became prevalent not only at universities but also on the secondary level in the 1950s and 1960s, a development prompted by changing demographics (such as the plummeting average age at marriage) and the growing conviction among educators that the majority of high school students needed to acquire basic “life adjustment” skills.⁷¹ According to historian Jeffrey Moran, high school FLE courses reinforced traditional notions of male and female marital roles and worked to “train adolescents to conform to middle-

class family life standards.⁷² For women, this undoubtedly meant fostering a happy married life (thus keeping their relationships safe from dissolution). On the collegiate level, the popularity of marriage courses, particularly among women, soared.⁷³ From textbooks with pointed titles such as *Making the Most of Marriage* and *Toward a Successful Marriage*, coeds learned how to avoid the pitfalls that led to marital unhappiness and failure.⁷⁴ The author of the latter text, James Peterson, explained that its purpose was to “spur individuals to think more constructively and profoundly about their own marital choice or level of adjustment.”⁷⁵ After reading his text and applying his suggestions to their lives, Peterson implied, students could not help but to choose their mates wisely and to be successfully married.

Marriage educators, counselors, and clergymen were particularly interested in preventing marriages between men and women who came from different racial or religious backgrounds. Interracial marriage was quite rare in the United States in the 1950s and indeed remained illegal throughout the South and much of the West. But the level of anxiety about the possibility of interracial marriage, particularly as a threat to white status and identity, overshadowed the actual incidence of it. Opponents of interracial marriages found new allies in the expert community of the 1950s. According to historian Renee Romano, experts displayed an increasing interest in the study of such unions and effectively “questioned the mental health of whites who would consider crossing racial lines and suggested that those who intermarried would suffer severe social consequences.” Not surprisingly, they came to the damning conclusion that marriages between blacks and whites were destined for marital failure. Fraught with religious objections and fears about the very notion of interracial sex, such proclamations contributed to “an atmosphere of strict societal repression of interracial marriage.”⁷⁶ While thousands of interracial couples rebelled against this environment and married, their already difficult battle for social acceptance was made still more complicated by the experts’ stand on the issue.

Experts’ discussion of interfaith marriages followed a relatively similar trajectory. A “typical” premarital counseling case presented

in a casebook published by the American Association of Marriage Counselors (AAMC), for instance, involved a young Jewish woman whose family was upset when she announced her engagement to a Catholic graduate student. Counseling (with a lay person), however, led her to understand “that she had been immature in her attitudes toward her father, her religion, her previous convictions, her fiancé, and so on.” The counselor’s notes concluded with an approving statement about her happy marriage with a Jewish man in her father’s line of business.⁷⁷ Marriage counselors’ attempts to avert such marriages reflected the lingering intellectual roots of negative eugenics in the profession. This effort on the part of religious leaders suggested an effort to keep their parishioners invested in their religious communities and, particularly in the case of Catholics and Jews, to have them maintain their distinctive identities while they assimilated into mainstream middle-class culture.⁷⁸

Experts also expected couples from relatively similar backgrounds to understand that the time to discover any fundamental incompatibilities was before they were married. In advice articles with unsubtle titles such as “Marriage Isn’t a Reform School,” they discouraged readers from believing that they would be able to change their spouses’ personalities or habits once they had tied the knot.⁷⁹ The aim was to disabuse couples of romanticized visions of their prospective life as husband and wife. “To be forewarned,” explained one minister in 1958, “is to be forearmed.”⁸⁰ They further argued that it was far better for a couple to break off an untenable engagement than it was for them to seek a divorce sometime in the future. Thus Clifford Adams asserted that “the ideal time for identifying possible sources of future trouble is not after the marriage, but during the engagement.” If a couple did not heed his advice, he cautioned, “divorce may be in the making before you return from the honeymoon.”⁸¹

This Charming Couple (1950), an installment in a series of educational films based on marriage educator Henry Bowman’s popular textbook *Marriage for Moderns*, incorporates all of these themes.⁸² The film begins ominously as the narrator explains that there are

close to half a million divorces in the United States each year, which translates into one in four marriages ending in divorce. It then tells the story of Ken and Winnie, a young couple who begin their relationship deeply in love but ultimately end up in divorce court. The plot focuses on Ken and Winnie's courtship, thus suggesting (not very subtly) that they should have foreseen the circumstances that would lead to their marital failure.

When the couple first meet, Ken is a young professor from the big city and Winnie is a college graduate and career "girl" in a small town. Although they are both young, white, and educated, they clearly come from different worlds, a point made painfully clear when Winnie embarrasses Ken in front of his more urbane friends. Plus, while the couple embrace the romance associated with being in love, they studiously avoid talking about the future. Ken refuses to discuss his views on having children, and Winnie declares her desire to remain a "mystery" to Ken. Even after a quarrel exposes their unrealistic expectations for one another—Winnie wants Ken to become a famous novelist, and Ken wants Winnie to become a sophisticated housewife—the couple still believe that they can be happily married. The narrator, however, points out the folly of this assumption at the film's conclusion when he intones: "What a lovely picture this bride and groom make. They might have found each other. But instead, they have remained strangers. Each is a dream in the other's mind. They don't want to accept each other as they really are. They would rather change each other to satisfy their own ambitions. That's why they are doomed to fail."⁸³ The film invokes the threat of divorce, therefore, in order to teach students the importance of choosing the right mate and approaching marriage with a hearty dose of practicality.

It is impossible to know how many couples were convinced by authorities on marriage to end engagements in the service of preventing future divorces. The number of high school and college students who took marriage education courses is also difficult to determine. These uncertainties notwithstanding, the participants in premarital counseling or marriage classes learned that, by carefully

following their teachers' or counselors' advice, their marriages could be successful endeavors. They also would have found it difficult to overlook the message that if their relationships failed to be satisfactory, they needed to take immediate action.

Couples certainly had a growing number of options in regard to assessing how they would function together. In the 1950s, the public fascination with psychology spurred the professional development and increased visibility of marriage counseling. The field's expansion was not entirely smooth, and concerns about training, research, and qualification standards preoccupied the marriage counseling community during these years. The need for qualification standards became particularly acute as the number of "quacks" seemingly proliferated, something that the national press drew attention to.⁸⁴ At the same time, it remained unclear whether marriage counseling would become a "profession" with specific educational requirements or would remain primarily an "activity" practiced by people from a variety of disciplines with varying degrees of specialized training. While some experts in the field identified themselves as "marriage counselors," others, such as clergymen, rabbis, and social workers in family service agencies, included counseling as one of many duties associated with their work.⁸⁵ Divisions in the counseling community, however, left most of these issues unresolved.

Still, marriage counselors and other experts made considerable progress in their attempts to convince the American public that seeking professional help for marital problems was often a necessary step to protect marriages from divorce.⁸⁶ The profession's profile was heightened, in particular, by a growing presence in popular women's magazines, which started to feature advice columns written by counselors and published scores of other pieces inspired by their work. "The Companion Marriage Clinic," the first such advice column, debuted in the *Woman's Home Companion* in the mid-1940s, and "Making Marriage Work" soon followed in the December 1947 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" debuted in the *Journal* in January 1953 and was originally envisioned as a seven-part series, but it runs in the magazine to this day. The *McCall's* series

“Why Marriages Fail” ran in 1953 and 1954; the magazine started a monthly feature, “Marriage Is a Private Affair,” in the late 1950s.⁸⁷

In each of these columns, experts and magazine editors collaborated to present cases that would hold interest for the largest possible audience. Dorothy Disney MacKaye, Paul Popenoe’s collaborator on “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” for instance, urged him to “concentrate on the problems of families of a reasonably high income and educational level,” and she rejected one potential case because she “wasn’t entirely convinced that the [husband and wife] were well enough educated to fit the ‘upper cultural level’ demands of the Journal.”⁸⁸ Similarly, the *Journal* chose not to work with marriage counselor Dr. Abraham Stone when he submitted a case history that led Executive Editor Mary Bass to declare, “This particular couple is too Jewish to be used in a national magazine.”⁸⁹ Regardless of Bass’s clear prejudices, it is evident that counselors and magazine editors wanted readers to identify with the problems faced by couples in their columns.

In this manner, marriage counselors strove to cultivate a wide and receptive audience for their message that hard work (including counseling) could put even the most troubled couples on the road to marital success. In October 1952, for instance, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* series “How America Lives” featured the story of Dick and Genie Simons, a real-life couple and parents of two small children who, in the words of the author, “learned to love again.”⁹⁰ The article opened with a dramatic scene in which Dick asked a stunned Genie for a divorce, stating that he no longer loved her. Genie, however, refused to agree to the separation and in a fortuitous moment discovered the existence of a nearby marriage counseling clinic, the American Institute of Family Relations.

The Simonses’ problems initially seemed insurmountable. Genie was jealous of Dick’s job, had a domineering, interfering mother, and felt that Dick unfairly favored their son over their daughter. Dick, for his part, was a poor financial manager, resented Genie’s insufficient housekeeping skills, and had begun to flirt with women at his office. Working with their counselor, however, allowed Dick and, especially,

Genie to understand the underlying personality faults that had damaged their relationship—his feelings of inferiority and her aggressiveness and “revolt against domesticity.” Genie explained, “I’ve gained the feeling that in counseling I’m doing something constructive. I’ve come to understand that we aren’t alone, that there are few couples who don’t have difficulties. I am beginning to accept my own limitations; to give appreciation as well as want it, to understand what is important in a man’s eyes.”⁹¹ In April 1953 Mrs. John Stevens of Buena Vista, California, echoed Genie in a letter to the *Journal*: “My husband is a neurotic. After eight years of hectic struggle, I at last learned to make adjustments that were necessary in the understanding and help of such an individual.” The expert advice offered by the magazine, in turn, had helped her and her husband come “into a new and peaceful haven of understanding and love.”⁹²

Such statements highlighted one of the most important themes that marriage experts wanted wives to learn from their advice articles: saving your marriage was a matter of personal responsibility and of accepting one’s limitations as well as those of one’s husband. “We must willingly underwrite the cost of changing ourselves enough to achieve lasting happiness,” one psychologist explained.⁹³ A counselor at the AIFR offered similar advice to a distraught wife whose husband of twenty-seven years had left her for another woman: “We have found, in our experience, that when a husband leaves his home, he may be seeking refuge from an unpleasant environment. Could it be that your husband feels that he is not understood or appreciated in his own home? What might there be in your relations to him that could make him feel that way? Could you have stressed your contribution to your marriage in such a manner as to have belittled the part he has played and thus made him uncomfortable in his presence?”⁹⁴ The same message was evident in the frequent diagnosis of “emotional immaturity” as the cause of marital problems. Counselors (clearly inspired by Freud) assumed that something had occurred in a client’s childhood that had impeded his or her path to “mature” adulthood and a happy, functioning marriage. The counselor’s role in such cases was to help identify whatever barrier was preventing the

client from achieving marital success and to give him or her the necessary tools to overcome the problem. Only after the client had achieved a new level of self-awareness could he or she expect to be able to have a healthy marriage relationship.

Counseling methods reflected this understanding of marital problems. Most husbands and wives who attended marriage counseling sessions worked individually with a counselor or counselors, instead of as a couple. Indeed, the AAMC warned that “joint conferences with both partners can be helpful but are difficult and potentially dangerous.”⁹⁵ Some counselors believed that marriages could benefit even if only one partner was willing to come to counseling, although this tactic was the topic of some debate. Paul Popenoe claimed that the AIFR had assisted many wives in greatly improving their marriages—often without their husbands’ knowledge—and he clearly approved of this technique. Other experts held the view, though, that in most situations it was desirable for both partners to be in counseling.⁹⁶

Even if both spouses participated in counseling, taking the lead for getting help and performing the work required to save a marriage clearly fell to the wife. The basic format of “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” emphasized this point. As each column began, the wife (always referred to by her first name to protect the couple’s anonymity) would first “tell her side” of the troubled couple’s story. This section would be followed by her husband’s version of the same events. The final words came from the couple’s counselor, who made the diagnosis, discussed the couple’s treatment, and gave an update on the couple’s progress. This “ladies’ first” format gave the aggrieved husband the opportunity to challenge his wife’s side of the story. Often a husband would admit to wrongdoing—having an affair, for instance—but would justify this wrongdoing for any number of reasons, such as his wife’s obsession with work.⁹⁷ The counselor’s comments, in turn, concentrated primarily (but not exclusively) on the wife’s problems and the steps that she took to overcome them.

Similarly, in cases of infidelity and alcoholism, marriage experts advised wives to consider their role in their husbands’ actions. Wives whose husbands had extramarital affairs were told to examine how

their actions may have driven their husbands to search for sexual gratification and affirmation outside of their homes. (Counselors generally assumed that husbands were the partners who were unfaithful.) If a wife identified and corrected her own behavior, experts suggested, the husband would most likely return to married life. It was a wife's job, as well, to ensure that her husband was not tempted to stray again in the future. "No wife to a normal man where there is friendship, love and a healthy sex life," explained one psychiatrist, "has anything to worry about [in regard to infidelity] . . . It is important to remember that and to guarantee it, through counseling if necessary."⁹⁸ Counselors also discouraged "innocent" spouses from immediately seeking a divorce on learning of an affair, believing that they inevitably would regret their hasty reaction. If they wanted to stay married and were willing to work to this end, then, according to Reuben Hill, "divorce growing out of infidelity [could] be avoided."⁹⁹ Likewise, experts advised wives that they were not passive victims of their inebriated husbands and that they even, in fact, might "drive husbands to drink." Wives, therefore, were obligated to learn to live within "alcoholic marriages" and to be supportive of their husbands' recovery efforts.¹⁰⁰

Georgie Elgin, the main character in the critically acclaimed 1954 film *The Country Girl* (based on the 1950 Clifford Odets play of the same name), embodies this spirit of wifely selflessness.¹⁰¹ Georgie (Grace Kelly, in an Oscar-winning turn) and her husband Frank (Bing Crosby) suffered a tragic loss years earlier after their young son died while in Frank's care.¹⁰² Plagued by guilt, Frank started drinking heavily, and his promising acting career stalled. His chance for a comeback occurs when stage director Bernie Dodd (William Holden) seeks to cast him in a leading role. Spurred by Frank's carefree public persona and propensity for telling lies about his wife, Dodd immediately pegs Georgie as an overbearing wife who has encouraged her husband's alcoholic tendencies and stood in the way of his success. Indeed, he even accuses her of putting too much effort into her marriage.

What Dodd fails to see is that Georgie alone can soothe Frank's

anxieties, thus allowing him to maintain his easy-going facade. Only after Frank's destructive drinking threatens to ruin the show does Dodd acknowledge that he has misread the Elginse's marital situation. His hostility melts into admiration and love for Georgie, who readily admits that she has tired of caring for Frank. But when she faces a choice between the two men, her decision is never really in doubt. A future with Dodd holds the potential for happiness, whereas Frank confesses that he can make no such promises. Georgie, however, realizes that her faults have also contributed to her marital woes and that Dodd has been right about her desire to control Frank. Even after Georgie rejects him, Dodd cannot help but praise Georgie as "steadfast, loyal, and devoted." The film concludes as he watches the couple reunite on a deserted city street, ready for whatever new joys or troubles marriage and life may bring their way. While *The Country Girl* is critical of Dodd's assumption that Georgie is solely responsible for Frank's drinking, at the time it was made it nevertheless reinforced common perceptions about the duties of a good wife. There was, quite simply, so such thing as working too hard on one's marriage, even if it was an unhappy one and greener pastures awaited.

In the 1950s, therefore, expert advice and popular culture combined to normalize virtually all marital problems and conflict. A journalist explained the general rationale: "What enables marriage to persist . . . is not a miraculous ability to avoid disagreements and resentments, but a mature understanding that a certain amount of friction is inevitable."¹⁰³ While this sentiment resonated with common sense, experts extended its logic beyond "everyday" quarrels and into the realm of family violence. Many believed that wives whose husbands hit them were "masochists" given to provoking and often enjoying the experience.¹⁰⁴ Even those who condemned men for physically attacking their wives believed that it was a female responsibility to "take the initiative in a program of prevention." Clifford Adams thus assured wives whose husbands were prone to violence that following a program of avoiding arguments, indulging their husbands' whims, helping them relax, and sharing their burdens would "foster harmony" in the home and make them "happy wives."¹⁰⁵

Experts claimed to understand that each marital situation was unique and that different husbands had different needs. (They had little to say, it should be noted, about the varying needs of wives.) Contrary to these claims, however, they often held preconceived notions about the nature of masculinity and proper male roles that allowed them to suggest that their advice could be applied broadly and successfully to most husbands. Marriage experts assumed that husbands had little interest in the daily goings-on in their homes and in any marital problems perceived by their wives. Adams informed his readers, for instance, that “men, having more outside interests and contacts than women, are less dependent on marriage for their day-to-day satisfaction in life, and so less preoccupied with domestic problems.”¹⁰⁶ On one level, this attitude gave men a “free pass” from being engaged with domestic affairs. On another level, it denied that men might want to be active participants in their marriages, particularly because this work had been cast as feminine in nature.

One instance in which marriage counselors would hold a husband responsible for keeping his marriage together was if he suspected that he was gay. The psychiatric consensus in the 1950s was that homosexuality was a curable mental disease.¹⁰⁷ While case histories involving homosexuality did not appear in any of the mainstream women’s publications, it is clear that marriage experts expected husbands with homosexual “urges” to work on remedying their illness. In a case presented in the AAMC’s casebook, for example, a husband who had never successfully had sexual intercourse with his wife came to a marriage counselor for treatment. This husband, according to his counselor, had homosexual feelings because he had never effectively made the transition to an adult understanding of sexuality. He expressed revulsion for female genitalia and only became sexually aroused when he was having a haircut. Six months of intensive counseling and hard work, however, helped the client to become comfortable with his wife and with heterosexual intercourse. At the end of the case, the couple was trying to start a family.¹⁰⁸

This notable exception aside, wives were responsible for instigating counseling in almost all of the cases featured in the AAMC’s

casebook and in women's magazines.¹⁰⁹ Popular men's magazines of the era, such as *Playboy* and *Esquire*, reinforced the perception that women needed marriage more than men and that marriage problems were women's problems. While *Esquire* rarely published articles about marriage, *Playboy* openly mocked the deluge of marital advice found in women's magazines, thereby cultivating an image of irreverence and glorifying male independence. In 1955 and 1956, for instance, the magazine ran a series of satirical columns by Shepherd Mead (author of the *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*) intended to teach men "how to succeed with women without really trying."¹¹⁰ In another piece, with the title "The Pious Pornographers" (and subtitled "Sex and Sanctuary in the Ladies' Home Jungle"), Ivor Williams joked that the sexual advice found in columns such as "Making Marriage Work" and "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" was far more salacious than anything he could find in *Playboy*.¹¹¹

The relatively rigid sexual division of marital labor usually espoused by marriage experts and popular magazines, however, rarely translated neatly into reality. Many husbands in these years did care about the fate of their marriages, and some even sought or agreed to participate in marriage counseling in order to remedy marital difficulties. One husband expressed great confidence in Paul Popenoe's skills when he wrote to the famed counselor: "Through the columns of the Lady's [sic] Home Journal, I understand your organization has mended thousands of marriages that have headed toward divorce. I believe that you could save our marriage."¹¹² Another husband asked the AIFR for a referral to a marriage counselor near his hometown. His wife had been going out with another man, and he wanted to find "a disinterested party who could listen to both our stories, then decide what is best for us so that we can work this problem out to the best advantage for all concerned."¹¹³ Yet another husband corresponded with Popenoe because his wife claimed to no longer have feelings for him. He was prepared to blame himself "to a certain extent": "I try hard to be a good husband. I'm far from perfect and probably a bit stubborn in some respects. I don't like to argue and find it hard to discuss subjects if I feel it will hurt any feelings. I love

my wife very much and feel that separation would be impossible if I ever wanted to be happy again.”¹¹⁴ These husbands, in other words, clearly valued their relationships and were willing to go to some lengths to hold on to their marriages.

Even though experts conceived of their audience as white, middle class, and female, evidence suggests that middle-class blacks also were aware of and influenced by their views on marriage. The idea that marriage took work clearly reached this segment of the African American community. Marriage education courses and lectures flourished on black college campuses.¹¹⁵ African American newspapers and magazines approvingly cited advice from white marriage experts such as Clifford Adams and Abraham Stone in their coverage of marriage.¹¹⁶ In 1950 a journalist in *Ebony* argued, “Unless husband and wife work at their marriage every day no amount of original honeymoon love and devotion will hold them together.”¹¹⁷ Despite this mention of husbands, it is clear that many middle-class blacks believed that marriage was women’s work. One African American female college student, for example, expressed her belief that marriage was “going to be the main life work for most of us.”¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, African Americans had fewer options for pursuing marriage counseling than whites did. While commentators on both sides of the “color line” believed that wives did not possess the wherewithal to create successful marriages without their help, counseling services that catered to the black community were rare. As a solution to this problem, some black leaders, such as Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (at the time a popular New York minister), called for all clergymen to be trained in the field, although it is not clear if his recommendations were put into systematic practice.¹¹⁹

Marriage experts were undoubtedly pleased to reach the broadest audience possible with the message that that the mere presence of marital difficulties did not justify the dissolution of a marriage. The coverage of marriage counseling in women’s magazines promised women that if they sought professional advice for their problems, or at least followed the guidelines outlined in advice columns, their marriages would not end in divorce. For example, every marriage

featured in Reuben Hill's series of articles "Why Marriages Fail" was saved thanks to the timely intervention of marriage counseling experts.¹²⁰ Similarly, in the first five years of the "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" counseling prevented all of the featured marriages from ending in divorce, in spite of the fact that Popenoe only claimed an 80 percent success rate for his clinic.¹²¹ Even this high success rate, it should be noted, was probably inflated. Most marriage counselors referred clients with "severe" personality problems to psychiatric professionals. The editors of the AAMC's casebook commented "that unlike psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and some clinical psychologists, the marriage counselor deals more often with so-called normal, average people, who, on the whole, manage their affairs quite adequately but occasionally find themselves confronted by a set of circumstances or a constellation of problems which are too much for them, either because of their own emotional involvement, or because they do not possess the necessary information or perspective to handle the situation, or both."¹²²

Popenoe's correspondence with the *Journal* editors, in fact, indicates that the purpose of "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" was to feature cases that had been "worked out successfully." Popenoe, however, rejected a proposal to inform readers of this fact. His decision helped to maintain the suspense inherent in the title question. At the same time, the inevitable outcome of the cases assured readers that the answer was "yes": with proper assistance and a willingness to work, all marriages could be saved.¹²³ This message, in turn, resonated with readers. Men and women from every part of the country wrote to the *Journal* and the *AIFR* in the hope of finding guidance for their marital troubles. Likewise, in a 1954 letter that the *Journal* editors titled "Woman Power Saved This Marriage," a wife wrote a letter describing how counseling had helped to alleviate her marital troubles: "It was hard work, but I am happier now than I have ever been in my life. I have a good marriage, a kind and considerate husband, and normal happy children."¹²⁴ Her efforts, in other words, allowed her and her family to live the prescribed 1950s familial dream.

In these years, therefore, the opportunities and incentives for

Americans to work on their marital relationships were wide-ranging. Even as the divorce rate stabilized, concerns about the detrimental effects of divorce remained strong, and marriage experts found a broad audience for their advice about how to save marriages. They judged any marriage that did not end in divorce to be a success, and they urged couples to strive for this goal. For white, middle-class women, in particular, getting and staying married was an important achievement. Indeed, the pressure to remain married was so intense that some wives clearly sacrificed their personal happiness in order to keep their husbands. In the 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminists would begin to question the validity of the assumption that marriage should be solely a wife's job. Still, very few Americans would have denied that marriage required hard work. Marriage experts had succeeded in convincing middle-class Americans that such an effort was essential to all successful relationships.

**RADICAL FEMINISTS,
LIBERATED HOUSEWIVES,
AND TOTAL WOMEN**

SEARCHING FOR THE FUTURE
OF MARRIAGE, 1963–1980

Bettina “Tina” Balser, the protagonist of Sue Kaufman’s 1967 novel *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (later released as a film with the same name in 1970), should have been blissfully happy. Granted, after her graduation from Smith, Tina needed to undergo psychoanalysis so that she could learn to embrace her femininity and to realize her true wifely aspirations. But clearly her therapy succeeded: she and her husband Jonathan, an attorney, live with their two young daughters in a large New York apartment. Jonathan has recently come into a significant amount of money, and Tina is able to keep house with the help of a full-time maid. On the surface, she has acquired all trappings of a happy wife and mother.

Yet Tina is desperately dissatisfied, so much so that she fears that she is losing her mind. She feels disgusted by her husband’s social climbing and resists his demands for a “little ole roll in the hay.” Jonathan, in turn, belittles her in front of their daughters and ques-

tions her ability to run their household. (Similarly, the writer with whom Tina has a brief affair disparages her intelligence and her life choices.) In one particularly revealing scene, Jonathan chastises Tina for failing to be a good role model for their children. He then lays the blame for their marital problems squarely on her shoulders. He argues, "If we work at it together, this marriage can be saved. It can be a damned good marriage if you'll only co-operate." Tina later records her reaction to his declaration in her diary: "I giggled. No doubt hysterically."¹ While the novel's ambiguous ending intimates that Tina will stay with Jonathan, her disregard for the standard wisdom that she should take responsibility for their happiness (in spite of Jonathan's gratuitous use of the word "we") suggests that not all American wives of the 1960s were happy with the marital status quo.

Three years after the publication of Kaufman's novel, on March 18, 1970, over 100 "mad" women descended on the New York editorial offices of the *Ladies' Home Journal* and demanded, among other things, the opportunity to publish a "liberated" issue of the magazine. Undaunted by the staff's negative reaction to their entrance, about thirty women, representing a variety of feminist organizations from the National Organization for Women (NOW) to the New York Radical Feminists, staged an eleven-hour sit-in in the office of John Mack Carter, the magazine's editor and publisher. The vigil ended with Carter's concession that he would "consider" allowing the demonstrators to publish a supplement in an upcoming issue of the *Journal*.² Later that week, undoubtedly sensing a publicity coup for his publication, he agreed to pay the protesters \$10,000 to publish such a supplement for an upcoming issue.³

The feminists had particular reasons for choosing to occupy the *Journal's* offices. With 6.9 million readers, the magazine had the second largest nationwide circulation for a women's periodical (after *McCall's*). More important, though, was the protesters' belief that the *Journal* was "one of the most demeaning magazines toward women."⁴ They specifically objected to the magazine's staple column "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" which Ellen Willis, a member of the Redstockings, supposedly suggested should be renamed "Can This Marriage."⁵

It is not surprising, then, that when the *Ladies' Home Journal* published the "special section" in August 1970, it contained a piece titled "Should This Marriage Be Saved?" It featured the story of Barbara, a young wife and mother of three, who decided that her answer to this question was "no." The piece further included a proposal for "A Bill of Rights for Divorced Women" and envisioned the possibility of "meaningful change in the family system." It concluded with Barbara's declaration that she had no desire to remarry, but that she did "want to find a man with whom I can live and have a working relationship."⁶

Many feminists in the 1960s and 1970s believed that pursuing such "meaningful change" in marriage and family life was a necessary component in liberating women from the oppressive expectations placed on wives and mothers within the nuclear family. Indeed, historians generally have assumed that the "second wave" of the women's movement (paired with other long-term social trends) fundamentally changed American marriage.⁷ For the most part, however, historians have failed to explore the specifics of feminist debates about the institution as well as the ways in which feminists both challenged and worked within the existing marriage discourse.⁸ (This omission has also inadvertently reinforced the notion that most feminists were out of touch with the lives and concerns of "everyday" women, especially housewives and stay-at-home mothers.)⁹ While many feminists, especially those who identified as "radicals" did argue that a complete rejection of marriage was necessary to bring about a revolution in women's roles, other fervent women's activists asserted that Americans were unlikely to discard marriage and that, if it was remade in an equitable manner, it could have a viable future as an institution. It is also important to recognize the limits of these efforts, as feminists certainly did not go unchallenged in their efforts to mold the future of the nation's marriages. Indeed, some Americans blamed the women's liberation movement itself for the "decline" of family life in the United States.¹⁰ A key element in conservatives' reaction to the feminist interpretation of marriage, in turn, was a call for wives to renew their dedication to marital work.

It should not be surprising, then, that as feminists and social conservatives joined marriage experts (from both the academy and popular magazines) in debating key elements of the “marriage as work” formula, the meaning of such work was in flux in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite alarmist proclamations to the contrary, marriage was never on the cusp of becoming obsolete. Even as the divorce rate skyrocketed and as some sexual “revolutionaries” experimented with alternative living arrangements, most Americans remained committed to finding ways to make their marriages work. What this work entailed changed over the years, especially as many wives began to demand that their husbands do their fair share. Furthermore, although most couples no longer defined a successful marriage as one that simply endured, they remained fascinated by what made some marriages succeed when so many other relationships failed. The fact that men and women from across the ideological spectrum used the language of marriage as work to forward their respective visions of the institution’s future demonstrates how important this idea had become to thinking about marriage. Its very flexibility, paired with a dearth of practical alternatives, had ensured its place as common marital wisdom.

IN 1963 JOURNALIST Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a ringing indictment of the nation’s postwar suburban culture and its glorification of marriage, motherhood, and housewifery as the paths to “true feminine fulfillment” for American women.¹¹ In short, Friedan’s goal was to free housewives from the deadening effects of their daily routines and to relieve them of the malaise that she labeled “the problem that has no name.” She exhorted women to stop conforming to the postwar ideal of womanhood and to find independent identities by performing creative work—preferably through paid employment—of their own.¹² Only by breaking the “happy housewife heroine” mold, in other words, would American women be “complete.”

In recent years, historians have criticized Friedan’s exclusive focus on the plight of middle-class women and have questioned the orig-

inality of her diagnosis of the malaise of American women.¹³ It is additionally interesting to note that for a book concerned with women's dissatisfaction with their roles as wives and mothers, *The Feminine Mystique* paid scant attention to the inner workings of the marital relationship, especially the postwar expectation that wives take responsibility for the success of their marriages. Friedan clearly disapproved of the pressure put on women to marry while still very young and the subsequent push for them to give up their career aspirations for domesticity upon marrying. She also challenged the "expert" dictum that a husband's breadwinning and his wife's homemaking were complementary and thus equally satisfying endeavors. Women, she argued, should not feel that they needed husbands in order to be defined as feminine. But Friedan never proposed that women would be better off if they bypassed marriage altogether. Rather, she assumed that most women would choose to be married and to pursue fulfilling careers. As she saw it, "With the vision to make a new life plan of her own, [a woman] can fulfill a commitment to profession and politics, and to marriage and motherhood, with equal seriousness."¹⁴ In fact, Friedan implied that the elimination of the mystique would help women have better marriages, much as she argued that it would make them better mothers.¹⁵ She approvingly described the marriages of young women with professional aspirations: "Their marriages . . . are not an escape but a commitment shared by two people that becomes part of their commitment to themselves and society."¹⁶

As for married women already caught in the mystique, Friedan discussed in only a cursory manner the effect that breaking out of their "traps" might have on their marriages. She argued that most husbands, even those who initially objected to their wives' desire to work, would be relieved that they were no longer the center of their wives' worlds. She cited one husband, for example, who confessed, "Not only is the financial burden lighter—and frankly, that is a relief—but the whole burden of living seems easier since Margaret went to work." Friedan did warn women that some husbands—those specifically trapped in an "infantile phantasy of having an ever-present

mother”—might object to their decision to go to work. She dismissed this problem lightly, however, by suggesting that such men either would overcome their fantasies or would leave their marriages. In this situation, divorce was an acceptable risk for breaking the chains of domesticity.¹⁷ Overall, *The Feminine Mystique* studiously avoided any discussion of the difficulties that many women (either married or divorced) might face as they tried to balance their working lives and their familial responsibilities.

Five years later, Friedan's critique of marriage had become much more explicit. She told a *New York Times* reporter, "It may be that we are asking too much of it [marriage]. . . . The inefficacy of all this tinkering, the assumption of 'Can this marriage be saved' makes you want to vomit."¹⁸ By the late 1960s, some far more radical feminists had begun to challenge the very institution of marriage and the "experts" who, in their minds, used marriage as a means of subjugating women.¹⁹ Radical feminists, while by no means a coherent group, were united by the belief that the oppression of women was the original, and remained the primary, form of oppression in human society.²⁰ They believed that all existing political structures and philosophies were complicit in this oppression, and that a revolution was necessary to give women the opportunity to live and express themselves freely.²¹ "The revolutionary woman," explained Germaine Greer (an Australian feminist read widely in the United States), "must know her enemies, the doctors, psychiatrists, health visitors, priests, marriage counsellors, policemen, magistrates, and genteel reformers, all the authoritarians and dogmatists who flock around her with warnings and advice."²²

These women forcefully objected to the idea that marriage was satisfying work. Susi Kaplow claimed that many women were angry because they had believed the persistent message that "marriage is your career."²³ Greer further asserted, "It is admitted that marriage is a hard job requiring constant adjustment, 'give and take,' but it is not so often admitted that the husband-provider is the constant and the woman the variable."²⁴ Wives, in other words, bore the brunt of marital work. Indeed, many feminists often referred to such labor,

both of the physical and emotional varieties, as “slavery.” The “wives as slaves” analogy had several key components. First, wives were not paid for their reproductive labor or their work within the home. Full-time domestic employees, however, received both monetary payments and time off for their efforts. Second, wives did not have complete freedom of movement. Husbands alone had the legal right to decide where married couples would live. Finally, wives did not have control over their own bodies; the law permitted men to force their wives to have sexual intercourse even if they were unwilling to do so.²⁵

Some radical feminists further argued that love and romance were tools of male supremacy. The promise of endless love, and thus the perfect marriage relationship, kept women invested in the patriarchal marriage system. As one activist explained, “Romance, like the rabbit at the dog track, is the illusive, fake, and never-attained reward which for the benefit and amusement of our masters keeps us running and thinking in safe circles.”²⁶ This attack on the “love fraud,” differed fundamentally from the previous attempts of marriage experts to emphasize the merits of companionship over romance.²⁷ While experts wanted to give Americans the tools to build “stable” marital relationships, some feminists claimed that marriage was an untenable institution—that it would never “work”—and that only with its abolition would women be freed from their slavery. Shulamith Firestone declared that “as long as we have the institution, we shall have the oppressive conditions at its base.”²⁸ Ti-Grace Atkinson elaborated, “Marriage and the family are as corrupt institutions as slavery ever was. . . . If women were free, free to grow as people, free to be self-creative, free to go where they like, free to be where they like, free to *choose* their lives, there would be no such institutions as marriage or family. If slaves had had those freedoms, there wouldn’t have been slavery.”²⁹

These women were not the first “radicals” of their generation to call for an end to marriage. In the late 1960s, many “hippies”—members of a growing counterculture that broke from middle-class values—eschewed marriage in favor of fluid sexual relationships.

Newsweek reported that “there are no hippies who believe in chastity, or look askance at marital infidelity, or see even marriage itself as a virtue.”³⁰ Calls to eliminate marriage also emerged from the more politicized New Left. But feminists believed that such attacks maintained traditional sex roles and, in fact, bolstered male authority. Atkinson illustrated this point in a 1969 speech: “If it were up to men there probably wouldn’t be marriage—witness the New Left—and it is also true that it is women who usually insist on the legal contract. What is not mentioned, however, is that men want and demand, one way or another, all the services from women that the legal marriage contract is payment for, and like any free enterpriser, if he can get these services for nothing, so much the more profit for him.”³¹ Merely replicating traditional heterosexual relationships without the bonds of marriage, in other words, was no less oppressive to women than was marriage itself.

Atkinson and others made their views about marriage known to the American public in a dramatic fashion. In February 1969, for instance, 150 members of WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) staged a demonstration at a New York bridal show. Singing “here come the slaves, off to their graves,” the group held an “un-wedding ceremony” at the show’s entrance. They later released 100 white mice into the venue. Former child star Robin Morgan explained to the *New York Times* that WITCH wanted to bring attention to “the commerciality of the Bridal Fair and the institution of marriage as it exists in this culture to dehumanize both parties—but especially, to oppress women.”³² Indeed, members of the organization internally referred to this action as “Confront the Whoremakers at the Bridal Fair.”³³ A similar demonstration occurred on September 23, 1969, when five feminists, including Atkinson, held a protest at New York City’s marriage license bureau. The feminists’ message was clear; they told a *Times* reporter that they objected to a system “in which women are being illegally made sex slaves in the unholy state of matrimony.”³⁴ As such, they presented a petition that charged “the city of New York and all those offices and agents aiding and abetting the institution of marriage, such as the Marriage Li-

cense Bureau, of fraud with malicious intent against the women of this city.”³⁵

This interpretation of marriage also affected the structure of some radical feminist groups. Most notably, the New York–based organization *The Feminists*, declared that no more than one-third of its membership could be in formal or informal marriage relationships (“informal” meaning that the member was cohabitating with a man).³⁶ This decision was controversial enough to lead some women to leave the group. According to historian Alice Echols, “Most radical feminists felt that the quota wrongly attacked married women rather than the institution of marriage.”³⁷

The controversy surrounding *The Feminists*’ declaration also highlights several of the chief problems with the call to end marriage. Radical feminist theorists looked primarily to the future and had very little to say to already-married women. Germaine Greer, for instance, only suggested that married women (or, the “older sisters” as she referred to them) teach unmarried women about the experience of marriage so that the unmarried women would not have to “investigate the situation” first-hand.³⁸ Furthermore, while radical women understood the hardships faced by divorced women, they did not discuss the consequences of a large-scale rejection of marriage by the already-married.³⁹ Shulamith Firestone presented perhaps the best-known plan, one in which artificial reproduction replaced pregnancy as the means of having children and “households” of consenting adults and children replaced marital and family relationships. Firestone anticipated a period of transition before her proposal could be realized, but the mechanics of how this revolution would occur remained decidedly unclear.⁴⁰

These problems notwithstanding, radical feminists’ insistence that marriage was fundamentally harmful to women had an important influence on women who wanted to work for change within the existing political and social systems. One of their primary goals regarding the institution was to debunk the popular notion that women benefited from and needed marriage more than men. In 1972 Jessie Bernard, a well-known professor emerita of sociology at Penn State

University (and herself the veteran of a tumultuous marital career), published academic findings that proved this very point.⁴¹ Bernard began her analysis with a discussion of “discrepant responses,” the fact that husbands and wives often gave appreciably different answers when queried about the basic facts of their marriages. Many researchers believed that methodological problems contributed to this phenomenon. Bernard, however, argued that the reason husbands and wives gave the impression that they were in two different marriages was that they *were* in different marriages, namely “his” marriage and “her” marriage.⁴² Moreover, contrary to the wealth of scholarship and comedic clichés that portrayed marriage as an undesirable state for men, the institution actually treated men quite well. Married men, in fact, lived longer and had better mental health than their unmarried counterparts. “There is no better guarantor of long life, health, and happiness for men,” Bernard asserted, “than a wife well socialized to perform the ‘duties of a wife,’ willing to devote her life to taking care of him, providing, even enforcing the regularity and security of a well-ordered home.”⁴³

The situation for wives, according to Bernard’s research, was quite the opposite. Not only did more wives than husbands report that they had marital difficulties, but married women also had poor mental and emotional health when compared with married men and with unmarried women. Bernard attributed these problems to a number of factors, particularly that marriage was an “occupational change” for women, and that wives consequently had to make greater adjustments to being married than their husbands. Revisiting the supposedly “egalitarian” sex roles of the preceding decades, Bernard discovered that merely labeling a marriage as egalitarian did not make it conform to the ideal or erase assumptions about the power distribution in marriage.⁴⁴ “Her” marriage, from this perspective, was “badly in need of change.”⁴⁵

Bernard readily acknowledged the effect that the radical feminist interpretation of marriage had had on her work. “I did not start out with the conviction,” she explained in a personal note at the end of the book, “that marriage was bad for wives.”⁴⁶ Her suggestions for

improvement, however, were grounded in the assumption that marriage would persist. She asserted, in fact, that “the future of marriage is . . . as assured as any human social form can be.”⁴⁷

Bernard also expressed faith that the two marriages could converge in a way that would be beneficial to both men and women. In this vein, she argued that the best hope for improving married life would be through the development of a “shared-role pattern” in which husbands and wives equally participated in breadwinning and care-taking responsibilities. Still, she acknowledged that realizing such change would not be easy, explaining, “It takes a considerable amount of sophistication to understand, let alone accept, the logic and the justice of the shared-role ideology, and a considerable amount of goodwill to implement it.”⁴⁸ Bernard further contended that sharing roles was not a panacea, specifically because individuals’ expectations for marriage would continue to exceed the capabilities of the institution. Of this pattern, she concluded, “It can help. That’s all.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Bernard expressed her gratitude to the men and women who were willing to pioneer a path in this regard.⁵⁰

Bernard’s conclusions drew attention to a leading issue in the minds of white, married feminists (and of women in the movement who anticipated marrying in the future): marriage was hard work, and wives were doing a disproportionate share of it. The focus of their concerns was practical in nature: husbands generally expected their spouses, with or without a paying job, to take responsibility for housekeeping and child care. In a humorous and incisive piece titled “Why I Want a Wife,” for example, feminist Judy Syfers explored the full range of activities and expectations implied by the word “wife.” Among other things, the kind of wife Syfers wanted would put her through school, be a “good nurturant attendant” for her children, take care of her physical needs, organize her social life, and be sexually available. She further demanded the liberty to replace her wife if she so chose and to insist that her wife not work so that she could “more fully and completely take care of a wife’s duties.” Given all these benefits to the “husband,” Syfers reckoned, “My God, who *wouldn’t* want a wife?”⁵¹

Yet even those wives with husbands who seemed willing to participate in more marital work encountered difficulties in striking an equitable balance of labor. In “The Politics of Housework,” for example, Pat Mainardi dissected the methods used by men to avoid doing their share of work around the house. According to her, when the husband says, “This problem of housework is not a man-woman problem! In any relationship between two people one is going to have a stronger personality and dominate,” what he really means is “That stronger personality had better be *me*.” In order to conquer this problem, wives had to be willing stand up for their right not to do all of the “shitwork” in their relationships.⁵²

Writer Alix Kates Shulman famously took this battle over house and child-care duties to a new level. Shulman was a member of radical feminist organizations such as Redstockings and WITCH, but she approached the issue of marriage from more of a “liberal” perspective (thereby embodying the difficulty of applying labels to describe individual feminists, as well as larger feminist groups).⁵³ Shulman wrote that before she and her husband had started a family, they had established a relatively equitable relationship, in that they both worked and shared cooking and cleaning duties. After they became parents, however, Shulman found that they were slipping into traditional sex role patterns: her husband spent long hours at work, and she performed the endless tasks of housekeeping and child care alone. Even when she began freelancing from home, Shulman’s familial duties always took precedence over the pursuit of her career. A sense of inequity took hold in her: “My husband, I felt, could always change his job if the pressure was too great, but I could never change mine.”⁵⁴ Shulman resolved to end this cycle, to find a way to “throw out the old sex-roles” so that they could “possibly survive as a family.” When she realized that an oral agreement alone did not lead to an equal distribution of work, Shulman and her husband wrote up a detailed marriage agreement dividing both the jobs to be performed and the time to be spent performing them. The couple stated, “We believe that each member of the family has an equal right to his/her own time, work, value, choices. As long as all duties are performed,

each person may use his/her extra time any way he/she chooses. If he/she wants to use it making money, fine. If he/she wants to spend it with spouse, fine. If not, fine.”⁵⁵

Shulman revealed some years later that the agreement had a legalistic tone because she and her husband were actually considering divorce and thus trying to negotiate a “radical separation agreement.”⁵⁶ Be that as it may, their marriage “contract,” as the agreement was soon dubbed by others, garnered wide public attention both in the mainstream and feminist press. *Redbook* featured Shulman’s story under the title “A Challenge to Every Marriage” in 1971, and the agreement, paired with a how-to story, also appeared in the first issue of *Ms.*⁵⁷ Throughout this coverage, Shulman emphasized the beneficial effects that the agreement had had on her family, especially the children’s relationship with their father. That she did not focus on the improvements on her relationship with her husband is hardly surprising, given that she never intended to repair her faltering marriage. The *Ms.* piece, however, specifically argued that writing a contract could be of “great service” to many marriages because “what we are really doing in thrashing out a contract is finding out where we stand on issues, clearing up all the murky, unexamined areas of conflict, and unflinchingly facing up to our differences.”⁵⁸ Doing so, in turn, would lead to a more equitable marital relationship. Evidence suggests that some couples took this advice to heart and began to sign such contracts before they married in order to ensure the egalitarian nature of their unions.⁵⁹

It should be noted that discussions about the distribution of marital work originated from an unambiguously white, middle-class perspective and were, as a result, the target of criticism by African American feminists. Debates about the place of marriage in the black community had become increasingly politicized in the 1960s. Specifically, in 1965 Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan had written a controversial report titled *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. Moynihan’s thesis in the report was that family breakdown, perpetuated by the dominance of “matriarchal” black women, was the “fundamental” problem of the nation’s black popu-

lation.⁶⁰ More economic opportunities for black men, he theorized, would help to restore their familial authority, and the African American family would then fall in line with mainstream (white) marriage and family patterns. Moynihan argued in favor of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model because it was the one that seemed to be followed by most Americans. The report stated, “There is, presumably, no special reason why a society in which males are dominant in family relationships is to be preferred to a matriarchal arrangement. However, it is clearly a disadvantage for a minority group to be operating on one principle, while the great majority of the population, and the one with the most advantages to begin with, is operating on another. This is the present situation of the Negro. Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it. A subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage.”⁶¹ At the same time, Moynihan was quick to recognize that many middle-class African Americans had established stable marriages in the patriarchal tradition. Still, in the aftermath of Moynihan’s report, many middle-class blacks believed that it was doubly important for black wives to be supportive of their husbands and to work to improve their marriages. A Boston social worker argued, for instance, that “it is the duty of every Negro woman, professional or otherwise, to help her husband assume his full height and stature as head of the family.”⁶² Failure to perform this duty could not only lead to personal marriage problems but also hurt the ongoing struggle for African American advancement.

Black feminists, in turn, spoke out in response to the stereotypes associated with “matriarchy.” They generally, however, spent much less time than their white counterparts discussing marriage and disapproved of the amount of energy white feminists dedicated to analyzing the institution.⁶³ That point was made by Aileen Hernandez, an African American activist who was elected president of NOW in 1970: “I don’t think black women are going to have as much patience sitting around as many white women in the movement do, discussing

identity and whether or not we can combine careers and marriages.”⁶⁴ Debates about marriage, careers, and the division of housework, in other words, had the potential to obfuscate the discrimination and other structural problems faced by African American women.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding such criticisms, white feminists remained intensely interested in how, as Ms. asked, an egalitarian marriage would “*really work?*”⁶⁶ The magazine found its answer in the marriage of Stanford University psychologists Sandra Lipsitz and Daryl Bem. The couple purposefully structured their relationship in order to avoid the “double standard” inherent in traditional marital roles. They shared the belief that an egalitarian relationship was one in which “no one has priority over anyone else, where no one pulls rank for any reason.”⁶⁷ The couple shared housework, and they anticipated that if they had children, they would carry the burden of child care equally as well. Lipsitz and Bem argued that marriages such as theirs helped partners maintain their own identities. As a result, they were much more likely to become friends and to have better sex lives than husbands and wives in “traditional” relationships. Lipsitz claimed, in fact, that this friendship allowed her and her husband to have a more stable relationship than most married couples. She stated, “I believe we are unlikely to get divorced. When people check back in 25 years, I hope they’ll find I was right.” (The couple, in fact, divorced in the early 1990s after twenty-nine years of marriage.)⁶⁸ Still, Lipsitz’s statement demonstrates clearly the hope of many feminists that egalitarian marriage would make marriages more successful and happier for both spouses.

The feminists who held this faith did not challenge the notion that marriage was work. Ideally, they wanted such work to be performed by both husbands and wives, and they wanted couples to have equal degrees of investment and interest in their marriage relationships. The difficulty with such a scenario, however, was that married women who wanted to change their relationships often had to convince their husbands to reevaluate the balance of power in their marriages. Wives, in other words, needed to assume responsibility for changing their husbands’ attitudes. This reality was appar-

ent in Dr. Joyce Brothers's 1972 book *The Brothers System for Liberated Love and Marriage*. Brothers was a Columbia-trained psychologist who achieved national fame through her radio advice show, television appearances, and magazine columns. In the early and mid-1960s, much of the advice that she offered in women's magazines like *Good Housekeeping* assumed that wives had more invested in their marriages than their husbands and thus had more responsibility for making their unions successful.⁶⁹

Her views had changed significantly by the early 1970s. While Brothers was quick to distance herself from the women's liberation movement—she incorrectly suggested that all feminists were in favor of the abolition of marriage—she plainly had absorbed the movement's language and much of its critique of marriage. She argued, for example, that marriage often resembled a “master-slave” relationship and that men generally benefited more from marriage than did women.⁷⁰ Still, Brothers's solution to the problems with modern marriage revisited a familiar theme: women alone could improve their marriages. In response to the query “Why does the woman always have to make the effort?” Brothers replied, “In theory, she doesn't; in practice, she usually does.” She added, “It's up to women to show their husbands and lovers just how happy it's possible to be.”⁷¹ Unlike Brothers, however, most feminists did set limits as to how much work a woman should put into her marital relationship. A piece in *Ms.* titled “Nothing Will Be the Same Once You Ask the Question: Can I Change Him?” opened, for instance, with a blunt warning: “Let's begin with the last line of the story: You may have to leave him.”⁷² If, in spite of a woman's best efforts, her partner refused to accommodate change and to work for a more egalitarian marriage, the author argued, she had every right to end the relationship.⁷³

Marriage counselors and other experts responded to the changing political and social climate in a variety of ways. Some marriage counselors used feminist theories and analysis to critique the profession's previous focus on women as the source of most marital problems. According to historian Rebecca Davis, for instance, marriage experts began to “take a long-overdue look” at domestic violence and to

challenge the notion that marriage was always a “benign, beneficial institution.” Furthermore, female marriage counselors undertook to discuss and attempt to ameliorate the gender imbalance at the top of their profession (most textbooks and journal articles in the 1950s and 1960s had been published by men). Still, virtually all counselors believed that their profession could adapt and remain relevant. Some even hoped that they could help spread feminist consciousness in their clients by stressing truly “egalitarian” marriage relationships.⁷⁴

Another important innovation in marriage advice during these years was the increasing use of the catchword “communication.” Fostering dialogue and creating a more open, free society were key goals of many of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and this ethos clearly influenced marriage experts. Whereas emotional immaturity had been the most common diagnosis for marital problems throughout the 1950s, marriage experts began to cite breakdowns in communication as the root of such difficulties. While the presence of emotional immaturity often could be attributed to only one spouse (most often the wife), a loss of communication was ostensibly a failing of both spouses.

This shift was also mirrored in marriage counseling techniques. Many counselors began to see couples together, rather than separately. This method, known as “conjoint marital therapy,” allowed counselors to understand how spouses actually dealt with one another, rather than relying on the descriptions of individual spouses. One counselor explained that watching couples interact “is more useful than merely hearing a possibly distorted version of something that has happened between them.”⁷⁵ How couples presented their problems in counseling also changed. Psychiatrist Bernard L. Greene, for instance, traced the most common complaints he heard from married couples over a period of years. From 1960 to 1962, “lack of communication” finished seventh on his list. By 1972 it was at the top.⁷⁶

Many marriage experts also revised their approach to divorce. The divorce rate skyrocketed in the late 1960s and 1970s as divorce laws and public attitudes about marital dissolution shifted dramatically. The number of divorces in the postwar years had reached its lowest

point in 1958 and started climbing steadily after that year. Between 1968 and 1976, the number of divorces grew each year by an average of 8 percent.⁷⁷ Changes in the law contributed significantly to this increase. The first sign of such change came in 1966 when New York legislators voted—in spite of opposition from the Catholic hierarchy (but with the support of important Catholics like New York senator Robert Kennedy)—to expand the state’s grounds for divorce. Whereas in the past New Yorkers could only obtain a divorce if a spouse had committed adultery, the new law expanded the grounds to include cruel and inhuman treatment, abandonment for two years, imprisonment for three years, and living apart for two years after executing a formal separation agreement. The legislators in favor of the legislation hoped that it would reduce the widespread practice of couples knowingly lying under oath in order to obtain their divorce decrees. Still, some lawmakers and social commentators believed that the legislation could have gone further to eliminate collusion. “New York State has come out of the eighteenth century,” one assemblyman complained, “but still hasn’t reached the twentieth.”⁷⁸

California soon became the first state to “reach the twentieth.” As early as 1963, the state’s legislature had begun looking into ways to fix its divorce system, largely because lawmakers believed that the process by which its citizens obtained divorces was too easy. Their solution to this problem was to substitute the idea of one spouse’s guilt with that of irretrievable marital breakdown, commonly known as “irreconcilable differences.”⁷⁹ The legislators assumed that judges would take the time to assess the merits of marital dissolution cases (as divorce cases were now legally designated) and would be willing to deny dissolutions to couples who had not proven that their marriages were beyond repair.

A bill to this effect became California law on January 1, 1970. One of the coauthors of the legislation explained the motivation behind it: “We are not trying to make divorce easier. We’re trying to make it less destructive.” In a further attempt to decrease acrimony, the new code called for the equal division of all of a couple’s property upon

marital dissolution.⁸⁰ Judges, though, expressed concerns about invading the privacy of divorce applicants and the high costs of investigating individual marital problems. Their doubts, in turn, led to a situation in which, as historian J. Herbie DiFonzo puts it, “trial courts under California no-fault simply refused to deny divorces under any circumstances.”⁸¹ Furthermore, this statute did not necessarily eliminate the adversarial nature of divorce, because issues of custody, child support and alimony became separate, often contested, legal matters (dramatized, for instance, in the 1979 film *Kramer vs. Kramer*). In the early 1970s, however, the public and other legal experts deemed this move to “no-fault” divorces to be a success because it went “far toward making a dishonest procedure honest.” Soon, a number of other states followed California’s lead.⁸²

A shift in expert and public attitudes about divorced men and women accompanied these changes in the law. Many no longer believed that the divorced had psychological problems that led to their marital failure. Marriage counselor Esther Oshiver Fisher articulated the shift in perspective:

Time was when it was believed that those who divorced were “sick” persons, misfits, hopeless neurotics who must inevitably repeat their failures should they marry again. Time was when it was believed the divorced came from a narrow segment of the population. These are certainly no longer valid assumptions. Today, although the divorcing and divorced population may not be randomly distributed, it encompasses people from all walks of life, different economic levels, a diversity of cultural backgrounds, and a myriad of life situations.⁸³

Indeed, while numerous commentators believed that young couples were largely responsible for the growing divorce rate, it is clear that in the late 1960s and 1970s more than a few middle-aged men and women were also seeking to end their marriages. As the “children of the baby boom” grew up and left home, many of their parents no longer felt obligated to stay together.⁸⁴ Furthermore, evidence sug-

gests that older women began to question previous definitions of marital success or, as one article explained, became “aware of discontents hitherto submerged by traditional acceptance of their lot.”⁸⁵

Marriage counselors quickly adapted their techniques and sought to provide husbands and wives with guidance throughout the divorce process. Some even adopted, according to one journalist, “the view that where a bad marriage seems unlikely ever to become satisfying and relatively free of conflicts, it is proper to help the client get out of it.”⁸⁶ Such efforts represented a considerable departure from those of Divorcees Anonymous, which only a decade before had taught women the importance of staying married at all costs. Some marriage counselors, in fact, even questioned whether their profession—with its historically intensive focus on mending broken marriage relationships—was the best mechanism for providing such assistance, and the specific practice of “divorce counseling” developed accordingly.

Many divorce counselors had trained as marriage counselors, and some even maintained dual practices. The purpose of this type of counseling was “to get them [a divorcing couple] through the split with a minimum of hurt ego, harassment, and damage to children.”⁸⁷ Divorce counselors worked with couples throughout the divorce process, from making the decision to divorce to adjusting to life after marriage. A pamphlet for the Divorce Counseling Service of Clayton, Missouri, for instance, advertised predivorce counseling, counseling during litigation, and counseling for postdivorce adjustment. The service featured a twenty-four-hour emergency consultation hotline and offered clients reassurance from the outset: “Divorce is about the most traumatic experience in a persons [sic] life. . . . Through counseling this stress can be lessened to a great degree and the individuals and families involved can be helped to deal with their problems in order to once again function adequately.”⁸⁸

Divorced men and women also shaped changing perceptions about ending a marriage. In his 1966 book *The World of the Formerly Married*, journalist Morton M. Hunt offered a positive slant on the experience: “The prevailing feeling of the Formerly Married is that divorce is

painful but necessary, temporarily destructive, but finally creative, and not only an act of courage, but an affirmation of one's belief in the value and the possibility of happy marriage."⁸⁹ The idea that divorce could be a creative process that offered men and women the chance for personal growth ran throughout the divorce literature in these years. Mel Kranzler, a self-described divorce adjustment counselor, expanded on this theme in his aptly titled *Creative Divorce: A New Opportunity for Personal Growth*. Kranzler argued, "I see the opportunity before every divorced man or woman to use the crisis of divorce to begin a new life, a life that recognizes the best of the past, accepts the challenges of the present, and is open to the newness of each."⁹⁰

Many feminists also subscribed to the idea that divorce, while trying, could lead to personal growth. They portrayed the decision to end a bad marriage as a courageous accomplishment, especially because women contemplating divorce also had to confront the longstanding opinion that wives were more responsible for marital failure than their husbands. In their book *The Courage to Divorce*, for example, Susan Gettleman and Janet Markowitz examined what they believed to be the nation's "anti-divorce culture" and its negative effects on women and their families. The two psychologists specifically criticized the role of women's magazines in perpetuating the view that women were responsible for holding their marriages together at all costs: "The self-esteem of the woman reader who may be having serious doubts about remaining married is insidiously undermined when she reads that there is nothing more wonderful than 'working' to achieve a good marriage."⁹¹

The editors at *Ms.*, for their part, published personal stories of divorced women who struggled to overcome the emotional trauma of ending a marriage and who largely succeeded in doing so.⁹² Such stories also appeared in more traditional women's magazines. A typical piece, in which a woman named Carol Watts described the full range of emotions that she experienced during the first fourteen weeks after she and her husband separated, appeared in the April 1977 issue of *Redbook*. At first, Watts was exhilarated by her independence, yet she also harbored concerns about the consequences of no

longer being “half an entity known as himandher.” By week eight, these feelings had intensified, and she found herself “aching for one moment of real human response.” Still, Watts found the courage to hire an attorney and made such progress in counseling that her therapist terminated their sessions. A final meeting with her soon-to-be ex-husband was bittersweet, but Watts had come to terms with their separation and felt herself a better, stronger person for the experience.⁹³

Several movies that debuted in the late 1970s reinforced the theme that divorce could be an opportunity for personal development. In the 1978 film *An Unmarried Woman*, Erica (Jill Clayburgh) is blindsided when her husband Martin (Michael Murphy) confesses that he has been having an affair with a younger woman and is leaving their “perfect” marriage. But the experience ultimately proves to be so empowering—especially after she meets and begins a relationship with a sensitive artist named Saul (Alan Bates)—that not only does Erica reject Martin’s suggestion that they reunite, but she also turns down the opportunity to spend the summer with Saul and his children in Vermont.⁹⁴ Similarly, in 1979’s *Starting Over*, Phil Potter (Burt Reynolds) is initially leery of his friends’ reassurances that his life can change for the better after his divorce. The fact that his ex-wife Jessica (Candice Bergen) has written a “feminist” anthem to this effect surely influences his position. But upon moving to Boston and joining a support group for men going through divorces, Phil finds himself falling in love with Marilyn (again, Jill Clayburgh), a quirky schoolteacher. After an ill-fated attempt to reconcile with Jessica, Phil realizes that he wants to forge a new life with Marilyn rather than remain in a stagnant relationship.⁹⁵ Whereas in previous decades reunification had been the desired outcome in films about divorce, *An Unmarried Women* and *Starting Over* reflected the new understanding that not every marriage was destined for success and that divorce could lead to positive life changes for all involved in the process.

Some feminists, however, qualified this optimistic outlook about divorce and drew attention to the fact that, unlike Erica, many women contemplating divorce did not have the time or the money to

treat the end of their marriages as “growth experiences.”⁹⁶ Contrary to widespread public belief, statistics in the early 1970s indicated that judges awarded alimony in just a small percentage of cases. In cases involving child support, only 38 percent of fathers were in full compliance with support orders after one year of divorce. By the tenth year, 79 percent of fathers were not making any child support payments.⁹⁷ That many newly divorced women had been out of the workforce for a long period of time, having left paid employment to become full-time wives and mothers, only exacerbated their problems as they struggled to find jobs and child care. Many feminists thus argued that alimony should not be considered a luxury; it should be seen instead as “a kind of payment for past services rendered—but unpaid for,” namely housekeeping and child-care duties.⁹⁸

Feminists developed a number of practical strategies to help women through divorce and to bring attention to the problems women faced after their marriages ended. A Philadelphia-based women’s group, for example, published *Women in Transition*, a “feminist handbook on separation and divorce.” The book was a thorough collection of information based on the group’s experience in helping middle- and working-class women negotiate the legal, financial, and emotional difficulties of divorce. From the outset, the handbook urged women to stand up for themselves: “Trust yourself! Do not allow guilt or self-pity to control you. Don’t listen to people who say things to upset you, to make you feel that it’s ‘a wife’s duty to . . .’ The only responsibility that you have is to provide for the welfare of yourself and your children the best way that you know how. Staying in a destructive marriage may result in far greater harm in the end to all involved, no matter what others say.”⁹⁹ Other organizations campaigned for and organized training programs for “displaced homemakers,” a term coined by NOW to describe the plight of older women left (by death or divorce) without any means of support.¹⁰⁰ In 1975, for instance, the NOW-sponsored Divorce Information Center of Garden City, N.Y., hosted a workshop in “reality-oriented decision making” intended to help women whose former husbands had been responsible for making the major decisions in their relationships.

Feminists' efforts to deal with the problems faced by divorced women, however, received little notice in the popular press. If anything, the media took a decidedly different approach. Specifically, in publicizing the denunciation of marriage by radical feminists, the press perpetuated the idea that feminism was responsible for the rising divorce rate. As one feminist explained, "The increasing divorce rate has grave implications for the stability of our society. What is to blame? Some commentators think they have found the culprit. They have seized upon the trend and all its implications, labeled them the product of the women's movement, and proffered them as evidence of what they perceive to be the movement's ultimate outcome: destruction of the family."¹⁰¹ This idea that feminism hurt marriages, for instance, led one *McCall's* writer to be surprised when, after looking into the matter, she discovered that consciousness-raising groups were not the source of domestic conflict. Rather, she found, the practice only had a "divisive" effect on those marriages that were already in trouble and such groups actually offered important support to women with marital difficulties.¹⁰²

Indeed, anxiety about the future of the American family was widespread throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, and journalists published one story after another with sensational titles such as "Are We the Last Married Generation?" and "The War on the American Family."¹⁰³ In spite of an increased awareness of the problems of the African American family in the post-Moynihan Report years, most of these pieces focused on the marital and family patterns of the white middle class, where the challenges to "traditional" marriage and family life often came from within.¹⁰⁴ Together with feminism, changes in the American sexual landscape—often referred to collectively as the "sexual revolution"—contributed to the fear that monogamous marriage and the nuclear family could be in serious danger.¹⁰⁵ The widening availability of birth control, for instance, allowed many young women to have premarital sexual relations without the fear of becoming pregnant. Plus, in 1973, the United States Supreme Court decided in favor of a woman's legal right to have an abortion. Some young heterosexual couples flouted convention in deciding to live together out of wed-

lock. Others opted to experiment with group living and joined communes. Meanwhile, members of the gay liberation movement saw themselves as being “in revolt against the sex-role structure and nuclear family structure.”¹⁰⁶ These young men and women, in other words, exhibited little desire to embrace the roles of husbands, wives, and parents as their own parents had a generation earlier.

Some men and women who were already married also challenged existing marital conventions, particularly regarding fidelity. Nena and George O’Neill’s 1972 bestseller, *Open Marriage*, elaborated on this new view of marriage (and contributed to the sense of alarm about the future of the institution, as well). The O’Neills, both anthropologists, believed that while marriage was an essential human institution, traditional expectations and roles needed to be revised in order for it to remain viable: “Rather than wishing marriage off into beanstalk land, as some people would apparently like to do, our efforts should be directed toward realistic changes in the institution.”¹⁰⁷ For most of their book, they laid out a plan in which men and women would shed the confining identities of “husbands” and “wives” and instead would adopt “flexible and interchangeable” roles.¹⁰⁸ Doing so would leave the partners free to grow as individuals and to establish relationships truly based on equality.

The O’Neills also warned that achieving an open marriage could be hard work. They asserted, for example, that while “constant and total marital harmony is a myth,” “open marriage . . . can bring you as close to that kind of harmony as it is humanly possible to get, provided you seriously endeavor to put the guidelines to work for you.”¹⁰⁹ The idea that couples needed to work to have successful marriages (be they “open” or “closed”) was certainly not novel. Much more so was the theme of the book’s penultimate chapter, “Love and Sex without Jealousy”; here, the O’Neills argued that pursuing sexual relationships outside of marriage could “make your marriage a still deeper, richer, more vital experience.”¹¹⁰ Soon, the term “open marriage” became synonymous with the pursuit of extramarital relationships.¹¹¹

For all the concern engendered by such proposals, many experts and other marriage commentators still believed that marriage was

going to remain a basic American institution and that the vanishing family was indeed something of a “myth.”¹¹² They believed that marriage would have to become more adaptable as men and women married at older ages, both spouses worked outside the home, and couples chose to have fewer children. Some did see positive signs in the fact that most divorced men and women were eager to remarry. Still, they also worried about how Americans would make such adjustments. An observation by Columbia University sociologist Amitai Etzioni aptly summed up this stance: “Some new and positive definitions of what marriage is all about are needed in the 1970s.”¹¹³

Others, however, were much less convinced that marriage could survive in this changing milieu. A burgeoning group of social conservatives, composed in large part by evangelical Christians, argued that only a return to “traditional,” pre-feminist marital roles could save American marriage. Marabel Morgan, a Florida housewife turned best-selling author, became a high profile spokesperson for this point of view.¹¹⁴ As Morgan told her story in her book *The Total Woman*, she had once been the nagging wife of her lawyer-husband, Charlie. One night, following a disagreement about the couple’s plans for the following evening, she took stock of her marriage. “I had to admit to myself,” Morgan said, “that we definitely weren’t doing very well. We were not moving forward.” She decided at that point that she did not want to continue in a “mediocre” marriage; she wanted “the best.” Morgan resolved to stop the “collision course” of her marriage, and her strategies for doing so formed the backbone of her book.¹¹⁵

Morgan advised her readers that “a great marriage is not so much finding the right person, as *being* the right person,” namely the wife whom her husband wants and deserves.¹¹⁶ One practical idea for becoming this person, for instance, would be for a wife to organize and prioritize her activities for the next day in the evening, so that she could accomplish the most important tasks and still find time for a bubble bath before her husband returned home from work. With this work finished, she then could pay him the full attention that was his due. Morgan also urged wives always to remember the rules that she labeled the “4 A’s”—to accept, admire, adapt to, and appreciate

their spouses. Doing so entailed curtailing nagging and not trying to change their husbands. It also meant allowing their husbands to make all marital decisions and accepting those decisions gracefully. The penalty for not doing so, Morgan argued, was inevitable marital failure. As she succinctly remarked, “A nag or a critic doesn’t make for a long marriage or a healthy husband.”¹¹⁷ Toward this latter goal, the *Total Woman* program also called for women not only to be sexually available to their husbands at all times, but also to add “sizzle” to their sex lives by dressing up in revealing costumes and making love in unusual places.

Morgan’s conviction that women alone were responsible for improving their marriages came from her strong Christian beliefs and her clear aversion to the feminist goal of achieving marital equality. In her mind, “God ordained man to be the head to the family, its president, and his wife to be the executive vice-president. Every organization has a leader and the family unit is no exception. There is no way you can alter or improve this arrangement. . . . Allowing your husband to be your family president is just good business.” She anticipated feminist critiques that she was turning women into slaves. The difference between slavery and submissiveness, according to Morgan, was that a Total Woman “graciously” chose “to adapt to her husband’s way.”¹¹⁸ Because she was acting on her own free will, in other words, a woman following the program was not a slave; she was merely fulfilling God’s plan for all wives.

The rewards that accompanied this change, Morgan promised, would be quick and bountiful. Soon after personally implementing the plan, Morgan’s husband bought her a long-desired new refrigerator and allowed her to redecorate their family room. He also began to show her more affection, such as one instance in which he “took my face in his hands and plastered gentle kisses all over it.”¹¹⁹ Morgan also cited the case of one enthusiastic wife who reported, “My husband wasn’t even speaking to me when I began, but I did all my assignments. He has never bought me a gift before, but this past week he bought me two nighties, two rose bushes and a can opener!”¹²⁰ The lesson to be learned, therefore, was that any woman who was willing

to put in hard work could have a wonderful, loving marriage. Morgan did not promise that her suggestions could solve all marital problems. “I do believe it is possible, however,” she stated, “for almost any wife to have her husband absolutely adore her in just a few weeks’ time. She can revive romance, reestablish communication, break down barriers, and put sizzle back into her marriage. It is really up to her. She has the power.”¹²¹ In later interviews, Morgan made it clear that even working wives could be Total Women, as long as God and their husbands and families remained more important than their paid employment.¹²²

Many women, whether they identified themselves as feminists or not, dismissed the *Total Woman* program, as well as a similar one run by Helen Andelin named “Fascinating Womanhood,” as manipulative and demeaning to both husbands and wives.¹²³ Some members of the Christian press also raised objections to Morgan’s guidelines for marital success. One writer, for example, criticized such advice because it placed “the burden of marital success solely on the shoulders of the woman, requiring all the psychological adjustments of her and blaming only her if success is not achieved.”¹²⁴ Human sexuality experts William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson also disapproved of the kinds of programs promoted by Morgan and Andelin. They argued that, in giving sexual advice in their books, these writers promoted “old beliefs and patterns of marital behavior that have long been recognized as frequent sources of problems between husband and wife—especially sexual problems.”¹²⁵ In spite of such criticisms, Morgan became, in the admiring words of the *National Review*, a “phenomenon.”¹²⁶ Not only was *The Total Woman* the best-selling nonfiction book of 1974, but Morgan’s how-to courses also became popular throughout the nation. Many American women, in other words, continued to signal their desire to work at their marriages.¹²⁷

As the 1970s drew to a close, women’s magazines both acknowledged this desire and took feminist criticisms of their previous interpretation of “marital work as women’s work” into account. Not surprisingly, given that these magazines were written for an audience of women, they continued to feature marital advice specifically di-

rected at wives.¹²⁸ But they additionally emphasized the good that came from involving husbands in such efforts. In 1979, for instance, a psychiatrist counseled the readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal* that “a marriage exists because the two people involved work to establish a mutually satisfying way of life.”¹²⁹

Marriage commentators in these magazines believed that most couples ultimately wanted to be happily married and avoid divorce. They acknowledged that marriage was a choice and that husbands and wives had a right to end unhappy relationships.¹³⁰ Yet, they also believed that couples often made that decision too quickly and that husbands and wives had to be reminded of the importance of remaining committed to their relationships. “Some basically good marriages die,” Joyce Brothers had argued in 1973, “because the two people involved haven’t enough determination, enough sheer will, to work out their difficulties.”¹³¹ Five years later, the authors of “Can You Be Sure Love Will Last?” approvingly quoted an authority who took a similar view: “Commitment occurs when two people value the bond between them more than anything else—and when they are willing to assume the responsibility to maintain it.”¹³²

Marriage experts no longer offered a single definition of marital success. One simply explained to *Redbook* that “not all marriages are alike and they cannot be measured by the same standards.”¹³³ But, in the late 1970s, many reaffirmed their interest in the question of how some couples were able to stay together while so many others were not. In her 1977 book *Staying Together: Marriages That Work*, journalist Patricia O’Brien set out to find the answer in case studies of six married couples, all from the white middle class, but otherwise living different lives. Diana and Phil Morris, for instance, purposefully led an isolated existence, whereas Jan and David Stein dealt regularly with the celebrity that came with his job as a local television newscaster. O’Brien ultimately argued that these couples stayed together because they shared a desire, at that particular time, to be married to one another. They also valued their common histories. In O’Brien’s words, “They’ve lived with each other through bad times, good times, and forgettable times, and there isn’t much of a way they can un-

tangle the threads without losing basic parts of themselves.”¹³⁴ She did not discount the fact that their marriages might stop working at a future date, and indeed, one of the couples did divorce.¹³⁵ O’Brien’s larger message, however, remained clear: it was possible, and indeed desirable, to be successfully married. In spite of the turmoil and debates of the previous years, working to achieve this goal remained an essential element of married life in the United States.

Concerns about the state of American marriage were still high at the end of the 1970s, but it was evident that marriage was not a dying institution. Though the divorce statistics were dire, many Americans continued to marry with the hope that their marriages would be the ones that beat the odds. The question of who should take responsibility for ensuring a successful outcome had been hotly contested throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While many feminists had argued that fostering equality would improve married life, conservatives such as Marabel Morgan had asserted that marriage should remain a woman’s occupation. These debates showed no sign of abating in subsequent decades. Experts, for their part, had ably adapted to the changing marital environment; their services would be in high demand through the end of the twentieth century. Experts and the public alike, in other words, would not lose faith that American marriages could, with the proper effort, “work.”

SUPER MARITAL SEX AND THE SECOND SHIFT

NEW WORK FOR WIVES
IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

In August 1987 *Newsweek* published a cover story titled “How to Stay Married.” The cover featured a cartoon of a smiling, white, heterosexual couple, happily swinging in a wedding band engraved with the word “forever.” The accompanying caption proclaimed: “The Divorce Rate Drops as Couples Try Harder to Stay Together.” The article’s lead quote further emphasized this point, declaring, “The age of the disposable marriage is over. Instead of divorcing when times get tough, couples are working hard at keeping their unions intact. And they are finding that the rewards of matrimony are often worth the effort.”¹

Two years later, the dark comedy *The War of the Roses* reached a similar conclusion, although it emanated a decidedly less sanguine tone.² Danny DeVito (who also directed the film) costarred as Gavin D’Amato, an attorney who narrates the sad tale of his friends Oliver and Barbara Rose (Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner) to a young husband who is contemplating divorce. On the surface, Oliver and Barbara have lived the American dream: they fell in love after bid-

ding on the same antique, married, and had two children. After some lean years, Oliver became a successful lawyer and the family moved into a large suburban home, which Barbara decorated with precise and devoted care.

Problems arise, however, as Barbara slowly grows dissatisfied with her life and decides that she no longer loves Oliver. Her self-absorbed husband refuses to concede marital failure, especially after learning that Barbara intends to continue living in their beloved house. Against D'Amato's advice, Oliver insists on staying there as well. The ensuing game of sabotage and one-upmanship between the spouses grows increasingly hostile. Oliver, for instance, disrupts an important dinner party that Barbara gives; Barbara runs over Oliver's sports car with her considerably larger vehicle. These battles ultimately lead to all-out war, with Barbara trying desperately to convince Oliver that their marriage is over and Oliver pleading with Barbara to give the relationship another chance. As they systematically destroy their house, the feuding spouses ultimately find themselves swinging from a large chandelier with literally nowhere to go but down. Barbara and Oliver's bitter divorce battle, in other words, culminates in their untimely deaths. As the film concludes, D'Amato's potential client flees from the attorney's office; the Roses' story has effectively inspired him to reconsider his own thoughts of marital dissolution.

The War of the Roses is, in many respects, an ambiguous film. On the one hand, it does not condemn Barbara for her desire to end her marriage, and Oliver's actions often justify her revulsion toward him. On the other hand, it does not fault Oliver for his equally strong urge to stay married and suggests that Barbara's stubbornness has impeded her ability to recapture her previous happiness. The final message of the film, however, is clear: divorce is so acrimonious and destructive (even deadly) that it should be avoided at almost all costs. Unlike the *Newsweek* piece, the film does not dwell on any positive aspects of being married. Yet the article and the film share the view that the "rewards" of staying married far outweigh those of ending a union.

The publication of the article and the release of the film reflected

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How to Stay Married

The Divorce Rate Drops
As Couples Try Harder
To Stay Together



In a 1987 cover story, *Newsweek* predicts a sunny future for marriage. From *Newsweek*, August 24, 1987 © 1987 Newsweek, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission and protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States. The printing, copying, redistribution, or retransmission of the Material without express written permission is prohibited.

a changing marital reality in the 1980s and 1990s. The article certainly overstated its case when it suggested that marriage had been “disposable” in previous decades. Furthermore, many couples continued to divorce in spite of dire warnings to the contrary. But, during these years, marriage experts, as well as religious and political leaders, did encourage Americans to approach marriage with renewed vigor, and many took this advice to heart. “Commitment” came to rival “communication” as the catchword most frequently associated with marriage.

The idea that working at marriage would help relationships stay together was taken for granted in the advice literature of these decades. So too was the importance of seeking professional help for marital (as well as premarital) problems; the number of marriage counselors and therapists skyrocketed.³ But if working at marriage had become common wisdom, the nature of this work continued to evolve, adapting to changing social mores and conditions such as the increasing number of wives and mothers in the workforce. Plus, the importance of putting effort into one’s relationship seemed increasingly urgent, especially for wives, following the publicizing of grim statistics indicating how poorly women and children fared—both financially and psychologically—after divorce. In the pages of women’s magazines, authors thus encouraged readers to remember “how tough and self-curing marriage can be.”⁴ Even as many husbands also demonstrated a desire to perform marital work, maintaining a satisfying relationship was still an essential priority for wives.

IN FEBRUARY 1980 THE women’s magazine *Mademoiselle* announced the arrival of “nuptial madness.” “A few years ago,” the author explained, “we didn’t believe in marriage and now we don’t believe in divorce.”⁵ Similarly, in 1991 a piece in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* opened with the observation: “Welcome to marriage in the nineties, where commitment and stability are suddenly back in style.”⁶ While news of the declining marriage rate complicated this story in the 1990s, many of these reports remained optimistic that American marriages were more stable than they had been in the previous

decades.⁷ The divorce rate, in fact, declined from its peak in the late 1970s and was relatively stable through the end of the century.

Still, discussions about the future course of the American family remained highly politicized and, if anything, concerns about the waning influence of marriage escalated. As historian Stephanie Coontz has argued, a number of trends, including the growing incidence of cohabitation, divorce and out-of-wedlock births as well as the fight to legalize gay marriage, coalesced to create a “perfect storm” that irrevocably changed many facets of marriage and family life in the United States.⁸ But while many Americans willingly participated in these new familial forms, others protested loudly. At stake was the very definition of family: was it a single unit based on the breadwinner/homemaker model or could it, as one journalist asked, encompass “the varieties of people’s real domestic arrangements?”⁹

A leading cause of this debate, particularly in the 1980s, was the growing visibility of women in the workforce. Of course, American woman had been performing paid and unpaid labor throughout the nation’s history. The difference at this point in time was that more women seemingly aspired to have “careers,” which suggested that they would have to show the dedication to their jobs and to work the long hours previously reserved for men. Some commentators worried that women would reject family life altogether, and many working women worried that they would have a hard time finding time for their careers and marriage. This latter fear intensified in 1986, when a team of researchers released what came to be known as the Harvard-Yale study. According to the study’s findings, white, college-educated women who had not married by the age of thirty had only a 20 percent chance of marrying at all. This percentage decreased as women grew older, so that by the time they reached forty, according to *Newsweek*, they were “more likely to be killed by a terrorist” than to find a husband.¹⁰ The media, in turn, largely attributed this trend to women’s decisions to postpone marriage and family life until they had been able to establish themselves at work.

Journalists and other demography experts later questioned the veracity of the Harvard-Yale research on a number of different

counts; they demonstrated, for instance, that the “statistic” about women over forty and terrorism originated as a newsroom quip, not as a scientific “fact.”¹¹ Still, the media attention given to the initial findings ensured that many women learned that the choice of work over relationships could easily lead to future regret and loneliness. Popular dating manuals, in turn, played on women’s fears of ending up alone. The 1995 best seller *The Rules*, for instance, promised women who followed the thirty-five “rules”—which ranged from never calling a man first to not accepting a date for Saturday night after Wednesday—that they would find “Mr. Right.” Authors Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider clearly felt that they spoke for a generation of career women when they acknowledged the dilemma they encountered: “Still, we had to face it: as much as we loved being powerful in business, for most of us, that just wasn’t enough. . . . We didn’t want to give up our liberation, but neither did we want to come home to empty apartments.”¹² Any woman who aspired to be married and to avoid the solitary single life, in other words, needed to become a “*Rules* girl.” Such advice, in turn, reinforced the persistent notion—only briefly challenged in the late 1960s and early 1970s—that it was inherently more desirable for women to be married than unmarried.

Once women got married, however, they faced another host of problems. The emergence of the “dual-career couple” (in which both spouses worked either by necessity or by choice) was a well-documented phenomenon by the early 1980s. Less, clear, however, was how marriages would fare when couples—and especially women—found themselves with less time and energy to devote to family life. Conservative and popular publications made frequent reference to the “perils” of such arrangements and asked questions such as “When Wives Work . . . Must Husbands Hurt?”¹³ It would not have surprised many upper- and middle-class Americans, then, when *Time* reported in 1985 that married couples who worked were “crowding therapists’ offices.”¹⁴

The general consensus in women’s magazines was that dual-career arrangements could be successful—as long as couples under-

stood that “it’s as much work to keep a relationship alive as a career.”¹⁵ When commentators discussed such challenges for “couples,” however, they usually meant “wives.” Because wives were the ones breaking with “tradition” by entering the workforce, they reasoned, women needed to be aware of the effect that their decision to work had on other family members, including their husbands. The popular press rarely questioned that women had the right to be in the workforce. Still, the media hinted that deciding to have a career came with a certain degree of marital risk. In this vein, a piece in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* argued, “But perhaps we must face the fact that relationships don’t change overnight. Women have to recognize that every change requires time for adjustment. And maybe it’s time, too, that we examine how the demands we’re making on our husbands affect *their* lives.”¹⁶

Again, wives, even those from the white middle class, had been going to work for decades. But many feared that a new competitive spirit between working spouses might be harmful to marriages.¹⁷ What would happen, for instance, if the wife earned more money than her husband, or moved more quickly than he did up the corporate ladder? Clinical psychologist Morton H. Shaevitz warned the readers of *Working Woman* that if their husbands were incapable of accepting a position of “less prominence,” their relationship could be “destroyed.” He continued, “This does not mean that a woman shouldn’t strive for success. However, women need to talk openly with their partners before, during and after their careers start to take off. More important, women must not naively assume that everything is fine just because nothing is being said.”¹⁸ Such inattention, women learned, could lead to marital breakdown.

Similarly, University of Chicago economist Gary S. Becker was quoted by *Newsweek* as warning that “families are more likely to break up when women earn more compared to men than in families where the women are earning less than the men.”¹⁹ In actuality, relatively few working women had to worry about this problem; in 1993, for instance, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that just 22 percent of women made more money than their husbands.²⁰

Many of the women who did draw higher salaries than their spouses did so because their husbands had been laid off or were struggling to find full-time employment.²¹ Still, the issue of finances, especially when both spouses worked, was a topic of frequent discussion in the marital advice literature. When journalist Neil Miller reported those same census numbers in *Glamour*, for instance, he emphasized the fact that nearly six million wives earned more than their husbands, without translating that number into a percentage or detailing the often complicated reality behind the figures. Miller instead used the report as an opportunity to discuss the problems facing dual-career couples. “With two paychecks coming in,” he stated, “easily defined sex roles are breaking down, leaving couples confused and sometimes angry with one another.”²²

Many experts considered career women’s attitudes toward money to be suspect. Boston psychologist Carolyn Maltas suggested that wives were more likely to view their money as their own and to view their husbands’ money as for the common use of their families.²³ In a typical situation, a husband named Mark complained, “When I was the sole supporter, the decisions were mine. Vicky’s attitude is that what she makes is *her* money, and she can do whatever she wants. My earnings are *our* money and should be spent on fixing the roof, not buying me three-hundred dollar suits.”²⁴ When Robert Simon, a psychiatrist who worked at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy, gave his analysis of Mark and Vicky’s difficulties, he suggested that Vicky, and not Mark, needed to make the necessary adjustments in order to save the marriage. After all, she had upset the marital balance by going back to work (even though the piece made clear that the family needed her earnings to maintain their standard of living).

Was money the “No. 1 bone of contention between spouses” in these years?²⁵ Sociological data compiled by Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz in their 1983 book *American Couples* found that financial disagreements landed near the top of the list.²⁶ Certainly, couples had quarreled about money in the past. The difference in the latter decades of the century was that many experts specifically at-

tributed the present discord to married women's entrance into the workforce. They paid relatively scant attention to Blumstein and Schwartz's other finding that the spouse who made the most money—the husband in the vast majority of cases—continued to wield more of the financial decision-making power.²⁷ Rather than addressing the problems associated with such power dynamics, most coverage of the subject focused on vague hopes that couples could sort out the friction between them through communication and negotiation.²⁸

Another ongoing problem was the question of who performed the housework in dual-career families. While feminists such as Alix Kates Shulman had argued vigorously that husbands and wives should share household chores equally, it was clear by the early 1980s that this was little more than a utopian vision. In 1981 the most optimistic news that *Redbook* could take from a poll on sharing housework was that in households in which the women were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four and worked full time outside of the home, their husbands split the cooking a little over 20 percent of the time. In households in which the women did not work full time, this number fell to 12 percent. But regardless of the wife's employment status, the poll found that 70 percent of women “always” performed less creative chores such as laundry and dusting and that 80 percent “always” scrubbed the bathtub and cleaned the toilet.²⁹

Many women's magazines portrayed this reality as an unfortunate by-product of the wife's decision to have a career and expressed hope that husbands would someday assume their share of this work. A journalist at *McCall's* cautioned working women, “Until the husband's support, both on the job and at home, is no longer in question, a working wife will still have to be something of a Superwoman.”³⁰ The media also featured articles about women who had ingeniously managed to get their husbands to help out around the house. In one such personal narrative, a working wife couched her frustrations about having to do all the housework in terms of her concern about the state of their marriage. She told her husband that she “hated what was happening” to them because they “weren't having any fun

anymore.”³¹ This tactic, according to the experts, was a smart one. Morton Shaevitz, for instance, advised women that “while men may not like to do housework, they will do more and with less griping if they feel there is a payoff for them: a more available partner.”³² In the case cited above, the author’s husband responded to her pleas and agreed to perform some simple chores like vacuuming. The author acknowledged that she still performed “the larger share” of household tasks, but she nevertheless felt that their marriage had changed for the better. In regard to housekeeping, it was clear that initiating change—and thus helping the relationship—was the wife’s responsibility.³³

Even with such anecdotal evidence, the full reality of the time working women spent doing housework and other duties was not recognized until the publication of sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s *The Second Shift* in 1989.³⁴ Based on interviews with fifty working couples, Hochschild’s “stinging study” (in the words of a *Newsweek* reporter) confirmed that wives continued to perform the majority of household and parenting tasks.³⁵ She calculated that because of this second shift—the first being a full day at paid employment—women worked approximately fifteen more hours a week than did their husbands. Hochschild found that in the name of “equality,” husbands often performed “token” work around the house. Evan Holt, for example, took care of the family dog (the “downstairs”), while his wife Nancy was responsible for child care and the rest of the house (the “upstairs”).³⁶ For one-third of the couples, however, disagreements about how much work each spouse should do at home was a major source of marital tension. Hochschild argued that such conflicts reflected the larger trend of women undergoing more rapid change in their lives than men. Rather than confronting their problems, many of these couples settled for “containing their differences without, alas, resolving them.”³⁷

Hochschild also contended that settling this issue was an essential element in preserving marriage in “an age of divorce.” The only way to stop the devaluation of care giving and to eliminate the pressure on working wives (as well as a smoldering resentment) was for their

husbands to perform such work as well. Hochschild asserted that the happiest and most stable marriages in her study were the ones in which the husbands showed sincere “willingness to share the second shift.”³⁸ Hochschild held men, and not their wives, responsible for initiating change. But when she told an interviewer that men should view sharing as “an investment in the happiness of their marriage,” she failed to account for the fact that the work of ensuring marital success, just like housework, had long been women’s domain and that husbands might not necessarily respond to such an argument.³⁹

Child care—whether that entailed personally staying home with the children or finding someone to look after them—also continued to be a woman’s responsibility. Indeed, the media placed such an intensive focus on motherhood in the 1980s and 1990s that many women came to view becoming a mother, rather than becoming a wife, to be the pinnacle of feminine achievement.⁴⁰ Experts, in turn, worried that women who tried to combine marriage, parenting, and work would spend too much time being “mommies” and not enough time being “wives.” They stressed that marriages would inevitably be changed by the arrival of children but urged women not to embrace motherhood so fully so as to undermine their marriages. Ironically, experts acknowledged the pull of the “new momism” by instructing women that they should work on their marriages expressly because it was good for their children to witness healthy adult relationships.⁴¹

A related concern was that between their paid and unpaid labor, wives had little time to concentrate on having pleasurable sexual relationships with their husbands.⁴² While sexual guidance had long been a facet of experts’ marriage advice, it played an ever more prominent role in the post-sexual revolution years. At a time in which concerns about white teenage pregnancy, black female-headed households, and sexually explicit song lyrics reached new heights, discussions of marital sexuality were relatively tame fare. Still, the broader cultural frankness about sexual matters, paired with the now-mainstream understandings about the nature and importance of female sexual pleasure, created an extensive market for such discussions. According to the experts, having a healthy, exciting sex

life was virtually a prerequisite for a happy, satisfying marriage. A glut of advice books and advice articles with titles such as *Keep the Home Fires Burning* and “Turn Your Husband into the Lover of Your Dreams” promised to help married women strengthen their sexual relationships with their husbands.⁴³

The achievement of such fulfilling partnerships, experts warned, was not necessarily simple. After interviewing marriage and sex therapists, one journalist concluded that “long married couples who are the happiest and most enthusiastic about their sex lives work hard to make it that way.”⁴⁴ An extenuating problem was that after the initial excitement of the early days of married sex, couples fell in predictable, rather monotonous routines. One psychiatrist explained that establishing a sexual rhythm was natural, “but if the pattern becomes a habit and you find yourself unable to relax it . . . you may be blocked from discovering the variety and spontaneity that can make sex such an exquisite mode of communication between two people.”⁴⁵

Experts assured wives, however, that it was possible to have what Paul Pearsall, the director of education at the Kinsey Institute, referred to as super marital sex.⁴⁶ The importance of communication and of making time for sexual encounters formed the backbone of their advice. Sex therapists urged women to overcome potential embarrassment and to speak with their partners about their sexual preferences. An article that promised “sexier sex,” for instance, reassured women, “You can take lead.”⁴⁷ Experts also advised busy couples that scheduling sexual encounters was not undesirable. One marriage and sex therapist even found that “couples who rely solely on spontaneous urges do not have as much sex, or sex that is as exciting, as those who plan.”⁴⁸ Other, less technical, suggestions for having “more fun in bed” ranged from planning a “tryst” in a hotel to looking at erotica together.⁴⁹ At the same time, however, experts suggested that sex with one’s spouse did not always have to live up to an ideal of perfection, especially as defined by the movies and other forms of popular culture. Rather, it was much more important for spouses to discover what worked best for them as a couple.⁵⁰

Whether such advice was serious or of the lighthearted variety, it contained a persistent subtext: the fear of infidelity. When experts claimed that “married women can have the best sex lives” and that “married sex can be the best sex of all,” they did so because they worried that wives, as well as husbands, were more prone to committing adultery than they had been in the past.⁵¹ For women, in particular, they warned that changing cultural attitudes, as well as their aspirations for careers, had increased the opportunities for sexual temptation. “A job,” explained the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, “often provides a woman who has adulterous inclinations with just the opportunity to meet a suitable partner and the chance to see him when her husband imagines her to be at the office.”⁵²

It is unclear, however, just how many wives actually were unfaithful to their husbands and whether the incidence of their adultery represented a dramatic departure from the previous decades. Three polls taken in 1983—by the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Playboy*, and the San Francisco-based Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality—all reported different numbers in response to the question “Have you ever had extra-marital affair?” (21 percent yes, 34 percent yes, and 43 percent yes, respectively). In a follow-up poll in 1993, the *Journal* increased its estimate, reporting that 26 percent of wives had been unfaithful. These numbers were generally higher than Alfred Kinsey’s 1953 estimate that between 6 and 26 percent of married women had been unfaithful to their husbands.⁵³ More significant than any specific figures, though, was the perception that more women than ever before were straying from their marriage vows.

Avoiding extramarital affairs, in turn, became a new wifely duty. Experts asserted that monogamy was viable in the modern world (and, indeed, important given the looming specter of HIV/AIDS) although certainly not easy.⁵⁴ One counselor argued, “All one has to do is recognize that, given the vast amount of sexual stimuli with which our culture bombards us today, it is important not only to believe that fidelity is possible but to also have a strategy for remaining faithful to the one you love.”⁵⁵ Other experts assured married women that, on the one hand, it was “normal” to be attracted to

other men and that, on the other hand, it was strongly inadvisable to act on the “much riskier impulse” of initiating sexual intercourse. Painting a stereotypical picture in which men such as co-workers and neighbors could not be expected to control their sexual desires, experts held women responsible for embodying the virtues of “self-awareness, honesty, and self-control” in sexually tempting situations.⁵⁶ When wives had feelings that could lead them into infidelity, therefore, it was best if they channeled them back into their marriages. Psychologist Karen Shanor counseled women, for example, to let the knowledge that they found other men exciting “enrich, rather than destroy, the all-important relationship that you have with the special man you married.”⁵⁷

Even in the event that a wife did succumb and have an affair, it was possible for her to salvage her marriage. Doing so, however, required tremendous energy and commitment to being married. “Trying to save a marriage,” two marriage and sex therapists maintained, “can be a lot harder and take a lot longer than sending in the demolition crew and calling it quits.”⁵⁸ In the June 1988 installment of the long-running *Ladies’ Home Journal* feature “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” for instance, a wife named Tamara began having an affair with a man named Alec after she went back to work. She claimed that Alec listened to her in a way that her uncommunicative and overworked husband, Rob, did not. Rob told the counselor that Tamara was demanding and rarely satisfied with his attempts to listen and to be sympathetic. The counselor believed that the couple had “conflicting expectations” about marriage, many of which were rooted in their unhappy childhoods. But if both spouses had contributed to this “grim” marital situation, mending the rift was entirely Tamara’s responsibility. The counselor “asked Tamara to make working on her marriage a top priority” but put no demands on Rob. In time, and in true “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” fashion, their marriage grew into a “solid, fulfilling relationship.” The message was unambiguous: as the guilty party, and especially as the wife, Tamara’s efforts alone assured that the marriage survived her affair.⁵⁹

Perhaps even more important than controlling their own extra-

marital sexual desires was for wives to ensure that their husbands did not stray. Again, marriage and sex therapists disagreed about the percentage of husbands who were unfaithful to their wives (estimates ranged wildly, from 15 to 75 percent), but they did agree that even “nice guys” could be tempted to have affairs.⁶⁰ Given these statistics, the heavy emphasis placed on maintaining an exciting marital sexual relationship assumed a cautionary tone. For example, when the title of an article in *Redbook* asked, “If You Don’t Flirt with Your Husband, Who Will?” the obvious implication was that a failure to flirt and to be sexually alluring left one’s husband vulnerable to the attentions of other women.⁶¹ Experts warned wives that they needed to exercise particular vigilance at certain key times during their marriages, such as after a child was born or when their husbands started to worry about getting older. One psychologist’s research, in fact, indicated that “any change or transition in marriage—and in the individual lives of a husband and wife—can pose a threat [to a husband’s fidelity].”⁶² Popular author Carol Botwin, for her part, outlined thirty-four “telltale” (if contradictory) signs—from “he is feeling unsuccessful” to “he has become very successful”—that indicated whether a husband might have an affair.⁶³ Identifying those signs, in turn, would allow wives to be particularly attentive to their husbands’ moods and sexual needs.

Experts suggested that if a husband was unfaithful, his wife should examine how she may have contributed to the breakdown of the marital relationship. Psychiatrist Helen Singer Kaplan, for example, advised married women to ask themselves the following questions if they found out that their husbands were cheating: “Am I really happy? Is he happy? Have I been as good a wife as I could have been? Has he been as good a husband as he could have been? What problems do we have that I haven’t wanted to look at?”⁶⁴ Experts additionally counseled forgiveness. A 1986 *Redbook* piece titled “‘He Cheated on Me!’ A Story with Three Endings,” aptly illustrated a wife’s alternatives if she discovered that her husband was having an extramarital affair: to end the marriage, to stay quiet, or to “get in there and fight for her husband.” If she selected the first path, she

likely would find herself lonely and divorced, pining for her ex-husband. The second choice would turn her into an angry spy. The last option, therefore, was surely the most desirable, even if the wife would have to confront the fact that she, too, had contributed to her husband's actions.⁶⁵

The 1987 film *Fatal Attraction* brought the notion of fighting for one's unfaithful husband to a logical, if extreme, conclusion.⁶⁶ As the movie opens, the seemingly happy couple Dan and Beth Gallagher (Michael Douglas and Anne Archer) attend a book party, where Dan meets Alex Forrest (Glenn Close), a sexy blonde career woman. After the party, any hopes that Dan has harbored of making love with Beth are dashed by her decision to let their young daughter sleep in their bed for the night. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when Dan next encounters Alex at a business meeting (with Beth conveniently out of town), he succumbs to temptation and spends several passionate nights with her. But while Dan views their affair as a brief fling, Alex refuses to accept his decision to cut ties. As her obsession with Dan escalates—especially after the revelation that she has become pregnant—Alex's behavior becomes increasingly erratic and violent—in one well-known scene, she kills the family's pet rabbit and leaves it in a pot of boiling water on their kitchen stove. In an inevitable, final confrontation, Alex attacks Beth with a knife and Dan attempts to drown her in an overflowing bathtub. His efforts fall short, however, and Beth ultimately saves the family by shooting Alex in the chest.

Fatal Attraction is not, however, a cautionary tale for men. Dan has a sexual relationship with Alex because she offers him the opportunity to do so and because he believes that she will allow him to set the "rules" of their affair. But the film also strongly suggests that Dan might not be tempted to engage in an affair if Beth were more available to him in bed. Certainly, the film presents Alex (the childless, career woman) and not Beth (the loving wife and mother) as the primarily villain. Given the public dialogue about marital fidelity at the time of the film's release, it is not surprising that Beth has to be the one to kill Alex at the end of the film. In doing so, she not only

forgives Dan for his infidelity—as well as for his culpability in bringing the psychotic Alex into their lives—but also demonstrates that she can be a successful wife because she is willing to go to drastic lengths to save her marriage and her family.

A little over a decade later, a real-life drama involving similar issues of marriage, infidelity, and forgiveness gripped much of the nation. In early 1998 allegations surfaced that President Bill Clinton had been unfaithful to his wife, Hillary, with Monica Lewinsky, a young White House intern. Similar accusations had been brought against Clinton in the past, and his wife had doggedly defended their marital relationship as well as her husband's reputation.⁶⁷ Still, throughout most of her husband's presidency, Hillary Clinton was distrusted by a large portion of the public and often viewed as a political liability for her husband.⁶⁸ But as the scandal deepened—ultimately culminating in the president's impeachment on charges of lying under oath about the nature of his relationship with Lewinsky—Hillary Clinton's popularity with the American public steadily grew, especially with women who did not identify themselves as feminists. (Many feminists argued that the First Lady's willingness to forgive her husband repeatedly for his sexual indiscretions betrayed some of their core values.)⁶⁹ Still, Hillary Clinton's forgiving attitude clearly enjoyed wide support—a *U.S. News and World Report* poll taken in September 1998 found that 58 percent of those women surveyed thought that Hillary Clinton should “stay and work it out” with her husband, although, ironically, only 49 percent said that they would choose this option if they were in a similar situation.⁷⁰ By acting like many Americans thought a wife should act—namely by standing by her husband in times of adversity—Clinton thus achieved the favorable public ratings that had eluded her throughout most of her husband's presidency.

A changing public discourse about the effects of divorce also contributed to this emphasis on forgiving a husband's unfaithfulness. From time to time, women's magazines still published stories about women who had “survived” divorce and grown stronger as a result.⁷¹ But, beginning in the 1980s, the trend was toward discussing the problems that women and children faced after divorce. When fem-

inist groups, such as Women in Transition, had made this case throughout the 1970s, they did so in order to argue for better social and governmental support of divorced women. Less than twenty years later, however, the tone had shifted, and the media and experts frequently deployed such evidence in order to convince still-married women that, in many cases, staying married was better than pursuing a divorce.

Advocates of this position had some persuasive research to support their line of reasoning. Their most convincing data emerged in 1985, with the publication of sociologist Lenore Weitzman's book *The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women and Children in America*. According to Weitzman's analysis, divorced women and their minor children experienced a 73 percent decline in their standard of living in the first year after divorce, whereas their ex-husbands enjoyed a 42 percent gain.⁷² Although other statisticians later challenged Weitzman's numbers and methodology, her findings were, by far, the most frequently mentioned in the media.⁷³ Such pieces often cited "real" cases of women who experienced a drastic change in their standard of living after a divorce. "Three years ago, Sharon Hudson lived in a sprawling \$170,000 house and had a cleaning woman to help her," began one such piece. It continued, "Then she became a cleaning woman."⁷⁴

Experts also cautioned women that divorce could lead to a variety of problems with their children. In the mid-1980s, psychologist Phyllis Chesler publicized findings that more men were demanding, and receiving, custodial rights than in the past. Her evidence additionally suggested that some men used the threat of a custodial battle to convince their wives to abandon financial claims.⁷⁵ Another persistent debate concerned the long-term effects of divorce on children. In the early 1970s, psychologist Judith Wallerstein had launched what would grow into a longitudinal study of the effect of divorce on parents and their children. In *Second Chances*, the 1989 installment of the research, Wallerstein asserted that divorce was "almost always more devastating for children than for their parents."⁷⁶ As in the case with Weitzman, Wallerstein's methods and analysis (especially her

lack of a control group) came under intense critical scrutiny, but her larger conclusions continued to hold sway in much of the mainstream media. A 1995 article about saving marriages in *Time*, for example, observed, “Though Wallerstein’s results are debatable, they have definitely seeped into the zeitgeist and affected not only efforts to stay married but also how people approach divorce.”⁷⁷

These experts did not publish their findings with the overt intent of convincing all wives contemplating divorce not to dissolve a marriage. Both Weitzman and Chesler argued that legislative changes and raised public awareness were needed to give divorced women better opportunities, and Wallerstein offered a variety of suggestions for improving children’s experience of divorce.⁷⁸ But the media judged their evidence to be so persuasive that when a 1992 report found that women (especially those over forty) could come out of divorce happier and more confident than when they were married, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* deemed it to be “startling.”⁷⁹ All in all, research on the aftereffects of divorce most frequently provided wives with powerful incentives to hold their marriages together, which led *McCall’s* to declare, “Women are finding that divorce simply is not the answer to their unhappy marriages unless staying together would literally ruin their lives. Working it out is simply a better bet than parting.”⁸⁰ The fact that the divorce rate did slow in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that some women undertook this work in order to avoid the dissolution of their marriages.

Many American marriages, however, still ended in divorce. In 1993 alone, for instance, 1.2 million couples ended their unions.⁸¹ The number of divorces fueled a mounting critique of American marriage from social conservatives, whose voices became particularly prominent in the 1990s. One of the foundations of the conservative stance on the family was a defense of “traditional” marriage, characterized by clearly defined gender roles and a belief in the permanence of the marital relationship.⁸² A piece in *National Review*, for instance, argued that “marriage is not a contract, balancing conflicting interests, measuring competing obligations, forcing compliance with fear of consequences; it is a covenant, a permanent and

exclusive union that sets no limits on what is to be given or forgiven by either party.”⁸³

In order to reinforce gender roles, many conservatives emphasized that wives (and especially mothers) should make taking care of their families their primary careers. In a manner reminiscent of *The Total Woman*, others highlighted the value of wifely submissiveness. In June 1998, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a statement that asserted, “A wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband, even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ.” While this declaration proved to be controversial—and indeed, was rejected by the Baptist General Convention of Texas—it nevertheless held symbolic value as an attempt to emphasize the importance of male leadership and authority in the home.⁸⁴

Conservatives worried, in fact, that men were not assuming enough responsibility for family life in the United States. In books with titles such as *Fatherless America* and *Life without Father* (the latter written by Rutgers sociologist David Popenoe, the son of “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” founder Paul Popenoe), they argued that children and society were suffering because a shrinking number of families fit the nuclear, father-led mold. The popular Christian men’s group Promise Keepers, founded by University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney in 1990, sought to ameliorate this situation by encouraging men to be engaged, active participants in their families. The mission was explicitly outlined in the fourth of the seven promises made by members of Promise Keepers: “A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values.” The group’s vision of the role of husbands and fathers, however, was not egalitarian. Rather, Promise Keepers promoted the idea that God had ordained men to be in charge of their families and urged them to seize their rightful positions back from their wives.⁸⁵ Such calls for reinscribing male authority, however, had little to say about men’s roles in the daily work of their marriage relationships, precisely because this work had traditionally been performed by women.

Many conservatives also sought to eradicate what they viewed to

be a “pro-divorce” culture in the United States. David Blankenhorn, founder of the Institute for American Values and author of *Fatherless America*, told the *Wall Street Journal*: “We as a society are becoming sick and tired of a culture of divorce and nonmarriage. . . . The divorce revolution has not delivered the goods, and now we’re beginning to view divorce as the problem.”⁸⁶ The solution to solving this problem, in turn, was to dismantle the no-fault system of divorce. (Most conservatives, however, did not want to abolish divorce altogether. They acknowledged that in certain circumstances, notably those involving domestic violence, divorce was the best option.) Citing studies like those published by Weitzman and Wallerstein, conservatives argued that divorce inevitably hurt women and children. From this perspective, the no-fault system was directly responsible for their plight because it allowed for divorces in which one spouse wanted to stay married.

Most opponents of reverting to fault-based divorce or of only allowing for divorce by mutual consent agreed that the nation probably did need to take steps to lower the divorce rate. They objected to the conservatives’ plans, however, because they felt that returning to a system of divorce that condoned perjury was not a wise idea. They worried that such laws could trap victims of domestic violence in untenable marital situations and expressed concern that the anti-divorce movement hurt children affected by divorce by labeling them as “damaged goods.”⁸⁷ On this latter issue, they also cited findings that children raised in homes in which their parents were unhappily married often suffered more than those whose parents had divorced.

For the most part, arguments against wholesale reform won the day. A 1996 proposal in Michigan to prohibit no-fault divorce in that state failed, as did several subsequent attempts. Even a much heralded victory for the reform movement ultimately proved to be ineffective. In 1997 the state of Louisiana passed a bill that allowed for “covenant marriage.”⁸⁸ Men and women who committed to such marriages agreed to undergo premarital counseling and their opportunities for divorce were severely restricted. The Louisiana plan, however, only had a limited influence on legislation in other states.

Furthermore, a vast majority of Louisiana couples continued to opt for marriages not governed by the new law.⁸⁹

While not all Americans agreed with the relatively extreme measures advocated by social conservatives, many did concur that more needed to be done in order to prevent marital failure. The public fascination with long-lasting marriages continued to flourish in the 1980s and 1990s. The importance of being “committed” to marriage was a particular mainstay of popular marriage advice. Some commentators believed that such an emphasis was necessary because the baby boomers had been raised to focus too much on their individual needs and thus were unprepared for the interdependence of marriage.⁹⁰ Whether this was the case or not, by emphasizing the importance of commitment, they also emphasized the importance of marital work to a new generation. In 1981, for instance, Mel Kranzler—who had celebrated the creative potential of divorce in the early 1970s—changed his focus to accentuate the ways in which married couples could remain happy throughout the entirety of their unions. In *Creative Marriage*, he argued that every marriage passed through six stages, from “The Now-We-Are-a-Couple-Marriage” to “The Summing-Up Marriage.”⁹¹ Each stage represented a “new” marriage that offered a husband or wife the “opportunity to revitalize your relationship on a new basis.”⁹²

Similarly, Francine Klagsbrun, the feminist author of *Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce*, praised husbands and wives who “willingly choose to change themselves when necessary to keep their marriages alive and vital.”⁹³ After interviewing over 100 couples who had been married at least fifteen years for her study, Klagsbrun came to believe that shared history was an essential element in holding couples together. She explained her insight into happy marital life to an interviewer from *People*: “Every marriage has a story, and people in long and good marriages cherish it. They don’t want to give up what’s between them. The good things (‘Remember what we did with the kids?’) and even the bad (‘God, we’ve been through that’) are all part of that, and looking back on it can help people work out whatever they’re going through.”⁹⁴

True dedication to marriage, therefore, involved paying constant attention to the subtle changes in one's relationship and adjusting to improve the situation accordingly. Experts advised couples that they could enrich their unions even after they had moved beyond the "honeymoon" stage. A writer for *McCall's* saw a period of adjustment as inevitable: "We must be careful not to mistake the ebbing of romantic bliss and the dawning of disappointment and conflict for warning signals of serious incompatibility. In many cases, we are simply entering into the reality of two people living together, and the reality is that no two people fit together perfectly. The friction that arises out of this fact is painful and annoying, but often it is precisely the challenge we need to grow."⁹⁵

The idea that conflict, and even strong dissatisfaction with the marital relationship, could lead to a better marriage became a frequent refrain. A pastoral counselor maintained, for example, that "resolving conflicts increases marital pleasure. . . . A marriage that is always in the process of conflict resolution is a marriage that is becoming stronger, better and more resilient."⁹⁶ Even seemingly loveless relationships, from this perspective, could be turned around. "Any marriage will tarnish with neglect," an article from the *Ladies' Home Journal* asserted, "but that doesn't mean that you can't restore the luster."⁹⁷ Experts counseled that as long as there was some hint that a marital rift could be mended, the union was worth preserving, a point articulated by psychiatrist Avodah Offit: "If the marriage seems fifty-one percent good, why not stick with it? In a year or two, it could reach sixty-five percent—or better. And then, who knows . . . ?"⁹⁸

Similar advice held particular sway in certain segments of the African American community. Coverage of marriage and divorce, in general, increased dramatically in the black media during the 1980s and 1990s, a change that can be largely attributed to the founding, in the 1970s, of *Essence*, the first magazine specifically targeted at African American women.⁹⁹ Readers of *Essence* often encountered celebrations of commitment and marital work, as in this instance: "People who love each other get divorced every day. But those who are committed to hanging in there say that making it work is a constant

effort. It's work of the most frustrating and the most rewarding kind."¹⁰⁰ While this observation seemingly echoed the advice found in other women's magazines, it actually was much more politicized within the African American context. The state of the black family was a frequent topic of political debate during these decades, as politicians such as President Ronald Reagan lamented the relatively large percentage of female-headed households and demonized the alleged welfare "queen." Authors who encouraged black women to make the effort to hold their marriages together did so, therefore, with the full knowledge that the high divorce and separation rate among African Americans, as well as rates of unwed motherhood, provided politicians with the ammunition to make such accusations.¹⁰¹

The political context also influenced discussions about marriage counseling. It is clear that African Americans had better access to, and were more willing to seek, professional marriage counseling than in the past. In 1978 a journalist for *Ebony* reported that

a decade ago it was virtually unheard of for Black couples to seek out a marriage counselor for help with intimate problems. They settled for talk sessions with relatives, close friends, or perhaps a minister. In many cases the couple, unable to resolve their differences, grew farther and farther apart and eventually separated. Today, however, it is not unusual for Blacks to seek professional counseling when their marriages turn sour. And, according to experts in the field, this is a very positive trend because in many cases marital problems can be solved with the help and guidance of qualified specialists.¹⁰²

A little over a decade later, writer Michael Beaubien shared his personal counseling experience in *Essence*. He concluded his piece with a call for other black couples to follow his lead: "I believe we owe it to ourselves, our families, and our communities to work for the success of our marriages."¹⁰³ Beaubien thus promoted the view that each couple's choice to seek or to not seek counseling affected their larger community in important ways.

The marriage counseling profession flourished as more couples,

regardless of race, tried to stay together. Indeed, the final decades of the twentieth century were a time of expansion and of change for the counseling field. In 1978 the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors officially changed its name to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). This alteration was not merely semantic. Marriage and family therapists in the 1960s and 1970s had generally disregarded marriage counseling because it lacked a theoretical or research component. By choosing to use “therapy” in its name, therefore, the AAMFT signaled its desire to take a more rigorous approach to marital problems.¹⁰⁴

A more significant boost to the profession’s profile, however, occurred in 1988, when Elliot and Nancy, two characters on the popular ABC television show *thirtysomething*, visited a marriage therapist to discuss their relationship problems. Counselors heralded the show for its “unusually realistic portrait of what goes on in counseling” and believed that it would prompt other couples to seek such help.¹⁰⁵ Whether or not *thirtysomething* had a significant influence, the number of couples seeking marriage counseling did, indeed, increase dramatically. *Time* reported in 1995 that 4.6 million couples a year were attending marriage therapy, a significant increase from the 1.2 million who had sought help in 1980.¹⁰⁶

Many marriage counselors also reflected and shaped the growing interest in fostering commitment among couples. In the words of one expert, marriage saving was once again a primary goal: “We’re back to a more traditional approach of trying harder to save the marriage, especially if children are involved. We see so many people make the same mistakes in a second marriage that the attitude has become: hold on, work harder at the one you’ve got, unless it’s utterly hopeless.”¹⁰⁷ A counselor cited by *McCall’s* estimated that two-thirds of couples who sought marriage counseling experienced at least some improvement in their marital circumstances.¹⁰⁸ A *Redbook* survey of fifty marriage counselors found that couples with common problems such as power struggles, unrealistic expectations, and poor communications, had an 80 percent chance of staying together through counseling, provided that they were “committed to improv-

ing their relationship.”¹⁰⁹ By differentiating between couples who willingly participated in counseling and those who were only there to placate a spouse before an inevitable divorce, counselors effectively boosted their success rates and signaled that counseling would continue to save marriages in the future.

A cottage industry of sorts, made up of a variety of marriage experts and dedicated to encouraging couples to stay together, became quite popular in the 1990s. A broad array of self-help books became available, and experts of this school of thought were featured on daytime television shows such as *Donahue* and *Oprah*; they also found a niche on the Internet. One of the trend-setters in this vein was Michele Weiner-Davis, the author of the best-selling 1992 book *Divorce-Busting: A Revolutionary and Rapid Program for Staying Together*. Weiner-Davis firmly believed that most marriages should not end in divorce. “I’ve grown increasingly convinced,” she explained, “that most marriages are worth saving simply because most problems are solvable. Or to put it another way, most unhappy marriages can be changed, and therefore are worth changing.”¹¹⁰ Thus while most marriage therapists continued to encourage couples to attend counseling sessions together, often for extended periods of time, Weiner-Davis advocated taking a short-term approach that required the participation of only one spouse. This so-called Solution-Oriented Brief Therapy (SBT) focused not on the sources of problems but rather on finding quick resolutions. The basic premise was that if even one spouse changed his or her behavior, the relationship would automatically change as well. In this manner, Weiner-Davis argued, relationships that appeared to be doomed for failure could begin anew.

While many experts disliked Weiner-Davis’s approach, groups similarly dedicated to “relationship enhancement”—strengthening marriages and thus preventing divorces—sprung up throughout the United States.¹¹¹ University of Denver psychologist Howard Markman, for instance, worked with a team of collaborators to develop the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP). PREP offered couples short classes (usually one day or two evenings) in

which they could learn how to discuss important issues without fighting. Markman believed that “destructive conflict” was at the heart of most divorces and that by teaching couples to communicate more effectively and to avoid nasty disagreements, they would be much less likely to embark on the path toward marital dissolution. While not all long-term research into PREP indicated that its results were statistically significant, Markman continued to exude confidence as to its effectiveness, as did others with similar approaches to divorce prevention.¹¹²

Research into the causes of marital problems also evolved. The leader in this regard was John Gottman, a University of Washington psychologist (and former mentor of Howard Markman), who challenged much of the accepted wisdom about healthy marital interaction from his media-dubbed “Love Lab.” Gottman prided himself on the scientific nature of his work, especially because he believed most of the existing research into marriage was lacking in this critical area. In order to study the interactions of married couples, Gottman and his students monitored their physiological responses, facial expressions, and other movements, as well as the content of their conversations. The goal of these observations was to identify “which responses, thoughts, and physiological reactions place couples on the path toward divorce.” Indeed, Gottman claimed that he could predict his subjects’ marital futures (good or bad) with “astonishing” accuracy.¹¹³

Gottman argued that past marriage experts had been mistaken in emphasizing that truly successful marriages were ones in which the couples actively listened to one another and compromised effectively when in conflict. He found that not only were couples in such “validating” relationships happy, but also those in “conflict-avoiding” and “volatile” relationships. The *Ladies’ Home Journal* quoted Gottman as saying, “There’s a big range of what makes a marriage work so that it satisfies both partners.”¹¹⁴ According to his analysis, marital problems arose when couples started to exhibit negative behavior that he termed the “four horsemen of the apocalypse”: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.¹¹⁵ Gottman deemed

overcoming these negative behaviors to be essential because, regardless of communication style, couples needed to have more positive than negative interactions.

Other studies in marital interaction focused on the frequently controversial issue of gender and communication. While academics had been debating this topic from any number of viewpoints for some time, it entered the realm of popular, prescriptive marriage advice with the 1992 publication of John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*.¹¹⁶ Gray, a relationship therapist who wrote in a folksy, anecdotal style, argued that husbands and wives misunderstood one another (thus leading to relationship problems) because men and women had fundamentally different communication styles. Whereas women resolved problems by talking about their feelings with others, for instance, men did so by retreating to be alone in their "caves." Gray believed that by recognizing such differences and by adjusting one's own responses and behavior accordingly, "you will learn how to create the love you deserve."¹¹⁷

While Gray's book purported to give advice to both men and women, critics complained that it placed most of the responsibility for changing marriages upon women. They argued that the book reinforced gender stereotypes and required women to embrace passivity by suggesting, for example, that women "never" offer their husbands unsolicited advice.¹¹⁸ Clearly, however, such criticisms (as well as questions about Gray's credentials) did not detract from his popularity. By the end of the twentieth century, it had sold over 7 million copies and launched a "Mars/Venus" empire.¹¹⁹

As the debate about the gendered implications of Gray's thesis makes clear, the distribution of marital work remained an area of contested discussion in the final years of the twentieth century. Certainly, many husbands demonstrated a desire to work on their marriages. By the late 1990s, studies indicated that men did more housework and child care than ever before (although they still performed less, on average, than their wives).¹²⁰ Men, too, bought marriage advice books and attended counseling sessions. Furthermore, some popular men's magazines—notably *Men's Health*, which debuted in the late 1980s—

occasionally featured pieces about marriage and divorce that echoed the sentiments found in women's magazines.¹²¹

Still, while not discounting the importance of men also working on their relationships, much of the marriage literature continued to advise women to take the lead in such endeavors. Typical in this regard was a commentator's suggestion that "although no woman can—or should—shoulder the entire responsibility for making a marriage work, she *can* initiate a conciliatory move."¹²² Similarly, when relationship therapist Harville Hendrix created a "workbook" to help improve marriages, he included a separate section about how to convince husbands to participate, with recommendations such as "Tell him you're interested in improving your relationship and that by filling out the questionnaire he will be helping you to become a better partner."¹²³ Women might only be able to persuade men to work at their marriages, in other words, if the husbands believed that their wives were already doing so.

Research, in fact, did indicate that women worked on their marriages more than their husbands. In *American Couples*, Blumstein and Schwartz discovered "a large number [of relationships] where the husband applies more of his energy to his job and the wife to the needs of the relationship."¹²⁴ Similarly, in 1991 *Redbook* told its readers (presumably most of whom were women), "If you feel you do a lot more of the work when it comes to making your marriage run smoothly—you're right. Couples researchers say that women have more relationship skills."¹²⁵ Several years later, the *Ladies' Home Journal* convened a "Happy Wives Club," in which four busy women agreed to spend two weeks "managing" their marriages in new ways. One wife, for instance, vowed to be more passionate; another tried to be less argumentative. While the wives embraced the experiment, they also had some questions about it. "Why is it, they all wondered," the author reported, "that in this age of equality, women are still responsible for the happiness of their marriages?" The article, however, made no effort to answer their query, suggesting that each woman had to be responsible for her own happiness.¹²⁶

Did this focus on women's role in preserving marriage contribute,

in the words of author Susan Faludi, to a “backlash” against American women? The answer is more complicated than a simple “yes” or “no.” As Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels demonstrate in *The Mommy Myth*, a great paradox of the final decades of the twentieth century was the intensification of requirements to be a “good” mother at the same time that more mothers, especially of small children, had paid employment outside the home.¹²⁷ This analysis equally applies to the question of their marriages. Public fears about women’s changing roles and the fate of the family contributed to a retrenchment of the belief that wives needed to work hard on their marriages in order to ensure relationship success. Their career aspirations did not lead them to abandon their marital work, as many conservatives feared, but prompted many of them to adopt a “second shift.”

The still high divorce rate, as well, did not dissuade many wives from embracing the idea that working on their marriages was an integral factor in their own wellbeing and the happiness of their spouses and children. Women demonstrated this belief each time they read marriage advice in a magazine, bought a book about improving their relationship, or watched an expert discussing marriage on daytime television. Once again, the idea that successful marriage took work had proved to be adaptable to a changing social and political context, thereby ensuring that it would play an important role in the ongoing debates about the meaning and future of the institution in the early twenty-first century.

EPILOGUE

STILL WORKING

On August 12, 2007, the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* asked: “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” The inside cover promised an article in which “a therapist and several troubled couples examine whether a crumbling union can be put back together again.”¹ While the story’s exploration of Marie and Clem’s marital problems, as well as of current trends in therapy, was considerably longer and more detailed than the *Ladies’ Home Journal* feature from which it borrowed its instantly recognizable title, the outcome mimicked those from the last half century of *Journal* cases. With the help of a kindly (and canny) therapist, Marie—portrayed by the author as the primary cause of the couple’s discord—came to understand the utility of counseling and to readjust her attitude about her professional life and her marriage. The piece concluded with a tempered optimism, suggesting that even if Marie and Clem failed to “irrevocably change” their situation for the better, their shared experiences and memories would ultimately bring them through difficult marital times.²

The project of working at marriage, together with the public’s fascination with what makes marriage work, thus remains alive and well in the early twenty-first century. While there are now fewer households made up of married couples than households formed by

unmarried individuals in the United States, most Americans still do marry.³ When they decide to tie the knot, they most frequently do so with optimism, hoping that their marriages will be happy and assuming that they will make concerted efforts in order to ensure their marital success. Innovative approaches to tackling marital problems abound—as illustrated by the group couples therapy highlighted in the *Times Magazine* article—because many American couples continue their quest for stronger relationships. Thanks to the Internet, men and women can access expert (and not-so-expert) marriage advice twenty-four hours a day. Daytime and reality television shows such as *Dr. Phil* and *One Week to Save Your Marriage* offer viewers the opportunity to watch “real” couples attempt to overcome dire marital circumstances, oftentimes with miraculous results. Of course, most commentators also recognize that the divorce rate remains high and that some couples are even better off ending their unions. Websites offering divorce support and advice are almost as ubiquitous as those that present advice about marital problems. The acknowledgment that every marriage could end in divorce, however, has done little to discourage the marriage-saving industry; if anything, concerns about divorce continue to fuel the industry’s growth.

Assumptions about gender have never ceased to be the basic factor in how Americans think about who benefits from marriage and who should perform most marital work. In early 2007, a front-page story in the *Times* reported, “For what experts say is probably the first time, more American women are living without a husband than with one.”⁴ By the time the newspaper’s Public Editor had chastised his colleagues for obscuring the fact that this new “majority” included unmarried women between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, the report had already reverberated throughout the nation and internationally.⁵ Commentators from across the political spectrum used the findings to push their respective points of view about marriage. Some applauded the seeming newfound freedom for women to choose not to marry; others criticized the growing gap between the educational levels of married and unmarried women and called for renewed efforts to encourage marriage among the poor, and espe-

cially in the African American community. The focus, in any case, was almost exclusively on women, a fact that becomes less surprising when one takes into account the historical assumption that women need and desire marriage more than men. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which a similar report about men would lead to such a quick and widespread reaction.

The long-standing belief that women have a special responsibility for the health of their relationships lives on today, as many social conservatives champion the cause of marriage promotion, particularly for low-income women.⁶ Evidence suggests that many current marriage programs counsel women that it is primarily their job to find marriageable men and to hold on to them at all costs. A 2003 article in the *New Yorker*, for instance, described an Oklahoma City pastor who informed the poor women attending his marriage education classes that marriage “is the worthiest of personal goals.” He went on to say, “For now, it’s up to you to go out and teach the men,” because most potential mates were not ready to make a sustained commitment.⁷ While most critics of such programs have rightly questioned whether or not marriage can lift women out of poverty, it is also important to recognize that the ideas expressed by the preacher have a history rooted in the equation of marriage and work. Moreover, history tells us that, too often, the push to keep marriages together led many women to stay in abusive or otherwise unsatisfactory relationships. Overzealous marriage promotion programs run the risk of prompting more women to do the same.

The concept of marital work informs other heated political arguments about the future of American marriage, such as the debates surrounding the legality and morality of gay marriage.⁸ Some experts, for instance, have begun to examine the distribution of marital work within same-sex marriages and civil unions; very early evidence, in fact, suggests a more equitable distribution independent of “traditional” gender roles.⁹ Furthermore, discussions about gay marriage have led liberals and conservatives alike to question how committed heterosexual Americans are to the sanctity of marriage and how willing they are to work on their relationships. Conservative-

leaning critic David Brooks, for example, has departed from the traditional conservative opposition to gay marriage and advocated its legalization because he believes that all Americans, regardless of their sexual orientation, should be encouraged to embrace marriage as a lifelong commitment. In doing so, he criticizes heterosexuals for willingly participating in a “culture of contingency,” as opposed to a “culture of fidelity.”¹⁰ While the application of this argument to the question of gay marriage is relatively novel, the larger anxiety it expresses about the stability of American marital relationships has a long history. The sense of crisis surrounding the gay marriage debate will eventually subside (albeit not in the foreseeable future). What will remain constant, however, is that when the next crisis arises, concerns about how marriages work will be central to the ensuing discussion.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER ONE

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- 2 Parrott, *Ex-Wife*.
- 3 Loew's Columbia, advertisement for *The Divorcée*. See also Watson, "Fading Shame," 142.
- 4 R.G., "Norma Shearer's Film," *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 1930.
- 5 Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*.
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- 10 Smith, "Making Marriage a Problem"; Coontz, *Marriage*, 8.
- 11 Riley, *Divorce*, 134–35, 156–57.
- 12 On the general lessening of the "divorce stigma," see Watson, "Fading Shame."
- 13 Groves, *Marriage Crisis*, 190.
- 14 Burgess and Locke, *Family*.
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- 77 A useful list of such studies appears in Clifford Kirkpatrick, “Factors in Marital Adjustment,” *American Journal of Sociology* 43 (September 1937): 270 n. 1.
- 78 Ross, *Origins of American Social Science*, chap. 10; Moskowitz, *In Ther-*

- apy *We Trust*, 89. On the postwar popularity of such tests, particularly in religious settings, see Davis, “The Wife Your Husband Needs,” 210–22.
- 79 Bogue, *Basic Writings of Ernest W. Burgess*, x.
- 80 “Marriage Test,” *Time*, February 7, 1938, 24.
- 81 Burgess and Cottrell, *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage*. See also Terman, *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness*.
- 82 Burgess and Cottrell, *Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage*, 39–44.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 354.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 349 (emphasis added).
- 86 Terman, *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness*, 6.
- 87 Paul Popenoe, “How Can Colleges Prepare Their Students for Marriage and Parenthood?” *Journal of Home Economics* 22 (March 1930): 169.
- 88 Ernest R. Groves, “So You Want to Get Married?” *American Magazine*, April 1938, 15, 151.
- 89 Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, chap. 6; Moran, *Teaching Sex*, 126–31.
- 90 Jerome Beatty, “Taking the Blinders off Love,” *American Magazine*, December 1937, 181.
- 91 The responses for several such assignments can be found in the Papers of Norman E. Himes, Frances A. Countway Library of Medicine, Boston, Mass., box 61. The assignment probably dates from the late 1930s, as Himes lost his job, under a cloud of scandal, following the spring 1941 semester.
- 92 Norman E. Himes to Clara G. Stillman, April 5, 1937, Himes Papers, box 61, folder 676. See also Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 132–33.
- 93 Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, chap. 6, and Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 82–87.
- 94 “Sex Education,” *Newsweek*, July 14, 1934, 25.
- 95 “Can Marriage Be Taught?” *Reference Shelf*, 1938 [2nd issue of the year], 287–88; “Marriage Courses Neglect Practical Topics Desired,” *Science News Letter*, June 10, 1939, 365.
- 96 Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine the number of students who took such courses, as well as the sex breakdown within the enrollment figures.

- 97 Moran, *Teaching Sex*, 108–17.
- 98 Reynold A. Jensen, “Psychology of Sex,” *Hygeia* 18 (February 1940): 155.
- 99 Moran, *Teaching Sex*, 127.
- 100 “Sex Education,” 25.
- 101 Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 85.
- 102 Norman E. Himes, *Your Marriage*, chap. 27, appendix B. See also Jordan, *You and Marriage*, chap. 14.
- 103 Meyer F. Nimkoff, “Education for Marriage,” *Birth Control Review* 15 (September 1931): 244.
- 104 Joanna C. Colcord, “The Matrimonial Advice Bureau,” *Family* 5 (May 1924): 61.
- 105 Ladd-Taylor, “Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA,” 311. A notable exception to this trend is Marie E. Kopp, “Marriage Counseling in European Countries,” *Journal of Heredity* 29 (April 1938): 153–60.
- 106 Ernest R. Groves, “A Decade of Marriage Counseling,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 212 (1940): 72. See also Emily Hartshorne Mudd, “Marriage Counseling as Afforded by Recently Developed Marriage and Family Counseling Clinics,” *Family* 28 (January 1938): 310.
- 107 Family life experts referred alternately to marriage “counseling” and “counselling” during the 1920s and 1930s. For reasons that are unclear, “counseling” became the spelling of choice by the 1950s.
- 108 Ralph P. Bridgman, “Guidance for Marriage and Family Life,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 160 (March 1932): 164.
- 109 Generally, see Davis, “‘The Wife Your Husband Needs,’” chap. 2.
- 110 Paul Popenoe, “A Family Consultation Service,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 17 (June 1931): 309–22. I have been unable to find archival records concerning the founding of the American Institute of Family Relations. The first mention of the institute in the Paul Popenoe Papers is a June 1930 letter describing the services sought by the institute’s first 200 clients. Paul Popenoe and John Vruwink to the Members and Associates of the Institute of Family Relations, June 10, 1930, Paul Popenoe Papers, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyo., box 11, folder 5. For information on Popenoe’s career as a eugenicist (both

- before and after World War II), see Ladd-Taylor, "Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA"; Kline, *Building a Better Race*, chap. 5; Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, chap. 5.
- 111 Ladd-Taylor, "Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA," 303–7.
- 112 Paul Popenoe, "Marriage Counselling," 211. Reprinted from *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics*, Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, 1932, Popenoe Papers, box 127, folder 4.
- 113 See, for instance, Duncan Aikman, "A Clinic for Solving Domestic Troubles," *New York Times*, May 22, 1932; Edsel Newton, "'Doctors of Divorce' Cure Family Troubles," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1933.
- 114 Chesler, *Woman of Valor*, 278; Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue*, 127.
- 115 Stone and Stone, *A Marriage Manual*, vi; Popenoe, "Family Consultation Service," 309.
- 116 Himes, *Your Marriage*, 416; Norman Himes to Emily Hartshorne Mudd, November 12, 1937, Himes Papers, box 39, folder 447. In his 1945 master's thesis, Rigdon Wayne Kernodle placed the number of clinics at twenty-five. Kernodle, "Origin and Development of Marriage Counseling Facilities," 43.
- 117 George K. Pratt, "Doctors of Matrimony," *Survey* 67 (January 1932): 359.
- 118 Emily B. H. Mudd, "Is Preventive Work the Next Step?" *Birth Control Review* 16 (February 1932): 43.
- 119 The earliest treatment of marriage counseling that I have found was a 1924 piece written by Joanna C. Colcord, who chaired the Committee on Marriage and Laws for the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work. See Colcord, "Matrimonial Advice Bureau."
- 120 Groves, "Decade of Marriage Counseling," 76. Family service agencies encountered, and largely overcame, such perceptions after World War II. See Morris, *Limits of Voluntarism*, chap. 2.
- 121 Paul Popenoe, "The Institute of Family Relations," Popenoe Papers, box 174, folder 18.
- 122 "Report of the Marriage Study Committee" and "Questions Asked on Marriage Questionnaire," 193, Massachusetts Society for Social Health Records, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Mass., box 5, folder 33. For more on Dearborn, see Davis, "'The Wife Your Husband Needs,'" 88–100.

- 123 Robert C. Binkley, "Shall We Leave Romance out of Marriage?" *Forum*, February 1930, 75.
- 124 Katharine Fullerton Gerould, "Romantic Divorce," *Scribner's*, November 1930, 492.
- 125 Anonymous, "Monogamy Is an Art: Practical Tips on Staying Happily Married," *Forum and Century*, May 1936, 274 (emphasis in the original).
- 126 Helen Welshimer, "Marriage in the Making," *Good Housekeeping*, December 1939, 26.
- 127 Eleanor Roosevelt, "Divorce," *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1938, 16.
- 128 Welshimer, "Marriage in the Making," 27.

CHAPTER TWO

- 1 *The Clock*, dir. Vincente Minnelli (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945). The exact popularity of the film is hard to determine because *Variety* did not tally year-end, box-office figures until 1946. For a full explanation of this issue, see Doherty, *Projections of War*, 317–18. While the film received positive reviews in the national press, it experienced an unlucky break in that it was a wartime romance released nationally several weeks after Germany's unconditional surrender.
- 2 Agee reviewed the film for *Time* on May 14, 1945. See Agee, *Agee on Film*, 357. Agee also placed *The Clock* on his list of the best films of 1945, published in the *Nation* on January 19, 1946. *Ibid.*, 187.
- 3 Harry Henderson and Sam Shaw, "Marriage in a Hurry," *Collier's*, July 17, 1943, 22.
- 4 American Historical Association, *Can War Marriages Be Made to Work?*
- 5 In his classic *War and Society*, for example, Richard Polenberg only cites divorce statistics for the war years. Polenberg, *War and Society*, 145. See also O'Neill, *Democracy at War*, 266. Neither John Blum in *V Was for Victory* nor Michael Sherry in *In the Shadow of War*, a comprehensive look at war in the twentieth century, even mentions marriage or divorce trends in the 1940s.
- 6 Anderson, *Wartime Women*; Bentley, *Eating for Victory*; Campbell, *Women at War with America*; Hartmann, *Homefront and Beyond*; Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope"; Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*; May, *Homeward Bound*, chap. 3; Michel, "American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family"; Milkman, *Gender at Work*. Note,

- too, that divorce texts such as DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, and Riley, *Divorce*, do not discuss the postwar divorce spike in any detail.
- 7 Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope."
- 8 Albert Dale Hagler, "What's Wrong with Marriage in America," April 11, 1947, National Council on Family Relations Papers, Social Welfare History Archives, Minneapolis, Minn., box 4, folder "Florida 1947–1961."
- 9 United Press, "Flood of Marriages Marks Our War Entry; Some Cities Report Increases Up to 150%," *New York Times*, January 10, 1942.
- 10 These statistics were supplied by Stephens College professor Henry A. Bowman in his article, "Should Soldiers Marry?" *American Magazine*, August 1942, 47.
- 11 United Press, "Flood of Marriages."
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 "First Lady Warns on War Marriages," *New York Times*, February 2, 1942.
- 14 Gretta Palmer, "Marriage and War," *Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1942, 110–11. See also Janet Fowler Nelson, "War Brides—1942," *Independent Woman*, January 1942, 30–31.
- 15 The most important source on marriage after the First World War was Calvin Hall, "The Instability of Post-War Marriages," *Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (November 1934): 523–30.
- 16 American Historical Association, *Can War Marriages Be Made to Work?* 10.
- 17 Ibid., 13.
- 18 Ibid., 14.
- 19 Palmer, "Marriage and War," 110, 111. See also Bowman, "Should Soldiers Marry?" 74.
- 20 "Hasty Marriages Scored by Graham," *New York Times*, October 5, 1942.
- 21 "Will War Marriages Work?" *Reader's Digest*, November 1942, 16; Bowman, "Should Soldiers Marry?" 74.
- 22 Palmer, "Marriage and War," 110; Bowman, "Should Soldiers Marry?" 74. See also "First Lady Warns on War Marriages"; "Young Couples Urged Not to Wed in Haste," *New York Times*, April 2, 1942; Walter John Marx, "What about Marriage?" *Commonweal*, July 10, 1942, 270–72.
- 23 "Will War Marriages Work?" 15.
- 24 On soldiers' motivations for fighting, see Westbrook, *Why We Fought*.

- 25 "I Married My Soldier Anyway," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1942, 74.
- 26 Mintz and Kellogg suggest that "altogether 800,000 marriages were postponed by the depression." Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 137.
- 27 Dellie Hahne, quoted in Harris, Mitchell, and Schechter, *Homefront*, 179.
- 28 "What Are a Girl's Chances of Marrying?" *Science Digest*, August 1942, 19.
- 29 Naomi Riol, "Somebody's after Your Man," *Good Housekeeping*, November 1943, 25.
- 30 Virden, *Good-Bye, Piccadilly*, 33–39.
- 31 "Hunter Girls Crowd Debate on Marriage," *New York Times*, April 1, 1943. Other evidence also suggests war marriage was a "hot topic" on college campuses. See E. M. Phelps, ed., "The War Marriage," *University Debaters' Annual*, 1942–1943, 161–91.
- 32 Don Eddy, "Can War Marriages Be Saved?" *American Magazine*, November 1944, 41.
- 33 Costello, *Virtue under Fire*, 195. According to Costello, the United States government initially allotted \$28 per month to privates' wives, and this figure rose to \$50 per month for overseas service. Servicemen's wives also received a \$10,000 insurance payment if their spouses were killed in action. See also Harold M. Wayne, "G.I. Divorce Dangers," *Collier's*, October 21, 1944, 13, in which Wayne argues, "Thousands of soldiers, with more youth than foresight, have been talked or drunk into hasty marriages."
- 34 James H. Bossard, "The Hazards of War Marriages," *Science Digest*, July 1944, 3. *Science Digest* condensed Bossard's article from the February 1944 issue of the professional journal *Psychiatry*.
- 35 May, *Homeward Bound*, 57–61.
- 36 For lists of popular songs divided by subject matter, see Heide and Gilman, *Home Front America*, 117–19.
- 37 Bowman, "Should Soldiers Marry?" 47.
- 38 For example, one woman, a high school junior in 1941, reminisced, "Uniforms were everywhere. It was thrilling and glamorous, and I got caught up in all of it." Virginia Rasmussen in Harris, Mitchell, and Schechter, *Homefront*, 172.
- 39 U.S. Senate, *Suspension of All Prohibitions against the Marriage of Officers*.

- 40 Gladys Norwood, "Bombardier's Bride," *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1943, 26–27, 70–74.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 Thelma Thurston Gorham, "Negro Army Wives," *Crisis*, January 1943, 21–22. Note that other black magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet* were not founded until after the war.
- 44 Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 168.
- 45 Vernon Pope, "War Brides," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 12, 1943, 28–29, 84–85.
- 46 Katherine Whiteside Taylor, "Are They Too Young to Marry?" *Parents' Magazine*, January 1944, 66.
- 47 Henderson and Shaw, "Marriage in a Hurry," 24. Eugenically inspired laws requiring a delay between applying to be married and the actual ceremony spread throughout the United States in the 1920s. Eugenicists, while not the only interest group advocating such laws, did so "in the interest of discouraging hasty and ill-considered unions" and "provided prior (or, at times, post hoc) biological rationalizations for what other interest groups wanted." Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 100.
- 48 "Cupid Gets Legal Lift," *New York Times*, April 13, 1942. Lucy Greenbaum, "Here Come the War Brides," *New York Times*, May 9, 1943.
- 49 "City Aids Altar-Bound Soldiers," *New York Times*, December 4, 1942.
- 50 Greenbaum, "Here Come the War Brides."
- 51 Henderson and Shaw, "Marriage in a Hurry," 22.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 53 Greenbaum, "Here Come the War Brides."
- 54 Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, 33–34.
- 55 Shukert and Scibetta, *War Brides of World War II*, 30.
- 56 On the difficulties of determining the exact number of foreign "war brides," see Virden, *Good-bye, Piccadilly*, 2.
- 57 Herman, *Romance of American Psychology*.
- 58 A similar organization, the National Council on Family Relations, was founded in 1938. As an "interprofessional" organization with interests in areas of expertise from home economics to social work, the NCFR cast a much wider net than the American Association of Marriage Counselors. For early NCFR documents, see Sidney E. Goldstein to Ernest Burgess, August 16, 1938, and Ernest Burgess to Sidney E. Goldstein, August 18,

- 1938, National Council on Family Relations Papers, Box 82, Folder "NCFR History—Ernest Burgess Correspondence, 1938–1939."
- 59 Nichols, *AAMFT*, 3–5.
- 60 Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 98.
- 61 On the general history of Mudd and the Counsel, see Davis, "'The Wife Your Husband Needs,'" 76–82.
- 62 Hannah Lees, "Good and Married," *Collier's*, June 27, 1942, 26.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 64–65.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 65 "Meet an Engaged Couple," *Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1943, 49. See also Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 150–52.
- 66 "Meet an Engaged Couple," 81.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 68 This term is borrowed from Erwin O. Krausz, "For the Duration Widow," *Parents' Magazine*, March 1944, 31, 109–11. Interestingly, Krausz did not acknowledge the fact that most "duration widows" faced the real possibility of becoming postwar widows as well.
- 69 Robert G. Foster, "Marriage during Crises," *Journal of Home Economics* 35 (June 1943): 331.
- 70 Katherine Whiteside Taylor, "Shall They Marry in Wartime?" *Journal of Home Economics* 34 (April 1942): 215.
- 71 Evelyn Millis Duvall, "Marriage in War Time," *Marriage and Family Living* 4 (Autumn 1942): 76. See also Ernest W. Burgess, "Marriage Counselling in a Changing Society," *Marriage and Family Living* 5 (Winter 1943): 8–10.
- 72 Paul Popenoe, "If You're a War Bride," *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1942, 24.
- 73 "Warns of Dangers of War Marriages," *New York Times*, January 28, 1943. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*.
- 74 Popenoe, "If You're a War Bride," 24.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 76 Krausz, "For the Duration Widow," 111.
- 77 Helen Van Pelt Wilson, "Is Your Marriage Slipping a Little?" *Good Housekeeping*, March 1944, 31, 180.
- 78 "7 of 10 War Marriages Held Headed for Trouble," *New York Times*, April 24, 1944. On postwar fears about the future of the family in general, see Levey, "Imagining the Family in Postwar Popular Culture."

- 79 See, for instance, “Firemen Are Called Good Marital Risks,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1944; Gretta Palmer, “What Should You Know about Divorce?” *Woman’s Home Companion*, September 1944, 30; Jere Daniel “The Whys of War Divorces,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 3, 1946, 48.
- 80 Waller, *Veteran Comes Back*, 13.
- 81 Eddy, “Can War Marriages Be Saved?” 80.
- 82 Samuel Tenenbaum, “The Fate of Wartime Marriages,” *American Mercury*, November 1945, 536.
- 83 Therese Benedek, “Marital Breakers Ahead?” *Parents’ Magazine*, September 1944, 151.
- 84 Goldstein, *Marriage and Family Counseling*, 389.
- 85 “Look Out, Men, They’re Plotting Planned Marriages Back Home,” *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean edition, January 27, 1945.
- 86 Leslie B. Hohman, “Married Strangers,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, October 1944, 156–57. See also Maureen Daly, “Peace, It’s a Problem!” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, May 1947, 207–9, 212, 289–92.
- 87 Rudolf Dreikurs, “Getting Along in Marriage,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, November 1946, 260.
- 88 “Liquor and Lipstick,” *Time*, October 15, 1945, 15.
- 89 “Divorces: A New High for U.S.,” *U.S. News and World Report*, October 4, 1946, 30–31.
- 90 “Divorce: The Postwar Wave,” *Newsweek*, October 7, 1946, 33. See also William K. Reed Jr., “One Out of Three Breaks Up,” *New Republic*, March 24, 1947, 17–20; Samuel G. Kling, “Why Marriages Fail,” *Better Homes and Gardens*, December 1947, 46, 144–46.
- 91 “Liquor and Lipstick,” 15.
- 92 I have been unable to locate any comprehensive studies of divorce in the immediate postwar years that examined how long the couples had been married or the ages of the husbands and wives. The anecdotal evidence about long-married couples is from “Liquor and Lipstick,” 15, which claimed, “Many [newly divorced individuals] were over 30, many had children, most had been happy before the war”; and from “Some Wives Hurt Soldiers’ Morale,” *New York Times*, January 8, 1945.
- Jere Daniel’s statistics in “The Whys of War Divorces” lend credence to the assertion that many of the nation’s newly divorced were refugees from war marriages. His numbers indicated that of the 800,000 “war-

- wed” GIs who had returned from service by 1946, one in four was already involved in divorce proceedings. Daniel, “Whys of War Divorce,” 18.
- 93 Daniel, “Whys of War Divorce,” 18.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 18, 48.
- 95 “Boston Divorces Rise,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1945. A similar circumstance was reported in Daniel, “Whys of War Divorce,” 18.
- 96 “Topics of the Times,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1946; “Our Divorce Courts Reach Record,” *Christian Century*, September 25, 1946, 1.
- 97 Samuel A. Tower, “Demand Is Heard Again for Uniform Divorce Laws,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1945.
- 98 Clifford R. Adams, “How to Pick a Mate,” *American Magazine*, December 1944, 32.
- 99 Marie Munk, “Putting the Brakes on Divorce,” *Survey Midmonthly* 82 (March 1946): 75.
- 100 Mona Gardner, “Has Your Husband Come Home to the Right Woman?” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, December 1945, 74.
- 101 The first “Companion Marriage Clinic” appeared in the May 1945 issue of the magazine. See Clifford R. Adams, “The Companion Marriage Clinic,” *Woman’s Home Companion*, May 1945, 35. The series ran for most months through December 1946. In 1947, Adams started writing another monthly series, “Making Marriage Work,” for the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. This series will be examined further in chap. 3.
- 102 “Topics of the Times,” and “Marriages Patched Up,” *Newsweek*, January 26, 1948, 27. On these “therapeutic” experiments, see DiFonzo, *Beneath the Fault Line*, chap. 5.
- 103 Irene Stokes Culman, “You Married Him, Now Stick with Him,” *Good Housekeeping*, May 1945, 17.
- 104 *The Best Years of Our Lives*, dir. William Wyler (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1946). On the film, see also Michel, “Danger on the Home Front,” 109–21; Gerber, “Heroes and Misfits”; Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 93–101.
- 105 By admonishing Fred in this manner, Marie violates the common belief of the latter 1940s that a woman had no right to say to her husband, “You are no longer in the war,” especially because she could not possibly understand what he went through while they were apart. See, for instance, “When He Comes Home,” *Woman’s Home Companion*, December 1944, 38.

CHAPTER THREE

- 1 "Divorce Hearing," Paul Popenoe Papers, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyo., box 169, folder 5; Richard F. Shepard, "'Divorce Hearing' Bows on Channel 5," *New York Times*, September 11, 1958.
- 2 "Mrs. G. is suing [sic] Mr. G.," Popenoe Papers, box 169, folder 5.
- 3 "Divorce Hearing"
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Wolper, *Producer*, 25–26.
- 6 "Divorce Hearing (Special Bit for Reconciliation)," Popenoe Papers, box 169, folder 5.
- 7 Winick and Winick, "Courtroom Drama on Television."
- 8 May, *Homeward Bound*; Coontz, *Way We Never Were*, especially chap. 2; Coontz, *Marriage*, 14.
- 9 Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*; Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*; Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*; Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*; Cobble, *Other Women's Movement*; Moskowitz, "'It's Good to Blow Your Top.'"
- 10 May, *Homeward Bound*, 172.
- 11 Coontz, *Marriage*, 223.
- 12 Emily Hartshorne Mudd, "Woman's Finest Role," *Reader's Digest*, August 1955, 139. See also Evelyn Millis Duvall and Reuben Hill, "If You're Getting Married," *Look*, June 16, 1953, 93, 96–98; Agnes Sligh Turnbull, "And They Lived Happily Ever After," *McCall's*, March 1959, 53, 156; Inez Robb, "How to Stay Married," *Reader's Digest*, June 1960, 169–70.
- 13 Vance Packard, "Marriage for Two, Adventure for Six," *American Magazine*, January 1952, 42–44, 119–23.
- 14 Clifford R. Adams, "Making Marriage Work," *Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1951, 28.
- 15 On this issue, Weiss quotes psychiatrist Sidonie M. Gruenberg's remarks that "a girl who hasn't a man in sight by the time she is 20 is not altogether wrong in fearing that she may never get married." Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, 23. See also Rufus Jarman, "It's Tougher Than Ever to Get a Husband," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 23, 1952, 30, 152–54.
- 16 See, for instance, Constance J. Foster, "Will Your Marriage Last?" *Parents' Magazine*, August 1949, 20, 52, 85.

- 17 E. Michel, "How to Make Him Propose," *Coronet*, December 1951, 30.
 - 18 Ibid., 46–47, 96; "How to Be Marriageable," *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1954, 48–49, 120; "How to Be Marriageable," *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1954, 54–55, 155; "How to Be Marriageable," *Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1954, 50–51, 119.
 - 19 Mary Bass to Doctor Popenoe, February 4, 1954, Popenoe Papers, box 42, folder 5.
 - 20 On the often difficult plight of single women in the 1950s, see Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, chap. 5. On the consequences of this overt celebration of heterosexuality for lesbians, see Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, chap. 6.
 - 21 E. Michel, "How to Make Him Propose," 27.
 - 22 Paul Popenoe to Mrs. Bass, October 6, 1952, Popenoe Papers, box 42, folder 1; "How To Be Marriageable," *Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1954, 46.
 - 23 Letter from Mrs. Leslie Kimmell, October 11, 1955, Popenoe Papers, box 148, folder 7. The names of correspondents asking for help have been omitted, in accordance with the privacy policy of the American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyo.
- The Human Relations Program proved to be a financial boon for the institute, as the fee to commence correspondence with a counselor was \$15.00.
- 24 This response was on the information form filled out by all Human Relations Program clients, Popenoe Papers, box 148, folder 125.
 - 25 Human Relations Program Form, Popenoe Papers, box 148, folder 13.
 - 26 Ibid., folder 28.
 - 27 One unmarried client, for instance, corresponded intermittently with her counselor between 1954 and 1957, until she was referred to a counselor in her community for further treatment. She remained unmarried over the course of counseling. Correspondence with Human Relations Program, Popenoe Papers, box 166, folder 10; box 148, see folders 7, 11, 25, 28.
 - 28 See, for instance, Carnegie, *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead*, 190–91.
 - 29 Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, chap. 4.
 - 30 Concerns about overbearing "moms" first found a public voice in Philip Wylie's 1942 book *Generation of Vipers*. The idea proliferated in the advice literature of the 1950s. Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, chap. 7.

- 31 Mary Jane Shour, "First-Class Mothers, Second-Class Wives," *Coronet*, October 1953, 139–42; Myrl C. Boyle, "Which Are You First of All: Wife or Mother?" *Parents' Magazine*, August 1955, 35, 77–79, 82.
- 32 Connie Dickman, "My Formula for Happiness," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1953, 45. See also Shour, "First-Class Mothers, Second-Class Wives," 139–42.
- 33 Carnegie, *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead*. *Coronet* condensed the book in January 1954. Mrs. Dale Carnegie, "How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead," *Coronet*, January 1954, 65–74. See also Mrs. Dale Carnegie, "How to Help Your Husband Succeed," *Better Homes and Gardens*, April 1955, 24, 242, 244–45.
- 34 Carnegie, *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead*, "Why I Wrote This Book."
- 35 *Ibid.*, chaps. 4, 32.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 220.
- 37 *Ibid.*, chap. 19. See also R. E. Dumas Milner, "Before I Hire Your Husband, I Want to Meet You," *Good Housekeeping*, January 1956, 52–53, 98, 100; "For Wives Only: Help Your Husband Get Ahead," *Changing Times*, November 1957, 41–42; Elizabeth Honor, "Help Your Husband Get Ahead," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1958, 44–48. While the two latter articles both appropriated Carnegie's title, they do not make specific reference to her book.
- 38 Milner, "Before I Hire Your Husband," 52.
- 39 Alice Lake, "I Hate My Husband's Success," *McCall's*, July 1958, 25.
- 40 Jane Lincoln, "I'm to Blame That: My Husband Died Too Young," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1954, 84–89.
- 41 Lees, *Help Your Husband Stay Alive!* For excerpts, see Hannah Lees, "How to Be Happy though Incompatible," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 16, 1957, 30, 103–4; Hannah Lees, "Help Your Husband Stay Alive," *Reader's Digest*, March 1957, 66–69; Hannah Lees, "How to Love Your Husband," *Coronet*, June 1957, 142–46; Hannah Lees, "What Every Husband Needs," *Reader's Digest*, October 1957, 137–40. On the growing fears about men's health, see Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, chap. 6.
- 42 Lees, *Help Your Husband Stay Alive!* 14.
- 43 Historians have clearly identified sexual availability and responsiveness as an important duty of the postwar wife, one rendered more difficult by many experts' continued insistence that the vaginal orgasm was the

- only “mature” female sexual response. Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution*, chap. 2. In reality, many couples struggled with such prescriptions. See Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, chap. 5.
- 44 Lees, “How to Love Your Husband,” 144.
- 45 For statistics, see Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, 50–53.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 54–58.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 48 T. F. James, “The American Wife,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1958, 37.
- 49 Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, chaps. 1, 3.
- 50 Carter and Glick, *Marriage and Divorce*, 56; May, *Homeward Bound*, xiii–xvi.
- 51 Albert Q. Maisel, “Divorce Is Going out of Style,” *Reader’s Digest*, August 1957, 35–39.
- 52 M. F. Nimkoff, “The Family in the United States,” *Marriage and Family Living* 16 (November 1954): 395.
- 53 Dorothy Barclay, “Problems Created by Divorce,” *New York Times Magazine*, February 26, 1950, 34. On the Child Study Association, see Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, 46–54.
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- 93 Allan Fromme, "How to Hold on to a Happy Marriage," *Better Homes and Gardens*, August 1950, 122.
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- 96 Paul Popenoe to Mrs. Bass, October 8, 1955, Popenoe Papers, box 42, folder 4. Leon J. Saul et al., "Can One Partner Be Successfully Counseled without the Other? A Symposium," *Marriage and Family Living* 15 (February 1953): 59–64. See also a letter from counselor Clinton E. Phillips, June 26, 1956, Popenoe Papers, box 43, folder 1.
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CHAPTER FOUR

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CHAPTER FIVE

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